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Exploration of Illocutinary Acts in the Movie Hacksaw Ridge by Mel Gibson

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the use of illocutionary acts in the war film Hacksaw Ridge directed by Mel Gibson, focusing on how characters employ language not only as a tool for communication but also as a reflection of moral conviction, institutional tension, and personal struggle. The study applies John Searle's theory of speech acts, particularly the classification of illocutionary acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the researcher analyzed selected dialogues from the film transcript. The data were categorized based on Searle's framework and interpreted contextually to examine the pragmatic function and moral implications behind each utterance. The findings reveal that directive acts dominate the communication in the film, followed by assertives and expressives. Commissive and declarative acts occur less frequently but carry significant narrative weight. The speech acts used by the main character, Desmond Doss, highlight his pacifist stance and deep religious values, demonstrating how language can serve as both a form of resistance and a means of persuasion in extreme wartime conditions.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan tindak ilokusi dalam film perang Hacksaw Ridge yang disutradarai oleh Mel Gibson, dengan fokus pada bagaimana para tokoh menggunakan bahasa tidak hanya sebagai alat komunikasi, tetapi juga sebagai cerminan keyakinan moral, ketegangan institusional, dan perjuangan pribadi. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori tindak tutur dari John Searle, khususnya klasifikasi tindak ilokusi yang mencakup asertif, direktif, komisif, ekspresif, dan deklaratif. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, peneliti menganalisis dialog-dialog terpilih dari transkrip film. Data dikategorikan berdasarkan kerangka kerja Searle dan ditafsirkan secara

kontekstual untuk mengkaji fungsi pragmatik serta implikasi moral di balik setiap ujaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tindak tutur direktif mendominasi komunikasi dalam film, diikuti oleh asertif dan ekspresif. Tindak komisif dan deklaratif muncul lebih jarang, tetapi memiliki bobot naratif yang signifikan. Tindak ilokusi yang digunakan oleh tokoh utama, Desmond Doss, menyoroti sikap pasifis dan nilai-nilai religius yang kuat, menunjukkan bahwa bahasa dapat berfungsi sebagai bentuk perlawanan sekaligus sarana persuasi dalam kondisi perang yang ekstrem.

INTRODUCTION

Linguistics explores how language operates and how people use it to interact, understand, and convey meaning within different contexts. Linguistics is the scientific study of language, encompassing various branches that explore how language is structured, used, and interpreted. One of its key areas is pragmatics, which focuses on how context influences meaning in communication. Unlike syntax and semantics, which analyze grammatical structure and meaning in isolation, pragmatics examines language in real-life interactions, considering factors such as speaker intention, social relationships, and situational context.

A crucial branch within linguistics is pragmatics, which examines how context affects the interpretation of meaning in communication. Rather than focusing solely on the structure of language, pragmatics looks at how words are used in real-life situations to convey intentions, elicit responses, and build relationships.

A crucial concept within pragmatics is speech act theory, introduced by John Austin and further developed by John Searle. This theory suggests that language is not merely a tool for conveying information but also a means of performing actions (Austin, 1975). Speech acts are categorized into three levels: locutionary acts (literal meaning), illocutionary acts (speaker's intent), and perlocutionary acts (effect on the listener). Among these, illocutionary acts are particularly significant because they define how utterances function in social interactions, such as making requests, giving orders, making promises, or expressing emotions.

This concept becomes particularly relevant in movies, where dialogues are not only used for storytelling but also serve as powerful tools to construct character relationships, convey ideological conflicts, and reflect social dynamics.

In a movie, there is of course a lot of dialogue among the characters. It is language which connects them all. The dialogue can vary in form and from the way it is delivered. Dialogue is the most interesting part in a movie. The audiences know what is going on in the movie through dialogue. To make it easier, there is subtitle in a movie. From this subtitle, which is the same with the script, language can be learned more. A language allows us to understand what someone says or means. However, it is not only about the meaning of the utterances that people create, there are also a few actions that are performed.

In Hacksaw Ridge (2016), a war film directed by Mel Gibson, illocutionary acts play a crucial role in shaping the protagonist's journey, highlighting the clash between personal beliefs and external pressures. As a conscientious objector, Desmond Doss uses speech acts to negotiate his moral stance, assert his religious convictions, and persuade others in the midst of war. His dialogues whether in the form of directives (urging others to act), expressives (revealing personal emotions), or commissives (making promises) demonstrate how language can function as a means of both resistance and influence.

