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# ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS OF MILES MORALES IN "SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE": IDENTITY REPRESENTATION THROUGH SPEECH ACTS

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze the illocutionary speech acts performed by the main character, Miles Morales, in the animated film Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, and to interpret how these acts contribute to the construction of his identity. The data source consists of Miles Morales' utterances throughout the film. The study applies Searle's classification of speech acts as its theoretical framework, which includes five categories: assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. Using a qualitative descriptive method within a pragmatic approach, data were collected through careful observation and transcription of relevant dialogue. The collected utterances were then classified and analyzed based on the five types of illocutionary acts. The findings are presented in the form of percentages to show the distribution of each speech act category. The results indicate that assertive (36%) and expressive (32%) acts are the most frequently used, followed by directive (28%) and commissive (4%), with no declarative acts identified. These findings suggest that Miles Morales constructs his identity largely through statements of belief and emotional expression, reflecting a character in emotional transition and self-discovery. Therefore, illocutionary acts in this film not only serve pragmatic functions but also play a crucial role in representing character identity within popular media narratives.

**Keywords**: Illocutionary acts, Searle's Speech Act, identity representation, animated film, Miles Morales

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for transmitting information; it is a powerful medium through which individuals express identity, negotiate social roles, and establish interpersonal relationships. Within the field of pragmatics, speech act theory provides a foundational lens for analyzing how utterances are used to perform actions. Developed initially by J.L. Austin and further formalized by John Searle, this theory categorizes speech into various acts, highlighting the performative nature of language. According to Searle (1969), illocutionary acts—such as asserting, questioning, commanding, and expressing—are central to understanding the intentions behind utterances and their impact on the listener.

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Searle (1976) classified speech acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. These classifications are not merely linguistic distinctions but reflect deeper psychological and social functions. For example, assertives commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition, while expressives convey the speaker's psychological state. Each type of illocutionary act reveals how language users position themselves in interaction, offering critical insight into character, identity, and power dynamics (Yule, 1996).

In contemporary linguistic research, identity has emerged as a central concern in discourse studies. Language choices are not neutral; they are deeply entwined with identity construction and social positioning (Bucholtz, M., & Hall, 2005). Identity is enacted through discourse, and speech acts play a significant role in this process. As Fairclough (2003) suggests, discourse both reflects and constitutes social identities and relations. When viewed through this lens, fictional dialogue—particularly in films—becomes a valuable source for examining how characters project and negotiate identities through speech.

Animated films, once regarded primarily as entertainment for children, have evolved into complex narrative forms capable of exploring deep psychological and social themes. The animated feature Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse (2018) is notable for its groundbreaking visual style and its reimagining of the Spider-Man mythos through the lens of Miles Morales, an Afro-Latino teenager navigating the challenges of heroism, adolescence, and cultural belonging. As a protagonist, Miles represents a new type of hero—one shaped not only by superpowers but also by his linguistic choices, emotional expressions, and identity struggles.

This study aims to investigate how illocutionary speech acts contribute to the representation of identity in the case of Miles Morales. Specifically, it examines the prevalence and function of speech acts which dominate his dialogues throughout the film. Through Searle's speech act categories, the researcher explores how they reflect Miles's evolving self-concept, his emotional landscape, and his relationships with others.

To achieve those objectives, the study explores several key questions: it investigates what types of illocutionary speech acts are performed by Miles Morales in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, examines the hierarchy or frequency of these speech acts in the character's dialogue, and analyzes how the dominant illocutionary acts contribute to the representation of Miles Morales's identity as a character.

By analyzing speech acts within a culturally significant and linguistically rich media text, this study contributes to the broader understanding of how language functions not only to communicate but also to construct complex identities in contemporary storytelling. Moreover, it bridges pragmatics and discourse analysis with media studies, demonstrating the value of speech act theory in examining character development and representation in narratives.

