

AN ANALYSIS OF ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS IN THE FILM EINSTEIN AND THE BOMB (2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the types and functions of illocutionary speech acts used by the main character, Albert Einstein, in the documentary film *Einstein and the Bomb* (2024). This study applies the speech act theory proposed by John Searle (1979) to identify and classify utterances into five categories of illocutionary speech acts, namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The method used is descriptive qualitative by transcribing each utterance from the main character, Einstein, then classifying them into five types of illocutionary speech acts and calculating their frequency and percentage and presenting the results of the analysis. The result is a total of 172 utterances made by Einstein throughout the film. The results show that assertive speech acts dominate with a percentage of 84.30%, followed by expressive at 11.62%, commissive at 2.32%, and directive at 1.74%, while declarative speech acts are not found. The dominance of assertive speech acts reflects Einstein's tendency to express opinions, beliefs, and moral views, consistent with his image as a rational and reflective scientist. Meanwhile, the presence of expressive and commissive speech acts demonstrates his emotional side and commitment to peace and ethical responsibility. The absence of declarative speech acts indicates that Einstein lacked the institutional authority to enact change through language. This study concludes that the film portrays Einstein not only as a physicist but also as a moral communicator who uses language to express his stance on peace, equality, and justice.

Keywords: Assertive, Einstein, Expressive and Commissive, Film, Illocutionary Speech Acts

INTRODUCTION

Film is not merely entertainment; it also presents the reality of real life. Film can also be a medium of communication that reflects the values, culture, and worldview of society (Cloete, 2017). Through narrative, characters, and visuals, film is able to shape the audience's perception of developing issues. Film is a photographic representation of theatrical representation. In other words, films not only capture reality, but also record something that has been previously represented through acting and sets, a concept known as two-tier films (Hopkins, 2008). The study of films is not limited to production aspects, but also to how films construct meaning and influence audiences. Thus, films are an important object in the study of language, communication, and culture, because they are able to present reality and create new discourse in society (Wessels, 2023 & Tom, 2014). Furthermore, films serve as a rich site for analysing how ideologies are communicated and contested through language and visual symbols (Hakim & Shebab, 2023). Each cinematic choice like dialogue, gesture, or camera movement contributes to a broader discourse that reflects social power relations and collective beliefs. Therefore, examining films from linguistic or discourse perspectives allows researchers to uncover how certain viewpoints are normalized or challenged within society.

Based on the many forms of film, one that is interesting to study in depth is documentary film, which focuses on presenting facts. According to Aufderheide (2008), states that a “documentary film tells a story about real life, with claims to truthfulness.” Thus, documentary films simultaneously influence the way people view the world around them. Therefore, this study focuses on documentary films that aim to depict real historical events factually. The selected film, titled *Einstein and the Bomb*, released in 2024, tells the story of Albert Einstein after his escape from Nazi Germany, exploring his role in the Manhattan Project and his letter to President Roosevelt encouraging the development of the American atomic bomb, as well as his regret over the impact of nuclear weapons. The film features archival footage and direct quotes from Einstein. The film also not only depicts Einstein's scientific achievements but also highlights his moral and emotional struggles in dealing with the consequences of his discoveries. Through authentic storytelling, “Einstein and the Bomb” offers a profound reflection on the intersection of science, ethics, and humanity.

While many studies have examined illocutionary acts in animated, fantasy, action, and romantic films, only a few have focused on documentary movies. One such study by Basra (2023) analysed speech acts in the documentary film “Tinder Swindler”, which tells the story of a crime committed by an Israeli conman (IMDb). In contrast this study of illocutionary

