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## Speech Acts Of Anxiety Used In Burnham's Eighth Grade Film

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### Abstract

*This research employs a pragmatic approach to analyze speech acts in the Eighth Grade by Bo Burnham. The primary objective is to identify the types of illocutionary acts used by the main character that reflect anxiety, as well as to determine the most dominant type of illocutionary act found in the film. The method used is observation, with data collection procedures involving: (1) downloading the film and its transcript, (2) watching the film while verifying the accuracy of the transcript against the spoken dialogue, (3) noting relevant utterances, and (4) classifying the speech acts based on the illocutionary act frameworks proposed by John Searle (1979) and George Yule (1996). The analysis is conducted descriptively to categorize the types of illocutionary acts and to identify which type is most frequently employed by the main character. The findings indicate a total of 56 speech acts in the film, consisting of 17 representative acts, 5 commissive acts, 10 directive acts, 1 declarative act, and 23 expressive acts. Among these, expressive acts are the most dominant, accounting for 23 utterances or 41.06% of the overall data.*

*Keywords: Analyze, Anxiety, Burnham's Eighth Grade Film*

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### I INTRODUCTION

Language is the main means humans use for social interaction to express different intentions, desires, ideas, and emotions. Through the language, humans not only share information, but also build social relationships, co-operate in various activities, solve problems, and develop

culture. In everyday life, communication plays a very important role in shaping and strengthening relationships between individuals and groups. Communication is not only understood as a simple process of transferring information from one party to another, but also as a series of

complex social actions, in which language serves as the main means. Every interaction through language not only serves to convey messages, but also to create, maintain, and even change the dynamics of existing social relations.

However, in its application, communication often faces various problems and challenges. The message conveyed by the speaker is not always received or understood in accordance with the intended meaning. Various factors, such as differences in cultural backgrounds, personal experiences, and social contexts, contribute to the possibility of misunderstandings, communication tensions, and even potential conflicts between individuals. This phenomenon highlights the importance of a deep understanding of language use in social contexts, so that communication can take place effectively and does not lead to misunderstandings that are detrimental to relationships between individuals or groups.

Based on the explanation, one of the most relevant concepts for analyzing how language functions in social communication is the speech act. Speech acts can be categorised into three types according to their purpose, namely locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. This concept emphasises that speaking is not only limited to conveying words, but also includes social actions carried out through the utterance. In other words, every utterance produced not only has semantic meaning (locution), but also aims to do something (illocution) and can affect the listener or recipient of the message (perlocution). Speech acts cover a wide range of activities such as requesting, commanding, suggesting, promising, or expressing feelings as part of the research on pragmatics, speech act theory allows us to explore the meaning contained in each utterance by paying attention to the speaker's intention and the context surrounding it. One form of communication that uses many speech acts is film.

Speech acts in films to understand characters' responses to social pressure. Through utterance analysis, various forms of speech acts that appear in the social context can be identified and how they reflect emotions and tensions in the interactions between characters. As a basis for such analysis, an approach is needed that is able to examine the relationship between utterance,

meaning, and context as a whole. Pragmatics studies how meaning is formed in communication that is influenced by social, cultural, and situational factors. According to Yule (1996:3) Pragmatics is a field of study that examines how meaning is conveyed in communication, focusing on how speakers and writers express meaning and how listeners and readers interpret it within a specific context.

Through a pragmatic approach, researcher can gain a deeper understanding of how film characters express anxiety through speech acts within conversational contexts. One notable film for analysis is Eighth Grade film, which prominently highlights anxiety-laden utterance in social interactions. Eighth Grade film is a comedy drama film directed by Bo Burnham, with Elsie Fisher starring as the main character, Kayla Day. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on January 19th, 2018, and was later given a limited release in the United States on July 13th, 2018, before its wider release on August 3rd, 2018.

Day is a teenager who faces significant challenges due to social anxiety as she approaches the end of her eighth-grade year. In coping with the pressures and anxiety she experiences, Day expresses her thoughts and feelings through videos uploaded to her personal YouTube channel. Her videos contain self-reflection, motivation to boost self-confidence, tips on making friends, and experiences in the process of maturing. While Day is able to speak openly and confidently in her videos, the reality in the real world is much different. Day finds it difficult to apply the advice she gives herself when interacting directly with her friends or her social environment. A pivotal moment occurs when she receives genuine emotional support from her father during a heartfelt conversation, which becomes a catalyst for her path toward self-acceptance and emotional maturity. The film concludes on a hopeful note as Day records a final, more sincere video, symbolizing the beginning of her journey toward personal growth and authentic self-acceptance. This film is a relevant example to analyse how anxiety manifests in the everyday speech used by the main character.