While prior research has explored speech acts in political speeches (Ilie, 2006), courtroom interactions (Cotterill, 2003), and literary dialogue (Black, 2006), more recent

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studies have extended this analysis to educational and cinematic contexts. Halid, Elan. & Juniati (2024) examined illocutionary speech acts in the learning process between teachers and students, emphasizing how such acts facilitate classroom interaction and pedagogical engagement. Meanwhile, Zega, at al. (2024) focused specifically on identifying assertive acts in Spider-Man: No Way Home, highlighting how characters express beliefs and assert personal truths through dialogue. However, Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse offers a unique case for analysis due to its hybrid genre, multicultural protagonist, and strong emphasis on personal growth, emotional expression, and identity negotiation. This study thus seeks to fill a gap by exploring how the frequency and function of speech acts serve as tools for constructing Miles Morales's identity in the film.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of speech acts is a central concern in pragmatics, providing insight into how language functions not merely to describe reality, but to perform actions. Austin (1962) laid the foundation for this area of inquiry by distinguishing among locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Building on this, Searle (1969, 1976) proposed a systematic classification of illocutionary acts into five main categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Each category comprises several subcategories that reflect the nuanced ways speakers perform speech acts in interaction.

Assertives are used to express the speaker's beliefs and convey information, with subcategories including stating, claiming, reporting, and suggesting. Directives are aimed at getting the hearer to do something, encompassing forms such as commands, requests, advice, and instructions. Commissives commit the speaker to a future course of action, including acts like promising, offering, vowing, and volunteering. Expressives reveal the speaker's psychological state or emotional response, with examples such as thanking, apologizing, congratulating, and complaining. Finally, declaratives bring about change in the external world through the utterance itself, such as declaring, resigning, naming, or sentencing—typically requiring some form of institutional authority. This classification serves as a comprehensive framework for analyzing how language functions as action and how speakers position themselves socially and interpersonally through their utterances.

In cinematic and media discourse, particularly in animated films, speech acts are not only used to simulate natural conversation but also to build characters, dramatize relationships, and propel narrative structure (Coulthard, M., & Johnson, 2010). Animated dialogue often compensates for the lack of realistic physical expression by intensifying linguistic elements, making speech acts a powerful tool for conveying identity (Tolins, J., & Heffner, 2016). Yule (1996) and Leech (1983) emphasize that understanding the illocutionary force behind an utterance is key to grasping the speaker's intent and social positioning.

Speech acts are closely tied to identity representation, especially in fictional narratives. From a

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sociolinguistic perspective, identity is seen not as a static trait but as a dynamic and relational construct that emerges through discourse (Bucholtz, M., & Hall, 2005). Gee (2011) also argues that language reflects and enacts social identities, values, affiliations, and roles. In this context, illocutionary acts become vehicles for expressing aspects of the self—beliefs, emotions, intentions, authority, and social roles.

Assertives, for instance, represent the speaker as knowledgeable or credible, playing a key role in projecting intellectual or moral identity (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003). Expressives function to reveal emotional states and to build rapport, making them crucial for constructing an empathetic or emotionally responsive persona. Both are often dominant in the language of protagonists undergoing identity transitions, as seen in the case of Miles Morales.

Directives and commissives also play important roles in projecting relational and moral identity. Directives reflect power relations and social roles, while commissives demonstrate responsibility, future orientation, and reliability. Declaratives, although less common in informal contexts, show institutional authority and legitimacy when present. Each type contributes to the multifaceted portrayal of a character's identity within the narrative context.

Scholars like Mey (2001) and Verschueren (1999) have emphasized that pragmatic competence—the ability to use appropriate speech acts in context—is vital for identity construction, especially for characters like Miles Morales who navigate multiple cultural and social worlds. Trosborg (1995) adds that speech acts are culturally embedded, making them particularly relevant in analyzing media discourse that often dramatizes cultural and interpersonal tensions.

In the realm of animated films, research supports the view that dialogue and speech acts are central to character development. McIntyre (2006) argues that linguistic elements—such as speech acts and politeness strategies—play as significant a role as visual design in shaping character identity. Dynel (2011) further highlights the dual nature of film dialogue as both naturalistic and scripted, designed to appear spontaneous while strategically guiding character development and audience interpretation.

In summary, the categorization and use of illocutionary acts not only serve functional communicative purposes but also act as a means of identity representation in fictional discourse. The analysis of speech acts in animated media like Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse offers valuable insights into how characters like Miles Morales linguistically construct and negotiate their evolving identities.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design to analyze the illocutionary speech acts of Miles Morales in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse. A qualitative approach is well-suited for examining language use in context, particularly when interpreting meaning, communicative function, and social implications (Creswell, 2013). The focus is on identifying and interpreting speech acts using Searle's (1976) theory and connecting them to the character's identity. The data, consisting of Miles's

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utterances, were manually transcribed from the film's original English audio, with accuracy ensured through repeated viewings and subtitle cross-checking. Data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation (Sudaryanto, 2015), involving film viewing, transcription, selection of utterances with illocutionary force, and categorization into Searle's five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Frequencies were recorded to identify usage patterns.