acts on “Einstein and the Bomb” movie focuses on the spoken language of a renowned scientist featured in a documentary, Albert Einstein. As one of the most influential figures in science, understanding the way Einstein communicates in the film is both important and timely. By examining the illocutionary acts used in his speech, the study aims to reveal the types of speech acts he employs, particularly those connected to the topic of the atomic bomb. This analysis helps shed light on how language can shape and influence significant global decisions. This study contributes to the field of pragmatics by extending speech act analysis to documentary film discourse, offering insights into how language in documentary narratives shapes moral and scientific perspectives.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Building on the discussion of the documentary film, this study employs Speech Act Theory by Searle (1976), to analyse the dialogue in the documentary *Einstein and the Bomb* (2024), which is a development of John Langshaw Austin's initial theory of speech acts. Austin (1962) introduced the Speech Act Theory, which emphasizes that language is not only used to describe reality but also to perform actions. He argued that every utterance contains three levels of acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. Thus, Searle (1969), Through his book, he introduced *felicity conditions* as a prerequisite for successful illocution, and explained that speech acts are governed by constitutive rules that give language its social meaning. Then, through his book, Searle further developed the types of illocutionary acts into five types: *Assertives* are utterances that state or describe reality, *Directives* are utterances intended to get the hearer to do something, *Commissives* are utterances that commit the speaker to a future action, *Expressives* are utterances that express the speaker's feelings or attitudes, and *Declarations* are utterances that directly change social status or reality (Searle, 1976).

This study attempts to explore how the main character, Einstein himself, conveyed his meaning through his letter to President Roosevelt, his narrative, and his conversations with other characters by applying Searle (1976) illocutionary speech acts theory. Being one of the most well-known scientists in the world, Einstein played a significant part in the advancement of science and his ideas had an effect on society. Thus, it is imperative to examine the utterances he made throughout the film to determine the kinds of illocutionary speech actions he employed that seemed to influence important choices.

Illocutionary speech acts have been analyzed by a variety of researchers. Jawad & Noureddine (2024) looked into the idea of speech acts in written McDonald's ads. Consequently, it was discovered that speech acts taken together strengthen the McDonald's advertising language's persuasive power. The study by Fachrully et al. (2023) also includes the other type of object of illocutionary speech acts analysis. They explained the kind of speech acts used in the COVID-19 pandemic case discussion on Deddy Corbuzier's podcast.

Many studies also have conducted the analysis of speech acts in animated movie genre, for example a study by Sianipar et al. (2025) examined the various kinds of illocutionary acts and examined which kind predominated in the dialogue of characters in the animated film "Inside Out 2." The findings revealed that Representative was the most prevalent type, indicating that each character in the film has a tendency to describe, inform, clarify, or agree. Cahyana & Simatupang (2025) carried out a more focused investigation. It concentrated on expressive illocutionary speech acts in the Disney+ animated film Luca. Thanking, praising, complaining, apologizing, and blaming were the five expressive styles that were highlighted in the findings. This finding also revealed how important expressive illocutionary acts are to Disney+ Luca's character and story development.

In the fantasy movie genre, Simatupang et al. (2025) analyzed speech acts in the "Godmothered" movie to explore how the use of magic in the real world generates actions through speech acts in the characters' dialogues. The illocutionary acts analysis in another movie genre was also conducted by Tutuarima et al. (2018) in the action movie "London Has Fallen." The results showed that the dominant type was directive, which indicates that most of the utterances involved giving orders or instructions for someone to carry out an action. Ramadhani & Mustikawati (2023) revealed the types of illocutionary speech acts along with their meanings in the romantic movie "The Vow". Their findings showed that the representative type dominated the utterances of the main characters. This type includes more specific classifications such as asserting, claiming, describing, concluding, and reporting. Most previous studies focused on fictional genres such as animation or fantasy, leaving documentary films underexplored, especially those that portray real historical figures.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. As outlined by Creswell (2013) qualitative research is conducted within a natural context and guided by an interpretative framework, which allows the researcher to focus on how individuals or groups understand a specific problem. Supporting this view,

Perry (2005), as cited in Dewi et al. (2019), emphasizes that qualitative research is characterized by the verbal description of data rather than numerical representation. Similarly, VanderStoep, S. W., & Johnston (2009) explain that qualitative methods aim to interpret human experiences by analyzing language, behavior, and cultural texts in their real-life settings. Therefore, this approach was deemed appropriate because the data in this study consisted of utterances that were described and interpreted, not quantitatively measured. The data comes from the dialogue and narrator's speech spoken by Albert Einstein in the film *Einstein and the Bomb* (2024), the data selected are speeches in the form of sentences. Each utterance was transcribed from the film and analyzed using the Speech Act Theory by Searle (1976). Each utterance was categorized into one of the five types of illocutionary acts. Subsequently, the researchers outlined which type of illocutionary act was the most dominant found in the data. Finally, the researchers concluded the findings obtained from the overall analysis.