This research purposes to analyse speech acts related to anxiety in the utterances of the main character, Day, in the Eighth Grade film. In

this research, a pragmatic approach is used to identify the forms of speech acts that portray Day's anxiety in interactions, as well as how the utterances reflect the feelings and internal conflicts experienced. This research is important because anxiety is a common feeling that many people experience, especially in adolescent girls who are trying

to find their social identity. According to Deardorff et al., (2007) it was expected that puberty and gender would influence social anxiety together, where girls going through more advanced stages of puberty would show higher levels of social anxiety, unlike boys. In particular, female adolescents with more rapid pubertal development tended to experience higher social anxiety, whereas this was not the case for male adolescents. These findings confirm that the experience of social anxiety in adolescence is influenced by both biological and social factors.

The main focus of this research is to examine the use of speech acts related to the

expression of anxiety in the utterance of the main character in the Eighth Grade film. This focus is chosen since the main character's utterances provide the most relevant and detailed data on anxiety, making it possible to analyze how anxiety is conveyed through language. Furthermore, the consistent and explicit expressions of anxiety from the main character provide more substantial data for analysis compared to other characters. This research aims to identify various forms of speech acts that represent anxiety, as well as to analyse the social and emotional background behind the use of these expressions. More specifically, this research seeks to understand how anxiety is communicated through verbal language, as well as how these representations reflect the emotional tensions that adolescents experience in the face of social pressures in the transition period of their lives.

## II RESEARCH METHODS

### 2.1 Method of Collecting the Data

In collecting data, the observation method was used. Dörnyei (2007:185) explain observation is a data collection method that enables researcher nto obtain objective, direct, and contextual information about behaviors or events. Its strengths lie in the accuracy, consistency, and ease of analysis it offers, particularly when conducted using a structured approach. The researcher observed the Eighth Grade film as the primary data source, focusing on the

utterance of the main character, Day, which represent speech acts containing elements of anxiety. The researcher objectively recorded every utterance and expression observed in the film, and noted the time when the utterance occurred. All this information was then documented in the form of field notes. The observation was conducted by watching the film repeatedly. In the context of verbal communication, anxiety can be expressed

through word choice, language style, and sentence structure.

### 2.2 Method of Analyzing the Data

In data analysis, the initial step involves organizing and preparing the raw data to make it ready for systematic examination. According to Dörnyei (2007:246), the first step in data analysis is transforming raw data into a text format. In this research, the data consists of utterances from the Eighth Grade film that reflect anxiety, using the theories of Searle (1979) and Yule (1996). The analysis involves identifying utterances that refer to anxiety and the social context within the film, based on Yule's (1996) pragmatics theory. Utterances that express worry or uncertainty will be categorized as speech acts reflecting anxiety. The classified data is then interpreted to understand how anxiety is expressed in the film and how this shapes the characters and interactions within the story.

### 2.3 Technique of Collecting the Data

The documentary technique serves as the main data collection in this research. The data

collected can be in the form of textual data, derived from various sources such as audio recordings, video recordings, field notes, and other similar media Mack et al., (2005:3). To achieve this research, the researcher follows several systematic steps. Field notes are a systematic note-taking technique that involves summarizing data observed directly. In this research, field notes were utilized while watching the Eighth Grade film, particularly when utterances indicating anxiety were expressed by the main character. These utterances were then classified into five types of speech acts representative, commissive, directive, declaration, and expressive based on the theories of Yule (1996) and Searle (1979). The researcher conducted careful observation and detailed note-taking of each speech act performed by the main character, especially those related to expressions of anxiety. The purpose of this observation was to identify the situational context and the underlying meaning of the utterances, which reflect the character's psychological condition, thereby generating data that are richer, more in-depth, and highly relevant to the research focus.

#### **2.4 Technique of Analyzing the Data**

The data in the form of utterance transcripts reflecting the anxiety experienced by the main character in the Eighth Grade film, is analyzed using Speech act theory by Yule (1996) and Searle (1979) through a coding technique based on categories such as

representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declaration. According to Dörnyei (2007:151) state that coding is a stage in classifying and marking qualitative data with the aim of finding themes and patterns that are in accordance with the research focus. This makes it easier to manage complex data by dividing it into smaller parts for analysis. The codes used in the analysis do not have to be abbreviations or symbols; they can be words or phrases that reflect the themes or concepts found in the data. The purpose of the coding process is to identify and classify speech acts related to the expression of anxiety conveyed by the main character. Once the coding is completed, utterances indicating signs of anxiety are grouped according to speech act categories to facilitate classification and interpretation. This research limits the data to the types of speech acts performed by the main character that represent anxiety in the Eighth Grade film. To analyze the data, several steps were undertaken by the researcher. First, the utterances were described in terms of their meanings related to anxiety, based on the types of speech acts. Second, the percentage of each type of speech act was calculated to identify the most dominant type used by Day in the film. Third, the researcher analyzed the types of speech act used in Burnham's Eighth Grade film.

