

## **LINGUOPRAGMATIC FEATURES OF FICTIONAL TEXTS: THE ROLE OF SPEECH ACTS**

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**Abstract:** *Language in fictional texts serves not only as a medium for storytelling but also as a means of exploring complex character interactions and societal dynamics. This article examines the role of speech acts in shaping narrative depth and character relationships in English literature. By focusing on directives, expressives, and commissives, with examples from *Pride and Prejudice*, *Great Expectations*, and *Jane Eyre*, the analysis highlights how speech acts reflect personal motives and broader cultural norms, enriching the reader's engagement with the text*

### **Introduction**

Fictional texts are not only a form of artistic expression but also a means of communication between authors and readers, using language to convey nuanced messages, emotions, and cultural values. Linguopragmatics, the study of how language functions in context to achieve specific communicative goals, plays a crucial role in understanding these texts. By examining how authors use speech acts and implicature, readers can uncover layers of meaning that enrich their understanding of characters and narratives. Fictional narratives rely on dialogue to create compelling characters and advance the plot. Beyond the surface of communication, linguistic choices carry deeper pragmatic functions. Speech acts, as defined by J.L. Austin and John Searle, are actions performed through words, such as making a promise, giving a command, or expressing emotions. These acts reflect characters' intentions, reveal societal values, and engage readers in uncovering implicit meanings.

This article explores the use of speech acts in classic English literature, focusing on three categories: directives, expressives, and commissives. Through an analysis of passages from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, it demonstrates how these linguistic features shape narrative and character development.

Speech act theory is a subfield of pragmatics that studies how words are used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. Speech acts, as theorized by J.L. Austin [1] and later expanded by John Searle [2], are communicative acts performed through language. From Searle's view, there are only five illocutionary points that speakers can achieve on propositions in an utterance, namely:

- The assertive

- The commissive
- The directive
- The declaratory
- The expressive

Speakers achieve:

- The *assertive point* when they represent how things are in the world;
- The *commissive point* when they commit themselves to doing something;
- The *directive point* when they make an attempt to get hearers to do something;
- The *declaratory point* when they do things in the world at the moment of the utterance solely by virtue of saying that they do;
- The *expressive point* when they express their attitudes about objects and facts of the world [4]

In fictional texts, these acts shape characters' intentions, relationships, and conflicts.

By analyzing specific interactions in novels, we can see how these acts drive character development and plot progression.

### **1. Directives: Commands and Requests**

In *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, directives establish power dynamics. Magwitch, a convict, exerts control over Pip in their first encounter through a series of commands:

*"You bring me, to-morrow morning early, that file and them vittles. You do it, and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live."*

Magwitch's threatening tone and explicit directives highlight his desperation while creating immediate tension in the narrative. Pip's silent compliance demonstrates the effectiveness of the directive speech act in this high-stakes situation.

### **2. Expressives: Emotional Outpourings**

Expressives convey the speaker's emotions, revealing their inner state. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* uses expressives to portray vulnerability and emotional depth. For instance, Mr. Rochester's passionate outburst to Jane reflects his frustration and longing:

*"Do you think I am an automaton? —a machine without feelings? And can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong!"*

Rochester's expressive speech act not only reveals his emotional turmoil but also underscores his defiance of societal norms that value wealth and appearance over authenticity. This raw honesty deepens the emotional resonance of the narrative, fostering a connection between the reader and the characters.

### **3. Commissives: Promises and Vows**

Commissive speech acts, which involve commitments to future actions, often signify pivotal moments in a narrative. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet functions as a commissive:

*"In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you."*

While Darcy's words convey his intention to marry Elizabeth, their formal and self-centered tone reflects his lack of emotional awareness. Elizabeth's rejection of his proposal serves as a turning point, forcing Darcy to reevaluate his approach and assumptions. This interaction exemplifies how commissive acts can drive character development and plot progression.

### **4. Assertives: Statements conveying information or belief**

J. Searle refined the idea, identifying assertives as acts that commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. He emphasized that assertives are grounded in sincerity, where the speaker genuinely believes the proposition to be true. **Example:** Mr. Darcy's initial statement about Elizabeth Bennet at the Meryton ball:

*"She is tolerable, but not handsome enough to tempt me."*

This statement by Mr. Darcy is an assertive speech act where he expresses his belief about Elizabeth's appearance and suitability as a dance partner. The assertive conveys information about his initial disdain and high standards, which contrasts sharply with his later feelings for her. It also sets the stage for Elizabeth's perception of Darcy as proud and dismissive, influencing the development of their relationship.

This example demonstrates how assertives provide insight into a character's beliefs or attitudes, often shaping the narrative and interactions with others.

**5. Declarative speech** acts are unique because they change reality simply through the act of uttering them, often relying on specific social or institutional authority. In literature, such acts can be seen in moments where declarations alter the state of affairs, like judgments, marriages, or official proclamations.

Scene: When Reverend Dimmesdale publicly confesses his sin on the scaffold.

*"At last—at last!—I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood; here, with this woman, whose arm, more than once, thou hast led me to the*



*verge of Heaven, by this symbol of my sin, and thine!"[ The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne]*

Dimmesdale's public confession is a declarative act because, by virtue of uttering these words, he changes his moral and social standing in the eyes of the community. The confession transforms his position from a secret sinner to a penitent, publicly acknowledged as flawed but redeemed. The declaration has immediate consequences: it resolves the tension between public perception and private guilt, altering the narrative's moral landscape.

### **Conclusion**

The contributions of Austin and Searle provide a framework for analyzing speech acts in literature, emphasizing their pragmatic functions and impact on narrative. Assertives convey belief, directives influence action, expressives reveal emotions, and commissives signal commitment. Together, these acts enrich fictional dialogue, driving both plot and character development. Speech acts in fictional texts are more than mere representations of dialogue; they are mechanisms that reveal character motivations, establish relationships, and reflect societal norms. By examining these elements, readers can gain a richer understanding of how language shapes narrative and character interactions in English literature. This exploration highlights the richness of linguopragmatics in literature, inviting readers to engage more deeply with the interplay between language and meaning in fictional narratives

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