FINDING

Table 1. Speech Act Findings from Einstein and the Bomb Movie

Type of Speech	Frequency	Percentage
Assertive	145	84.30%
Expressive	20	11.62%
Commissive	4	2.32%
Directive	3	1.74%
Declarative	0	0%
Total	172	100%

Based on Table 1, the Result show that the data that has been collected and analyzed for speech acts, shows a dominance of the assertive type with a total of 142 utterances and a presentation of 82.55% of the total 172 data. This shows that the main character, Einstein, is depicted in the film as a figure who often states facts, provides explanations, and emphasizes his views or beliefs regarding the situation that occurs. This type of assertive speech act illustrates the character's tendency to convey information and defend his intellectual position, which is in line with Einstein's image as a rational and analytical scientist. Thus, assertive dominance confirms that most of the communication carried out by the main character serves to inform and convince, not to order, request, or express personal emotions.

In addition, expressive speech acts are the second most dominant illocutionary speech acts in the utterances delivered by Einstein in the film, with a total of 20 utterances and a presentation of 11,62% of the total data. This main character tends to focus on conveying facts, he still expresses feelings such as guilt, sadness, disappointment, and empathy in certain situations that display his emotional side. Meanwhile, directive and commissive illocutionary acts were found only rarely throughout the data set. This scarcity reflects that the main character, Einstein, rarely uses language to give orders or make promises, so his interactions are more factual and reflective than instructional or commitment to a particular action. On the other hand, declarative speech acts were absent from the data, indicating that Einstein did not use authoritative or formal speech to create institutional impact through his utterances in the film.

Based on the analysis conducted, this study also has limitations that need to be acknowledged. In classifying illocutionary speech acts, based on the available data, this study only focuses on the five main types of illocutionary acts proposed by Searle, without exploring more specific subtypes. Therefore, a more detailed classification can be considered in future research to provide a deeper understanding of how language functions in shaping meaning and character in the context of narrative films. Furthermore, further research can also expand the focus of analysis by comparing other characters or different communication situations, thereby producing a more comprehensive picture of the use of speech acts. The following will present some of the main data analysis of each type of illocution as an example of the presentation of the analysis of speech classification.

DISCUSSION

Assertive

Assertive illocutionary acts, in simple terms, are when someone says something with the intention of stating a fact or sharing a belief. The speaker is essentially saying this is how they see it, and they expect the listener to consider it a reflection of reality, at least from their point of view. These acts are not about giving orders or asking questions. They are about sharing what the speaker thinks is true. Words like believe, think, know, claim, or suggest often signal this kind of statement.

In the film, assertive speech acts are the most frequently used by Einstein, comprising 82% of his total utterances. There are 142 instances where he uses language to state or describe reality. This high percentage reflects Einstein's tendency to articulate his ideas, opinions, experiences, and personal beliefs, particularly in scenes where he is asked to explain or defend his theories. As a renowned scientist, Einstein is frequently approached by the media and the public to clarify his views. In response, he often employs assertive illocutionary acts to express what he holds to be true. This is a strategic use of language to convey

information, establish credibility, and make his stance clear on complex issues. The following are some examples of Einstein's utterances which are classified as assertive illocutionary types.

Data 1 : "Yet, I am firmly convinced that in the present state of the world, organized force can be opposed only by organized force"

In this utterance, Einstein is asserting his belief that organized force must be countered with organized force. The phrase "I am firmly convinced that" signals a strong commitment to the truth of the statement that follows. It clearly functions as an assertive speech act because it communicates not only information but also a personal conviction about how the world operates. This statement exemplifies how Einstein uses assertive acts to share his beliefs and persuade others of the validity of his views.