Data analysis was guided by Searle's (1976) Speech Act Theory and supported by insights from Yule (1996), Leech (1983), and Cutting (2002). Utterances were analyzed based on semantic and contextual cues to determine their illocutionary force, followed by frequency and functional analysis to explore their contribution to Miles's character development. A hierarchy analysis was also conducted to trace shifts in speech act usage across the narrative. To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation was employed through repeated observations and theoretical cross-checking (Denzin, 1978), alongside peer debriefing and expert consultation. Results are presented in descriptive tables generated using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word, displaying the frequency, percentage, and explanation of each speech act type. Due to the manageable dataset and the focus on qualitative interpretation, advanced software was not required.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Result

This section presents the findings of the illocutionary speech acts performed by Miles Morales in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse. Using Searle's (1976) framework of illocutionary acts—assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives—the analysis uncovers how Miles's speech reflects his character development and identity formation.

To provide a clearer picture of the distribution of speech act types, the following table presents the quantitative findings of Miles Morales's utterances in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse. The table 4.1 shows the distribution of illocutionary speech acts performed by Miles Morales in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse. Assertive acts are the most frequent (36%), followed by expressive acts (32%) and directives (28%). Commissives are rare (4%), while declaratives are entirely absent.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Illocutionary Speech Acts

| Speech Act Type | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Assertive | 19 | 36% |
| Expressive | 17 | 32% |
| Directive | 15 | 28% |
| Commissive | 2 | 4% |
| Declarative | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **53** | **100** |

The analysis revealed that Miles Morales predominantly uses assertive speech acts, which account for 36% of his total utterances. These include statements of belief, observations, and evaluations, indicating that Miles often verbalizes his thoughts and attempts to make sense of the world around him. According to Searle (1976), assertives are used to convey the speaker's belief or to commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. As shown in Table 4.2, Miles frequently uses assertives to

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express his personal experiences, preferences, evaluations, and factual observations. For instance, in the early scene when a friend mentions an earthquake (Timestamp 00:03:50–00:03:54), Miles responds with "I slept like a baby last night," asserting his experience and subtly dismissing the event. This type of utterance illustrates how Miles affirms his own perspective, especially in contrast to others around him.

**Table 2.** Assertive Speech Acts

| No. | Time-stamp | Line of Dialogue | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 00:03:50–00:03:54 | "What are you talking about? I slept like a baby last night." | Miles asserts his personal experience, denying the perceived earthquake. |
| 2. | 00:04:15–00:04:20 | "Seriously, Dad, walking would have been fine." | He expresses an evaluation, asserting his preference for walking. |
| 3. | 00:06:20–00:06:22 | "You wanna hear me say it?" | He confirms and clarifies his father's request, acknowledging the situation. |
| 4. | 00:06:22–00:06:23 | "You're dropping me off at a school—" | Stating a factual event while implying discomfort about it. |
| 5. | 00:07:28–00:07:38 | "Einstein said time was relative, right? Maybe I'm not late..." | Quoting a theory and asserting a humorous reinterpretation of being late. |
| 6. | 00:42:18–00:42:33 | "I don't have a choice. Kingpin's got a supercollider. He's trying to kill me." | Making factual claims about his urgent situation and the villain's intention. |
| 7. | 00:43:01–00:43:08 | "I need it to destroy the collider." | Asserting a specific goal and necessity. |
| 8. | 00:43:26–00:43:47 | "You good with that, Spider-Man?" | Requesting confirmation but implying his own view as valid. |
| 9. | 00:45:03–00:45:09 | "A private technological campus in Hudson Valley, New York…" | Providing factual background information. |
| 10. | 00:45:51–00:45:54 | "That lady with the bike is the head scientist." | Making a factual observation or identification. |
| 11. | 00:46:17–00:46:28 | "Why did I get stuck with the janky-old, broke, hobo Spider-Man?" | Asserting frustration through a rhetorical question; evaluative in tone. |
| 12. | 00:48:20–00:48:22 | "I can't move!" | Stating a physical condition. |
| 13. | 00:49:05–00:49:10 | "Can Spider-Man turn invisible?" | Framed as a question, but implies Miles's belief or doubt. |
| 14. | 00:52:20–00:52:23 | "When did you teach me that?" | Questioning past actions, asserting uncertainty. |
| 15. | 00:52:54–00:52:57 | "I run better than I swing!" | Evaluating and asserting personal ability. |
| 16. | 01:18:08– | "We can say | Making a proposal |