Several studies have explored illocutionary acts in movies, including the research by (Fatma & Sundari, 2021) entitled "Illocutionary Acts Performed by Anna in Frozen II", which focuses on identifying the speech acts performed by the secondary character Anna in an animated fantasy film. This previous study classifies illocutionary acts but does not deeply analyze their influence on character interactions, ideological conflicts, or the moral framework of the story. This research expands the analysis by exploring how speech acts in Hacksaw Ridge reinforce ethical values, military hierarchy, and social pressures in a wartime environment.

Many existing studies only classify illocutionary acts but do not analyze how these Ilocutionary acts reflect moral dilemmas, ideological stances, or social pressures in extreme situations such as war movies.

This study aims to explore the use and function of illocutionary acts in the movie Hacksaw Ridge, examining how language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful tool for action, and moral expression. By analyzing illocutionary acts in the characters' dialogue, this research will explain how language forms relationships, conveys intent, and drives the narrative in the film.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher has chosen Hacksaw Ridge as a subject to analyze Illocutionary acts. The movie provides a rich context in which various illocutionary acts can be identified and examined, the researcher can explore how the characters use language not only to communicate but also to perform actions that have significant consequences. The variety of dialog in the film such as commands, promises, denials, to declarations offers a valuable case study for applying Illocutionary act theory.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method that emphasizes pragmatic analysis, specifically Illocutionary acts theory. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In this study, the qualitative descriptive method is employed to explore the use of illocutionary acts in Hacksaw Ridge, focusing on how language is used by characters to express intentions, beliefs, and moral choices during wartime. This approach is suitable for investigating the main objective of this study, which is to examine the influence of Illocutionary acts on character interaction, motivation, and evolution, in addition to revealing the ethical values presented in the movie.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes illocutionary acts in Hacksaw Ridge based on Searle's (1969) theory to examine how language reflects moral and ethical dilemmas in a wartime context. From 101 analyzed dialogues, all five types of illocutionary acts were identified.

Directive acts are the most dominant (42.65%), reflecting the military setting where commands are crucial for survival. Assertive acts account for 27.94% and function to report situations and assert moral principles, particularly Desmond Doss's commitment to saving lives.

Expressive acts (20.59%) convey emotional responses such as gratitude and apology, highlighting the psychological impact of war. Commissive acts are rare (2.94%), indicating limited emphasis on future commitments, while declarative acts (4.0%) appear mainly in institutional contexts such as court-martial scenes.

1. Assertive Act

Findings recap: 19 out of 68 analyzed utterances (27.94%) were assertive statements of belief, reports, evaluations, or state a fact.

Situational awareness & moral conviction. In a combat film, assertives serve two key roles. First, they report battlefield reality ("We just lost our cover," "Three battalions got wiped out today"), equipping characters (and viewers) with vital situational knowledge. Second, they express personal ethics notably Desmond Doss's moral stance ("God says not to kill," "While everybody else is taking life, I'm going to be saving it").

Link to Searle's theory, Searle (1969) describes assertives as speech acts that commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. Here, they both ground the narrative in grim wartime facts and anchor Doss's conscientious objection in absolute moral terms.

And in ethical dimension, By blending factual reporting with moral declarations, assertives become the vehicle through which Hacksaw Ridge explores the conflict between duty and conscience a central thematic thread.

Table 01. Assertive Act

No	Utterances	Description
1.	"The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the Earth."	This is the continuation of the biblical voiceover by Desmon Doss, overlaying images of nature and war. It links Desmond's world to a higher power.
2.	"He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom."	Still part of the voiceover of Desmond scripture, this line underscores the perfection and strength of God, in contrast to human weakness.

2. Directive Act

Findings recap: Approximately half of all utterances (29/68; 42.65%) are directives,commands, requests, or instructions. Survival and coordination. In the chaos of battle, imperatives ("Move, move!," "Cover me," "Fall back!") are indispensable. They organize collective movement, ensure compliance under fire, and literally save lives.

In institutional hierarchy context, Many directives reinforce military structure and authority: basic-training orders, court-martial commands, and evacuation instructions. In urgency & repetition, The frequent use of repetition ("Clear! Clear! Move aside!") and elliptical imperatives

underscores how battlefield speech must cut through confusion with maximum perlocutionary force.

According to pragmatic theory, directives aim to get the hearer to do something. Here, they reflect the film's emphasis on action over deliberation, aligning with the military context where hesitation can be fatal.

