

Illocutionary Speech Acts in Guy de Maupassant's Short Story A Family

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ABSTRACT

The study of illocutionary speech acts is important for understanding implicit meaning in literary texts. However, previous studies on illocutionary speech acts in literary texts tend to emphasize classification rather than contextual interpretation of meaning. This study aims to identify the types of illocutionary speech acts in Guy de Maupassant's short story "A Family." The data source was the short story, and the unit of analysis consisted of 22-character utterances selected from the dialogues. A qualitative descriptive method was applied using Searle's theory of illocutionary acts. The findings show three types of illocutionary acts: assertive, directive, and expressive. Assertive acts were the most dominant, functioning to convey information, reflection, and social evaluation. This dominance indicates that the story emphasizes reflective meaning and indirect social criticism.

Keywords: *A Family, Guy De Maupassant, Illocutionary Speech Acts, Pragmatics, Short Story*

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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is a sub-discipline of linguistics that examines language use in context, emphasizing the roles of the speaker, the listener, and the circumstances surrounding an utterance. Pragmatic studies emphasize the understanding of utterance meaning, which is determined not only by linguistic structure but also by the speaker's intention and the social background surrounding the interaction (Yule, 1996). In literary works, language functions not merely as a medium for storytelling, but also as a means of expressing the author's attitudes, emotions, and social criticism implicitly through the utterances of characters and the narrator. Therefore, a pragmatic approach is considered appropriate for uncovering the underlying meanings behind utterances in literary texts.

This study examines illocutionary speech acts in the short story *A Family* by Guy de Maupassant by referring to the speech act theory proposed by (Searle, 1979). According to Searle, every utterance not only has a literal meaning but also contains illocutionary force, namely the speaker's intention or action conveyed through the utterance. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method with a library research approach, as the object of the study is a literary text. The research data consist of sentences and dialogues of the characters that contain elements of illocutionary speech acts, which are collected through careful reading and note-taking techniques by conducting an in-depth analysis of the text.

This study focuses its analysis on assertive, directive, and expressive illocutionary speech acts because these three types are the most dominantly found and play an important role in shaping the characters and conveying social criticism in the short story *A Family*. Assertive illocutionary speech acts are used to express facts, opinions, and the speaker's beliefs about certain social realities (Searle, 1979). Furthermore, directive illocutionary speech acts aim to influence or direct the hearer to perform an action through utterances in the form of commands, requests, or advice (Searle, 1979; Yule, 1996). Meanwhile, expressive illocutionary

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speech acts function as a means for the speaker to express attitudes and psychological states, such as sympathy, disappointment, sadness, or irony (Leech, 1983).

Through a pragmatic approach to these three types of illocutionary speech acts, this study emphasizes that the interpretation of utterances in the short story *A Family* is highly dependent on the context of their use. Speech context, including the situation, inter-character relationships, and social background, plays an important role in determining utterance meaning (Levinson, 1983). Therefore, the analysis of illocutionary speech acts enables the disclosure of moral messages and social criticism conveyed indirectly by the author through the narrator and the characters in the story. This study is expected to contribute to the development of literary pragmatics studies and to broaden understanding of the application of illocutionary speech act theory in literary works. However, studies that specifically examine illocutionary speech acts in Guy de Maupassant's short story *A Family* remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types and functions of illocutionary speech acts found in Guy de Maupassant's short story *A Family*.

The data were taken from the original English version of Guy de Maupassant's short story *A Family*. The unit of analysis consisted of characters' utterances in the form of dialogues that contain illocutionary speech acts. To ensure analytical reliability, the data were analyzed through repeated close reading to understand the context of each utterance. Each utterance was carefully classified based on Searle's categories of illocutionary speech acts, and the categorization was conducted consistently by referring to contextual cues and communicative functions within the story.

METHOD

The type of research employed is qualitative descriptive. This approach aims to describe and explain the forms of illocutionary speech acts that appear in the short story *A Family* based on their speech contexts (Moleong, 2017). The research data consist of sentences or character dialogues containing illocutionary speech acts, which are analyzed using the theory of illocutionary speech acts proposed by (Searle, 1979).

This study analyzes illocutionary speech acts in the short story *A Family* by Guy de Maupassant by focusing on the utterances spoken by the characters in the story. Since the object of the research is a literary text, the study is conducted through library research with intensive text reading to understand the context and meaning of the utterances (Zaimar, O. K. S.; Harahap, 2011).

The data source of this study is the short story *A Family* by Guy de Maupassant. The data collection techniques are conducted through close reading and note-taking methods. The close reading method is used to understand the content of the story and to identify utterances containing illocutionary speech acts by reading the text carefully and repeatedly. Furthermore, the note-taking technique is employed to record and classify the identified utterances according to the types of illocutionary speech acts being analyzed (Mahsun, 2017).