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| | 01:18:12 | goodbye at the collider." | embedded in a factual setting. |
| 17. | 01:34:24–01:34:33 | "Well, Einstein said time was relative, right?" | Reasserting a previous claim with a humorous undertone. |
| 18. | 01:35:08–01:35:11 | "Peter, that wasn't the deal!" | Stating a violation of agreement; expressing expectation. |
| 19. | 01:35:21–01:35:32 | "Yeah, it is ok." | Affirming or evaluating an emotional situation. |

Several other assertives reflect Miles's efforts to make sense of his circumstances. For example, he says "Seriously, Dad, walking would have been fine" (00:04:15–00:04:20), asserting his opinion in a mild disagreement with his father. Other statements, such as "I need it to destroy the collider" (00:43:01–00:43:08) and "That lady with the bike is the head scientist" (00:45:51–00:45:54), show his growing awareness and his role in understanding the events around him.

Additionally, humorous or rhetorical assertives such as "Einstein said time was relative, right? Maybe I'm not late. Maybe you guys are early." (00:07:28–00:07:38) highlight his creativity and youthful voice. Even when faced with physical or emotional challenges—as in "I can't move!" (00:48:20–00:48:22) or "That wasn't the deal!" (01:35:08–01:35:11)—Miles uses assertive acts to articulate his current state or perceived violations of expectations.

Following closely are expressive speech acts at 32%, which include expressions of emotion such as surprise, fear, frustration, admiration, or joy. The prevalence of expressives reflects Miles's emotional transparency and internal conflict. As shown in table 4.3, these acts function as important markers of his vulnerability, self-doubt, and gradual self-acceptance.

**Table 3.** Expressive Speech Acts

| No. | Time-stamp | Line of Dialogue | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 00:05:40–00:05:49 | "He's a good guy—" | Expresses a positive emotional evaluation about someone. |
| 2. | 00:06:25–00:06:30 | "Dad, I love you." | Expresses affection and emotional connection toward his father. |
| 3. | 00:06:40–00:06:49 | "Hey good morning. How you doing?... Oh my gosh this is embarrassing; we wore the same jacket—" | Expresses friendliness, politeness, and embarrassment. |
| 4. | 00:11:34–00:11:39 | "This is so fresh." | Expresses admiration or approval about something |
| 5. | 00:15:26–00:15:32 | "Oh. See you." | Expresses farewell in a casual, emotionally light tone. |
| 6. | 00:16:05–00:16:09 | "Nice to meet you." | Expresses politeness and positive regard toward a new acquaintance |

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|---|---|---|---|
| 7. | 00:34:46–00:35:10 | "I'm sorry, Mr. Parker… That thing you gave me, that key… I think I really messed it up. I want to do what you asked. I really do, but… I'm sorry. I'm not sure I'm the guy. I can't do this without you." | Expresses guilt, regret, and emotional insecurity. |
| 8. | 00:41:29–00:41:33 | "This is amazing." | Expresses astonishment and excitement. |
| 9. | 00:45:31–00:45:33 | "I think it's cool." | Expresses appreciation or approval of something. |
| 10. | 00:53:56–00:53:59 | "I gotta say, you're amazing man!" | Expresses admiration and respect toward another character. |
| 11. | 00:56:22–00:56:24 | "I like your haircut." | Expresses a compliment and positive regard. |
| 12. | 00:49:05–00:49:1 | "I'm sorry about your friend." | Expresses sympathy and condolences. |
| 13. | 00:59:33–00:59:44 | "I am so sorry." | Strong expression of remorse or apology. |
| 14. | 01:14:28–01:14:3 | "Uncle Aaron. This is my fault." | Expresses guilt and responsibility for a tragic event. |
| 15. | 01:32:32–01:32:48 | "That was crazy." | Expresses emotional reaction of shock or excitement. |
| 16. | 01:42:01–01:42:1 | "I know Dad. I'm so sorry." | Expresses apology and recognition of wrongdoing. |
| 17. | 01:43:19–01:43:2 | "Thank you for your bravery tonight. I love you." | Expresses gratitude and affection, affirming an emotional bond. |