Data 2 :

"It is only men who are free, who create the inventions and intellectual works, which make life worthwhile."

In this statement, Einstein expresses a firm belief about the conditions that enable meaningful human achievement. Here, he is not merely offering an opinion but asserting what he sees as a fundamental truth about the relationship between freedom and creativity. The central purpose of this utterance is to present a factual claim or what the speaker perceives to be a universal truth about the nature of human potential and the importance of liberty.

While the notion of what makes life "worthwhile" is inherently subjective, Einstein delivers this statement with the force of a declarative truth. This places the utterance squarely within the category of an Assertive speech act, as defined in speech act theory, where the speaker commits to the truth of the expressed proposition. In essence, Einstein is not simply sharing a personal perspective but is articulating a broad philosophical conviction about the essential link between freedom and the kinds of intellectual and creative contributions that give life depth and value.

Data 3 :

"According to the theory of relativity, there is no essential distinction between mass and energy."

In this statement, Einstein isn't sharing a personal feeling, so it isn't an expressive act. He's also not trying to influence someone to do something, so it isn't a directive either. Instead, he's presenting a conclusion based on his own scientific theory. By stating that mass and energy are fundamentally equivalent, as captured in the equation $E = mc^2$, Einstein is making a clear claim about the nature of the physical world. The illocutionary force of the statement is assertive. He is affirming a

scientific fact and committing himself to the truth of that proposition. It's not just a personal belief but a statement grounded in theoretical reasoning and supported by evidence.

Expressive

Expressive illocutionary acts are those in which the speaker reveals their emotional state or attitude toward a particular event, action, or situation. They are not used to describe facts or give commands, but rather to express inner feelings such as regret, disappointment, or gratitude. Through expressive acts, language becomes a tool for showing personal emotions and moral reflection.

In the film *Einstein and the Bomb* (2024), expressive speech acts appear in 20 utterances, making up 11.62% of Einstein's total dialogues. Although he is primarily portrayed as a logical and rational figure, these instances show that Einstein also experiences emotional struggle and moral awareness. His expressive utterances often occur when he reflects on the consequences of his involvement in scientific discovery, revealing guilt and sorrow for the destructive use of his ideas.

Data 1: "Had I known that the Germans would not succeed in producing an atomic bomb, I would not have taken part in opening that Pandora's box."

This line expresses Einstein's deep remorse about his indirect contribution to the creation of nuclear weapons. The conditional form "Had I know" and "I would not have taken part" conveying regret and emotional self-blame. This utterance is classified as an expressive illocutionary act because it communicates Einstein's feelings rather than factual information or directives. It represents his emotional burden as a scientist whose intellectual work unintentionally led to devastating outcomes.

Data 2: "My feelings for Rathenau were ones of thanks for the hope and consolation he gave me during Europe's presently bleak situation."

This utterance conveys Einstein's gratitude toward Rathenau, showing appreciation for his support during a difficult time in Europe. The phrase feelings... of thanks explicitly communicates thankfulness, making it a clear example of an expressive act. Through this statement, Einstein acknowledges emotional support and expresses his positive sentiment toward someone who comforted him, revealing that behind his intellectual persona lies a deeply empathetic and appreciative character.

Data 3: "Dear posterity, if you have not become more just or peaceful and generally more rational than we are or were, then may the devil take you."

This utterance expresses disappointment and frustration toward future generations. The emotional tone of *may the devil take you* indicates discontent and moral outrage, showing Einstein's critical reflection on humanity's failure to progress morally. This statement is categorized as an expressive act because it communicates Einstein's disapproval and emotional reaction toward the persistent irrationality and injustice of humankind.

Overall, the presence of these expressive utterances demonstrates that Einstein is not merely a man of logic and science but also one of emotion and conscience. His feelings of regret, gratitude, and frustration reveal the complexity of his humanity and moral awareness within the film's narrative.