The data analysis in this study was conducted based on the theory of illocutionary speech acts proposed by (Searle, 1979). The analysis was conducted on all the characters' dialogues in the short story without limiting them to a specific type of illocutionary speech act. Based on the analysis, three types of illocutionary speech acts were found, namely assertive, directive, and expressive, which were used by the characters in the short story to build interactions, represent the narrator's attitude, and convey social criticism implicitly. The research findings are then presented in the form of descriptive explanations supported by the presentation of data in tabular form to clarify the results of the analysis.

This study is expected to contribute to the understanding of the use of illocutionary speech acts in literary works and to broaden pragmatic studies, particularly those related to the analysis of short story texts (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996).

To ensure analytical rigor, the data were analyzed through repeated close reading of the text to maintain consistency in categorizing illocutionary speech acts. Each identified utterance was carefully examined based on its linguistic form and speech context. The

categorization process was conducted systematically to avoid overlapping interpretations. Contextual cues within the narrative were also considered to support accurate interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Illocutionary Speech Acts in the Short Story A Family by Guy de Maupassant

This section presents the findings of the analysis of illocutionary speech acts found in Guy de Maupassant's short story A Family. Based on the analysis of 22 character utterances, three types of illocutionary speech acts were identified, namely assertive, directive, and expressive. The findings are presented descriptively and supported by tabular data to enhance clarity and analytical rigor.

Table 1. Distribution of Illocutionary Speech Acts in A Family

Illocutionary Act	Frequency	Presentage
Assertive	14	54.5%
Directive	6	27.3%
Expressive	2	18.2%
Total	22	100%

Assertive Illocutionary Speech Act

Assertive speech acts are utterances used by speakers to convey information that they believe to be true. Through this type of speech act, the speaker commits to the truth of the proposition expressed. Assertive speech acts can take the form of suggesting, stating, boasting, complaining, and claiming.

Data A1

Context:

George recalls the changes in a person's character and condition after being apart for a long time, namely fifteen years.

Utterance: "A man may change greatly in the course of fifteen years!"

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying reflection and assumption. George expresses his view on the possibility of a person changing over time based on his own experience and observation.

Data A2

Context:

Simon explains his daily routine to George after not meeting for a long time.

Utterance: "Eating and sleeping, that is my existence!"

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying a description of lifestyle. Simon states his living condition directly without intending to influence the hearer.

Data A3

Context:

George evaluates Simon's personality changes through his expressions and appearance. Utterance: "If the expression be the reflection of the mind, the thoughts in that head are not what they used to be." This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying judgment or evaluation. George expresses his critical opinion regarding Simon's mental state, which he believes has changed.

Data A4

Context:

Simon introduces his children to George.

Utterance: "Here are my two eldest children."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying factual information. Simon simply states a fact without containing any invitation or emotional element.

Data A5

Context:

Simon shows one part of his house to George.

Utterance: "That is my den."

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This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying a statement of ownership. Simon provides information about his private room.

Data A6

Context:

George gives a polite response to the place shown by Simon.

Utterance: "It is charming."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying a polite evaluation. George expresses a positive assessment as a form of social courtesy.

Data A7

Context:

Simon introduces his children one by one.

Utterance: "Jean, Sophie and Gontran."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying the introduction of family members.

Data A8

Context:

Madame Radevin introduces an elderly family member.

Utterance: "This is my grandfather; he is eighty-seven."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying the identity and age of a person.

Data A9

Context:

Madame Radevin explains the social relationship between George and Simon to her father.

Utterance: "This is a friend of Simon's, papa."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying the introduction of a social relationship.

Data A10

Context:

George responds to the welcome he receives from Simon's family.

Utterance: "You are very kind, monsieur."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying polite appreciation.

Data A11

Context:

Simon assures George that he will enjoy his time with the family.

Utterance: "You will be amused."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying a prediction or expressing confidence about the hearer's future reaction.

Data A12

Context:

Simon announces the dishes available for the evening.

Utterance: "This evening there is sweet creamed rice!"

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying the announcement of information.

Data A13

Context:

Simon provides a reason for forbidding his grandfather from eating too much.

Utterance: "If he were to eat too much, it would harm him, at his age."

This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying an explanation or justification.

Data A14

Context:

George delivers a moral critique regarding the family's treatment of the grandfather.

Utterance: "Why not grant him that last solace until he died?"

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This utterance is classified as an assertive illocutionary speech act, conveying ethical criticism. George questions the humanity in restricting someone's happiness in old age.

Directive Illocutionary Speech Act

Directive speech acts are utterances intended to influence or encourage the hearer to perform a certain action. This type of speech act includes acts such as advising, requesting, recommending, ordering, and commanding.

Data D1

Context:

George wants to verify the accuracy of the information about Simon's children.

Utterance: "Are they yours?"