According to Searle (1969), expressives are utterances in which the speaker articulates their psychological state or emotional response to a situation, such as joy, regret, admiration, or sorrow. As shown in Table 4.3, Miles expresses a wide range of emotions through language—from affection and embarrassment to fear, guilt, admiration, and gratitude. Early in the film, he shows affection in a straightforward and sincere manner with "Dad, I love you" (00:06:25–00:06:30), demonstrating emotional openness within a familial context. Similarly, utterances like "Nice to meet you" (00:16:05–00:16:09) and "I like your haircut" (00:56:22–00:56:24) are expressive of politeness and social engagement.

A more intense level of emotional expression is observed in moments of self-doubt and remorse. For instance, in "I think I really messed it up… I'm sorry. I'm not sure I'm the guy. I can't do this without you." (00:34:46–00:35:10), Miles reveals feelings of guilt and inadequacy. These expressive acts allow the audience to witness his internal conflict and fear of failure,

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which are central to his narrative arc as a reluctant hero. The emotional climax of this expressive trajectory occurs when he accepts responsibility for a tragic event, stating, "Uncle Aaron. This is my fault" (01:14:28–01:14:34). Such moments of vulnerability humanize the character and deepen audience empathy.

In other scenes, Miles expresses admiration ("You're amazing, man!" at 00:53:56–00:53:59) and gratitude ("Thank you for your bravery tonight. I love you." at 01:43:19–01:43:24), reflecting his developing interpersonal maturity and his capacity to emotionally connect with others.

Directive speech acts account for 28% of the data (table 4.4). These involve commands, requests, or suggestions and become more prominent as Miles begins to take initiative and interact more assertively with others. His growing use of directives signals an increase in personal agency, albeit still within the bounds of youth and uncertainty.

**Table 4**. Directive Speech Acts

| No. | Time-stamp | Line of Dialogue | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 00:05:01–00:05:05 | "--…, speed up, …--" | An imperative instructing someone (likely his dad) to drive faster—direct command. |
| 2. | 00:06:24–00:06:25 | "Look at this place—" | Directive to draw attention to something—mild imperative. |
| 3. | 00:12:49–00:12:54 | "Stop lying." | Direct command aimed at correcting behavior. |
| 4. | 00:15:45–00:15:50 | "Come on, Dad, you can just drop me off out front." | Request phrased politely, suggesting an alternative action. |
| 5. | 00:29:53–00:30:07 | "Can I sleep here tonight?" | Indirect request for permission—polite directive in question form. |
| 6. | 00:34:10–00:34:15 | "Teach me how to swing like you." | Requesting instruction—directive aimed at Peter. |
| 7. | 00:43:08–00:43:11 | "…, don't play with me!" | Imperative used emotionally to stop someone from joking—directive. |
| 8. | 00:43:18–00:43:26 | "Can't we make another one?" | Indirect suggestion/request for action. |
| 9. | 00:44:23–00:44:39 | "Can we focus?" | Directive disguised as a question; aims to regain attention or concentration |
| 10. | 00:45:20–00:45:25 | "Wait! Don't go yet!" | Command urging someone to stay—strong, emotionally charged directive. |
| 11. | 00:47:11–00:47:14 | "Just move over!" | Imperative for physical movement—clear directive. |
| 12. | 00:58:03–00:58:0 | "So, just keep it | Suggestive directive framed |

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| | 9 | between us, ok?" | politely as a shared agreement—request for confidentiality. |
| 13. | 01:10:30–01:10:35 | "Let me come with you. I can help." | Suggestive directive indicating a desire to join in action. |
| 14. | 01:25:50–01:25:55 | "Tell me what I need to do." | Directive requesting instruction—motivated by willingness to act. |
| 15. | 01:30:00–01:30:05 | "Trust me. I got this." | Directive appealing for confidence and control over the situation—assertive encouragement. |

According to Searle (1976), directives are utterances intended to cause the hearer to take some future action, encompassing commands, requests, suggestions, or advice. As shown in Table 4.4, Miles's directives vary in form, ranging from direct imperatives (e.g., "Stop lying," "Just move over!") to polite or indirect requests embedded in interrogative structures (e.g., "Can I sleep here tonight?", "Can we focus?").