Table 02. Directive Act

No	Utterances	Description
3.	"Hey! Get away from that ledge, you damn fool kids!"	Someone's spots the boys (Desmond and hall) dangerously close to a cliff's edge and shouts this warning.
4.	"I want to see some fire here. A little hustle."	A Commander encourages more energy and speed to the soldiers during exercises.

3. Commisive Act

Commissive utterances are rare, only around 2.94%. Commissives commit the speaker to future action; their rarity underscores how the film's narrative privileges immediate action and moral stance over long-term planning.

they reveal the characters' personal aspirations beyond the battlefield. Desmond's vow to marry Dorothy and his declaration "I want to be a medic" provide poignant glimpses of his life-apart-from-war commitments. Their scarcity underscores the immediacy of survival in a war film, where future-oriented promises take a back seat to present-oriented commands and moral declarations. Nonetheless, these moments of forward-looking intention reinforce that personal identity and moral choices endure even in the crucible of combat.

Table 03. Commissive Act

No	**Utterances**	**Description**

5.	“Her name's Dorothy Schutte. I'm gonna marry her.”	Desmond says this line to his mom after first meeting Dorothy at the hospital. It’s a light-hearted yet sincere moment. Desmond has just had a brief but meaningful interaction with Dorothy and feels instantly connected to her.
6.	“Show me you know how to handle a riffle and I'll sign your furlough.”	This is what a commander says when Desmond Doss asks for leave because his wedding day is coming up. The commander gave him the requirements to get the signature

4. Expressive Act

Although less frequent (about 14/68 20.59%), expressive speech acts bring essential emotional texture to the narrative. Moments of fear (“I’m scared!”), apology (“I hope one day you can forgive me”), and praise (“Good job, men. Good work.”) humanize characters hardened by war. These expressives offer catharsis, mending rifts caused by brutality and reinforcing the bonds of camaraderie. They remind us that, even amid relentless directives and factual assertions, language in Hacksaw Ridge also serves to acknowledge vulnerability and restore hope.

Table 04. Expressive Act

No	Utterances	Description
7.	“Thank you, Seargant!”	this sentence was uttered by one of the soldiers because he received good direction from the commander
8.	“Please, Lord, help me get one more.”	This iconic line is spoken by Desmond Doss during one of the most powerful and emotional scenes in Hacksaw Ridge. After many of his fellow soldiers have been killed or wounded, Doss alone and under fire repeatedly risks his life to rescue as

		many men as he can. Exhausted, scared, and physically broken, he utters this prayer while trying to save yet another wounded comrade.

5. Declarative Act

Declarative acts constitute the smallest proportion (4/68 4.88%), appearing exclusively in the court martial sequence. Phrases like "I withdraw the charges, sir" and "Then this case is dismissed" are not mere descriptions but performative statements that alter Desmond Doss's legal status. Only a legitimately empowered speaker.

In this case, military judges and a Brigadier General can issue these utterances, instantly transforming institutional realities. Their rarity and formality highlight the extraordinary power of institutional language to override battlefield exigencies and validate individual conscience within a rigid hierarchy.

Table 05. Declarative Act

No	Utterances	Description
9.	"Signed, Brigadier General Musgrove, war Services Commander, Washington, D.C."	This line is read aloud during the climax of Desmond Doss's court-martial hearing, after his father successfully delivers a letter from Brigadier General Musgrove. The letter affirms Desmond's right to serve as a combat medic without carrying a weapon.
10.	"Then this case is dismissed."	This line is spoken during the climactic resolution of Desmond Doss's court-martial hearing, right after the letter from Brigadier General Musgrove is presented.

CONCLUSION

This moral positions, particularly through the protagonist Desmond Doss, whose utterances consistently articulate a stance of nonviolence within a violent institutional setting.

Expressive acts (20.59%) highlight the emotional and psychological dimensions of war, revealing characters' fear, gratitude, regret, and solidarity, while commissive acts (2.94%) appear infrequently, indicating that future-oriented commitments are secondary to immediate moral and survival concerns. Declarative acts (5.88%) occur mainly in formal institutional contexts, demonstrating how authoritative language can alter legal and social realities.

Overall, the findings confirm that language in Hacksaw Ridge functions as more than dialogue; it serves as a mechanism for enforcing authority, expressing moral resistance, and negotiating personal identity within institutional constraints. The dominance and distribution of illocutionary acts underscore the strong influence of situational context on language use and illustrate how speech acts can reflect ethical conflict and human resilience in extreme circumstances.

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