Commissive

A commissive illocutionary act, in simple terms, refers to a speech act in which the speaker commits themselves to a future course of action. Through this act, the speaker expresses an intention, willingness, or obligation to carry out something, such as making a promise or offering assistance. Commissive acts indicate the speaker's personal involvement and responsibility toward what is being said, emphasizing the performative nature of language as not only describing reality but also shaping future actions.

In the film, the commissive is the type of illocution that is least frequency found in Einstein's utterances in the film, there are 4 utterances, which is only 11.55% of the total percentage of the data. From these statements it is found that Einstein also expressed his commitment to an action, even if only a little, in the film which he conveyed through speech or dialogue. The low percentage of commissive actions used by Einstein shows that Einstein did not show many forms of commitment or promises to certain actions, but rather conveyed statements and views. The following is an example of Einstein's utterance which is classified as a commissive illocutionary type.

Data 1: *"I am willing to fight for peace."*

From this utterance, Einstein commits himself to a future action, indicating his readiness to engage in efforts or actions aimed at achieving peace. The statement expresses a personal willingness and determination, showing that he is making a promise or commitment to act in a certain way. Therefore this utterance is categorized as a commissive illocutionary act. This is because the main function of the Commissive is to bind the speaker to an action in the future. In this utterance, the subject *"I"* explicitly states his commitment and willingness *"am willing to"* to carry out the upcoming action, namely *"fight for peace"*.

Data 2: "As long as I have any choice, I will only stay in a country where political liberty, toleration, and equality is the rule."

From this utterance, Einstein shows a personal commitment to the principles of political liberty, tolerance, and equality. This utterance is included in the illocutionary speech act type commissive because the speaker explicitly commits himself to a principle or course of action that will continue into the future. The phrase *"I will only stay"* serves as a pledge or commitment that the speaker will only choose to settle in a country that meets certain ethical standards, making his life choice a promise that must be kept. Einstein, states his willingness and determination to act in accordance with the values he believes in. In other words, he promises himself to only live in an environment that is in line with his moral and political beliefs.

Data 3: "Since they massacred my Jewish brethren, I will have nothing further to do with Germans."

This utterance is classified as a commissive illocutionary act because Einstein expressed his determination and commitment to no longer have any contact with Germans after the tragedy that befell his nation. And it is because the speaker explicitly commits himself to an action, or in this case, an avoidance of action, a reluctance to engage in any interaction, that will be carried out continuously in the future. The phrase *"I will have nothing further to do with..."* functions as a personal pledge or oath that binds the speaker to maintain a stance of non-interaction with the German party, and this is based on the conditions already mentioned. This utterance contains a firm personal promise or decision regarding future actions. Thus, through his statement, Einstein affirmed his moral and emotional stance as a form of commitment to humanitarian values and solidarity with fellow Jews. Although past reasons are presented, the illocutionary point is the future commitment made by the speaker.

Directive

Directive speech acts, as defined by Searle (1976), are utterances in which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something. These include commands, requests, suggestions, advice, and questions and any form of speech where the speaker's intention is to influence the hearer's future actions. The defining feature of directive acts lies in their illocutionary force, as they aim to prompt the hearer toward some intended behavior. However, directives can range from direct and forceful to subtle and indirect, depending on the context and the speaker's strategy. In the film, directive speech acts are the third most frequently used category by Einstein, with only 6 utterances, making up approximately 6% of his total speech. This low number indicates that Einstein seldom aimed to influence the actions of

others directly. Rather than relying on commands or explicit requests, he often expressed ideas through assertions, philosophical reflections, and rhetorical questions.

Data 1 :

“Concern for man himself and his fate must always be the chief objective, in order that the creations of our minds should be a blessing and not a curse to mankind.”

On the surface, this utterance appears assertive, as it expresses a philosophical viewpoint. However, the use of the modal phrase “must always be” signals a prescriptive intention. Einstein is not merely describing a belief; he is prescribing a principle that he believes ought to be followed.

Although this utterance is not structured as a direct command, it still functions as a directive. It encourages the audience to adopt a particular ethical stance: to place human well-being at the center of intellectual and scientific efforts. The directive is delivered in a careful, reflective tone rather than an authoritative one. This indirectness reflects Einstein’s broader communicative approach in which he encourages action not through coercion but through moral reasoning and shared values.