In the early parts of the film, his directives are often socially tentative and emotionally charged, such as "Come on, Dad, you can just drop me off out front" (00:15:45–00:15:50), which blends politeness with a desire for autonomy. As the narrative progresses, Miles gradually shifts toward more confident and assertive directives, especially in moments of urgency or leadership. For instance, "Tell me what I need to do" (01:25:50–01:25:55) and "Trust me. I got this" (01:30:00–01:30:05) signal his readiness to take initiative and assume responsibility.

As shown in table 4.5 commissive speech acts are found in only 4% of his utterances, suggesting a reluctance or inability to commit fully to decisions or promises—an expected feature of a young character still coming to terms with his responsibilities.

**Table 5.** Commissive Speech Acts

| No. | Time-stamp | Line of Dialogue | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 00:26:33 – 00:26:49 | "I promise." | A direct commissive act—Miles makes a clear verbal commitment to act in the future. |
| 2. | 00:58:20 – 00:58:38 | "Yeah. If you ever decide to do friends again, I could always open up a slot." | An indirect commissive—offering friendship and implying future availability in a casual tone. |

These two commissive acts show Miles's willingness to engage in meaningful relationships and take responsibility, albeit selectively. The first is a solemn, straightforward commitment; the second is more playful and socially tentative, revealing his emotional openness without full vulnerability.

Notably, no declarative speech acts were identified (0%), indicating that Miles does not hold institutional or authoritative power to enact change through words alone. This aligns with his social position as a teenager who,

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despite his heroic potential, lacks formal authority.

**4.2 Discussion**

A clear hierarchy emerges in the frequency and function of Miles Morales's illocutionary speech acts in Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse. At the top of this hierarchy are assertive and expressive acts, which together comprise 68% of his utterances. This dominance illustrates a character whose identity is shaped more through introspection and emotional articulation than through commands, commitments, or institutional declarations. Assertives (36%) reveal how Miles constructs his sense of self through beliefs, judgments, and evaluations, while expressives (32%) expose the psychological and emotional realities that shape his journey. Directives (28%) occupy a secondary position, indicating moments when he seeks to influence others, although these attempts are often tentative and context-dependent. Commissive acts appear rarely (4%), and declaratives are entirely absent. This distribution paints a portrait of a character in flux—one who is actively engaged in identity formation but not yet positioned within structures of formal authority.

This speech act distribution reflects both Miles's developmental stage and the thematic concerns of the film, which centers on identity as a fluid, emergent construct. According to Searle (1976), assertive speech acts commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition and function to express beliefs or convey facts. In Miles's case, these acts represent attempts to interpret his experience and affirm a stable perspective amid instability. Viewed through Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, adolescence is a stage marked by identity exploration and the negotiation of self-concept. Miles's frequent use of assertives aligns with this developmental task, serving as verbal performances of epistemic authority—that is, the capacity to define one's reality and speak credibly from within it. As such, assertives are not merely descriptive tools in the dialogue; they are vehicles for personal agency, allowing Miles to claim narrative space as a legitimate knower.

Similarly, expressive acts provide vital insight into Miles's inner life. Defined by Searle (1969) as utterances that reveal the speaker's psychological state, expressives encompass emotions such as fear, excitement, frustration, and gratitude. For a character navigating the dual pressures of adolescence and superhero responsibility, these acts mark key moments of vulnerability and emotional authenticity. Expressive language plays a fundamental role in establishing rapport and projecting identity, as noted by Holmes, J., & Stubbe (2003). Miles's emotional openness—his willingness to articulate doubt, awe, and confusion—endears him to the audience and positions him as a psychologically relatable character. These acts allow him to communicate affective experience, not just logical reasoning, and thereby contribute significantly to the audience's understanding of his identity as both human and heroic.

The relative scarcity of commissive acts reflects another important dimension of Miles's evolving identity. Commissives, which entail a speaker's commitment to future action (e.g., promises, vows, or refusals), are rare in his dialogue, accounting for only 4% of speech acts. As Trosborg (1995)

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explains, such acts are typically associated with a strong sense of agency and foresight. Their infrequent use by Miles suggests that he is not yet fully confident in making future-oriented commitments—a realistic portrayal of a young character grappling with uncertainty and shifting responsibilities. When commissives do appear, they signal critical turning points in his transformation, indicating moments where he begins to assume the mantle of responsibility. These rare but impactful instances foreshadow his eventual acceptance of the Spider-Man role, functioning as narrative milestones in his character arc.