This utterance is classified as a directive illocutionary speech act, conveying a request for confirmation. George expects an answer from Simon to clarify the information he has received.

Data D2

Context:

George continues his curiosity about Simon's family.

Utterance: "How many have you?"

This utterance is classified as a directive illocutionary speech act, conveying a request for information. George directly asks about the number of Simon's children.

Data D3

Context:

George realizes the presence of other members of Simon's family.

Utterance: "Ah! ah! so there are the others?"

This utterance is classified as a directive illocutionary speech act, conveying a request for confirmation. George seeks validation for his assumption

Data D4

Context:

Simon wants to draw George's attention to something.

Utterance: "Just look!"

This utterance is classified as a directive illocutionary speech act, conveying the act of directing the hearer's attention.

Data D5

Context:

Gontran forbids his grandfather from eating too much.

Utterance: "You have eaten too much already; you can have no more."

This utterance is classified as a directive illocutionary speech act, conveying a prohibition.

Data D6

Context:

George shows pity for the grandfather and requests that he be given more food.

Utterance: "Come, give him a little more rice!"

This utterance is classified as a directive illocutionary speech act, conveying a request or plea for action.

Expressive Illocutionary Speech Acts

Expressive illocutionary speech acts refer to utterances through which speakers convey their psychological states or emotions in response to the hearer or a specific situation. These acts commonly involve expressions such as praise, apologies, gratitude, blame, and congratulations.

Data E1

Context:

George is surprised to see Simon's physical condition, which appears overweight when they meet again.

Utterance: "By Jove! You have not grown thin!"

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This utterance is classified as an expressive illocutionary speech act, conveying surprise. This expression shows George's emotional reaction to Simon's appearance, which did not meet his expectations.

Data E2

Context:

Simon expresses amusement at his grandfather's behavior.

Utterance: "Is not the old man comical?"

This utterance is classified as an expressive illocutionary speech act, conveying amusement or entertainment.

Discussion

Discussion of Research Findings

The results of this study indicate that assertive illocutionary acts are the most dominant type of illocutionary acts found in the short story *A Family* by Guy de Maupassant. The dominance of assertive illocutionary acts suggests that the dialogues in the short story are primarily used by the characters to express opinions, describe situations, convey judgments, and reflect on social realities and family life. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by (Sahara, A. I.; Yuhdi, 2022) on the novel *Kami (Bukan) Sarjana Kertas* by J.S. Khairen, which revealed that assertive illocutionary acts are frequently employed to represent characters' perspectives on social conditions and their lived experiences.

In addition, the results of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Irza Sahara, Hasanah, and Rahmawati (2024), which examined illocutionary acts in *Asma Nadia's* short story *Rembulan di Mata Ibu*. The study demonstrated that assertive illocutionary acts appear significantly because the short story explores reflective and emotional themes that encourage characters to express feelings, viewpoints, and interpretations of life experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that literary texts focusing on family, life, and inner reflection tend to predominantly employ assertive illocutionary acts.

However, the findings of this study differ from those of (Yaqin, 2024), who analyzed illocutionary acts in the short story *Mr. Know All* by Somerset Maugham. That study found expressive illocutionary acts to be the most dominant type. This difference can be attributed to variations in the characteristics and narrative focus of the texts. *Mr. Know All* emphasizes emotionally charged social interactions, attitudes, and interpersonal responses, which leads to a more intensive use of expressive illocutionary acts. In contrast, *A Family* contains more reflective narration and rational evaluations by the characters regarding changes in character, family life, and social realities, resulting in the dominance of assertive illocutionary acts over expressive ones.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that the short story *A Family* by Guy de Maupassant is predominantly characterized by assertive illocutionary speech acts, rather than directive and expressive acts. This dominance is closely related to the theme of the short story, which emphasizes reflection on family life, changes in human character, and implicit social criticism of domestic values and morality. The characters tend to express statements, judgments, and observations about social realities more frequently than direct emotional responses. Therefore, the prevalence of assertive illocutionary acts reflects the reflective and critical narrative style employed in the short story. Despite these findings, this study has several limitations. First, the data source is limited to a single literary text, namely one short story by Guy de Maupassant, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Second, the analysis focuses only on three types of illocutionary speech acts—assertive, directive, and expressive—while other types such as commissive and declarative acts, as well as perlocutionary effects, were not examined. In addition, the number of analyzed utterances was relatively limited, which may not fully represent the complexity of speech acts in literary discourse. Nevertheless, this study contributes to the field of literary pragmatics by demonstrating the application of illocutionary speech act theory in the analysis of literary

texts. By emphasizing contextual interpretation rather than mere classification, this research highlights how illocutionary acts function to convey implicit meanings, moral values, and social criticism through character dialogues. The findings are expected to enrich pragmatic studies in literature and provide a reference for future research on speech acts in literary works, particularly in the analysis of short stories.

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