Einstein’s use of directive acts in this way suggests that when he does seek to influence others, he does so through appeals to conscience and ethical responsibility rather than through explicit demands. This aligns with his thoughtful, philosophical demeanor and highlights his preference for guiding others rather than commanding them.

Data 2 :

“How can we guard Europe from further disaster?”

This is one example of Einstein’s utterance that he said in the form of a question. It becomes a thoughtful and urgent appeal to the audience, encouraging them to come together and engage in finding meaningful solutions. Rather than a straightforward inquiry, the question acts as a powerful invitation to reflect, to collaborate, and to take shared responsibility for addressing serious issues. Einstein uses this form not just to provoke thought, but to inspire action. His words reach out to policymakers, scientists, and everyday individuals, urging them to participate in the development of effective strategies and forward-thinking policies. What may look like a simple question on the surface actually functions as a sincere call for unity, dialogue, and problem-solving. Through this approach, Einstein transforms a question into a force that motivates others to think critically and to work collectively toward a better future.

Data 3 :

“In view of this situation, you may think it desirable to speed up the experimental work, which is at present being carried on.”

In this statement, Einstein subtly encourages the audience to take a specific course of action without issuing a direct command. The phrase *“you may think it desirable to speed up the experimental work”* is a carefully worded and highly mitigated suggestion. By framing the directive as something the listener *may* consider *desirable*, Einstein softens the force of the request, making it sound more like a polite recommendation than a demand. This indirectness reflects a strategic use of politeness, likely intended to maintain respect for the listener's autonomy and authority, while still guiding them toward a particular decision.

Even though the wording sounds polite and somewhat tentative on the surface, Einstein's real intention is quite clear. He is encouraging the audience to act with greater urgency and to speed up the experimental work that is already underway. The softened language does not take away from the strength of the message. Instead, it makes the suggestion feel more thoughtful and easier to accept, especially in a formal or sensitive setting. By choosing his words carefully, Einstein shows how one can be both respectful and persuasive at the same time. He manages to strike a careful balance between being tactful and making his point clear. Through this approach, he gently leads the listener toward the action he believes is necessary, while maintaining a calm and considerate tone.

Declarative

In simple terms, a declarative illocutionary act is a type of speech act in which the speaker's words bring about a change in the external situation or reality at the moment of speaking. Through declarative acts, the speaker has the authority or power to alter a social or institutional state, such as declaring, naming, or appointing something. In other words, this act not only describes a reality but also creates it through language itself.

In the film, the Declarative is a type of illocutionary act that is not found in Einstein's utterances or dialogues in this film, its percentage is 0% of the total data that has been collected. The absence of this type of illocutionary act indicates that Einstein does not demonstrate the function of language that plays a role in changing status or social situations through his speech. In the context of this film, this indicates that Einstein's character does not act as an authoritative figure who has institutional power to establish decisions, regulations, or social change directly through his speech. Instead, his speeches are more focused on conveying views, beliefs, expressions, requests or suggestions and even personal commitment to the values of humanity and peace.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at how Albert Einstein uses different speech acts in the documentary *Einstein and the Bomb* (2024) to share his thoughts, feelings, and ethical concerns. Using Searle's speech act theory, the analysis showed that assertive acts made up more than 84 percent of his speech. This highlights how Einstein often used language to state facts, express beliefs, and explain ideas, reflecting his role as a scientist and thinker. Expressive acts appeared less often but were important in showing Einstein's emotions like regret and gratitude. Commissive and directive acts were rare and usually showed his quiet commitment to peace or gentle guidance rather than commands or promises. There were no declarative acts, which suggests Einstein did not try to change social or official realities through his words, but instead aimed to share his views and encourage reflection. Overall, the film presents Einstein as someone who speaks mainly to inform and reflect, blending scientific authority with a strong sense of conscience. This study shows how speech acts help us understand character and meaning in documentaries. Future research could explore more specific speech acts or compare different speakers, but this work demonstrates the value of speech act analysis in understanding language in film.

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