Even more telling is the complete absence of declarative acts in Miles's speech. Declaratives, in Searle's terms, are speech acts that enact change simply by being uttered, but they require institutional authority (e.g., "I declare the meeting open"). Their absence underscores Miles's lack of formal power within the film's social structure. He is not a teacher, leader, or official figure—he is a teenager thrust into extraordinary circumstances. From a critical discourse perspective, this reinforces Fairclough's (2003) argument that language reflects and reproduces institutional hierarchies. Miles does not speak with the voice of authority; rather, he builds authority through experiential knowledge and emotional expression. His discourse mirrors a bottom-up identity formation process, grounded in personal experience rather than institutional roles.

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, Miles's use of language aligns with Bucholtz, M., & Hall (2005) sociocultural linguistic theory, which conceptualizes identity as emergent, interactional, and contextually grounded. Through the pragmatic choices in his dialogue—especially the balance of assertives and expressives—Miles performs a version of self that is in constant negotiation with others and his environment. His utterances not only reflect internal states but also signal relational positions: son, student, friend, and emerging hero. The identity that emerges is thus hybrid and situated, shaped by intersectional influences including age, culture, and role expectations. In this light, the film becomes a site where language operates not just as a medium of communication but as a mechanism of identity construction.

Furthermore, the interplay between speech acts and character development supports (Dynel, 2011) view that fictional dialogue, particularly in cinematic contexts, functions as a simulation of authentic interaction and can reveal deep character psychology. In Into the Spider-Verse, speech acts are not randomly distributed but are carefully crafted to reflect Miles's inner transformation. His language becomes the space in which identity is both challenged and affirmed—where hesitations give way to commitments, and when emotional confusion transitions into expressive clarity.

In sum, the dominance of assertive and expressive acts—coupled with the limited use of commissives and the absence of declaratives—paints a coherent picture of Miles Morales as a character whose identity is constructed through reflection, vulnerability, and gradual assumption of agency. His dialogue charts a developmental trajectory from uncertainty to self-definition, and from emotional honesty

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to increasing interpersonal influence. Through this lens, the speech acts do not merely accompany the plot—they are central to the film's portrayal of identity as a dynamic, discursively performed process. Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse offers more than a coming-of-age story; it presents a coming-to-voice narrative in which speech is a primary instrument of transformation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the illocutionary speech acts performed by Miles Morales, the protagonist of Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, through the lens of Searle's (1976) classification of speech acts. The findings reveal that assertive (36%) and expressive (32%) speech acts dominate Miles's language, followed by directives (28%) and commissives (4%), while declaratives were entirely absent (0%). These patterns demonstrate that Miles, as a teenage character undergoing personal transformation, relies primarily on speech acts that convey beliefs, self-perceptions, and emotional states, rather than authoritative commands or institutional power.

The high frequency of assertives reflects Miles's ongoing effort to understand and interpret his surroundings, which aligns with Erikson's (1968) theory that adolescence is marked by the search for identity. His expressive acts, meanwhile, convey emotional openness and vulnerability—key traits that shape audience empathy and contribute to the narrative of growth and change. Although directive speech acts are less dominant, their use increases over time and reflects Miles's gradual development of agency and confidence. Commissive acts are sparse, indicating hesitancy to commit, which is consistent with the transitional nature of adolescent identity. The absence of declarative acts further emphasizes Miles's limited social authority within the story world.

This study illustrates that language in animated film functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a pragmatic device for constructing character identity. Speech acts serve as narrative indicators of psychological, emotional, and social positioning, especially for characters in developmental stages. This finding reinforces the idea that linguistic analysis in cinematic texts offers valuable insights into character construction, identity formation, and interpersonal dynamics.

These results open promising directions for further research. Future studies could explore the comparative use of illocutionary acts across different animated protagonists, genres, or cultural contexts to investigate how language reflects varying identity trajectories. Additionally, pragmatic analysis could be extended to supporting characters or antagonists to understand contrasting identity roles and power dynamics. From an applied perspective, findings like these could inform scriptwriting, character development, and media literacy education—particularly in youth-focused narratives that emphasize identity, growth, and voice.

This research contributes to the growing intersection between linguistics, media studies, and identity theory, highlighting how speech acts are not only performative but also profoundly representational of a

character's journey toward self-realization.

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