### **III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Analysis Speech Act of Anxiety in film**

##### **3.1.1 Locutionary Act**

Locutionary act is the act of speaking itself, which is saying words or sentences that have a certain meaning. Speech not only conveys information but is also a form of communication that can be understood by the listener.

##### **Data 1**

Day: I just choose not to talk a lot at school. Like other people, you know? ( Eighth Grade film, 2018, 00:02:00)

The utterance is produced by Day while recording a vlog for her YouTube channel in her bedroom. In this context, Day addresses the camera as a medium of self-expression, enabling

her to articulate her feelings about being reserved at school in a manner that is more controlled and less confrontational than direct interpersonal interactions.

##### **3.1.2 Illocutionary act**

An illocutionary act is what a speaker does when they say something, like making a statement, promise, command, question, or offer. In Expression and Meaning (1979), John Searle, along with George Yule in Pragmatics (1996), classifies speech acts into five main types: representatives, commissives, directives, declarations, and expressives.

### 3.1.2.1 Representatives

Ilocutionary Representatives are speech acts in which the speaker commits to the truth of the expressed proposition, representing a state of affairs according to their belief.

#### Data 1

Day : Um okay. But it's like, being yourself is, like, not changing yourself to impress someone else. (Eighth Grade film ,2018, 00:00:45)

This utterance, "Um, okay. But it's like, being yourself is, like, not changing yourself to impress someone else," Day performs a Representative, in which she expresses a belief or assertion about the concept of authenticity. Through this utterance, she is stating what she believes to be true—that being oneself involves resisting the pressure to change in order to gain approval from others.

### 3.1.2.2 Commissives

Commissives are speech acts in which the speaker commits to a future course of action. In other words, the speaker expresses an intention, promise, or plan, taking responsibility for performing or attempting to perform the stated action.

#### Data 1

Day : Um, yeah. Yeah, I'll try you know.. I mean, I'd like to. I just don't know if I can. ( Eighth Grade film,2018, 00:12:08)

This utterance to response Kennedy's mom's invitation, Day says, "Um, yeah. Yeah, I'll try you know.. I mean, I'd like to. I just don't know if I can." This utterance is a Commissive where Day expresses her intention to try attending the party but simultaneously reveals her uncertainty and self-doubt. The use of fillers like "um," "you know," and pauses indicate anxiety and lack of confidence.

### 3.1.2.3 Directives

Directives are speech acts in which the speaker tries to get the listener to do something. In other words, the speaker's goal is to influence or guide the actions, behavior, or response of the listener.

#### Data 1

Day : Um, but you just got to ignore them and, like, not care what they're saying. ( Eighth Grade film,2018, 00:01:27)

In the utterance, "Um, but you just got to ignore them and, like, not care what they're saying," Day performs a Directive by giving advice to the listener on how to deal with negative opinions and social judgment. The use of fillers such as "um" and "like" shows that she still feels hesitant and anxious. This utterance is spoken while Day is recording a vlog in her bedroom, a place where she feels comfortable enough to share her experiences and how she copes with anxiety.

### 3.1.2.4 Declarative

Declaratives are speech acts in which the speaker brings about a change in the external world simply by making the utterance.

#### Data 1

Day : So the topic of today's video is "Being Yourself." (Eighth Grade film ,2018, 00:00:31)

This utterance performs a Declarative by announcing the subject of the video. The speaker sets the context and informs the audience about the focus of the forthcoming discussion. This type of act functions to organize discourse and guide listeners' expectations, reflecting the speaker's intention to communicate clearly and engage the audience.

### 3.1.2.5 Expressives

Expressives are speech acts in which the speaker expresses their psychological state, emotions, or feelings toward a particular situation or event. The focus is on communicating internal emotions such as happiness, sadness, regret, gratitude, or anxiety, rather than asserting facts or directing actions.

#### Data 1

Day : ....HEY! Sorry about that, uh, I have, like, really, really bad reception at my house. (Eighth Grade film ,2018, 00:52:12)

In the utterance Day performs an Expressive by apologizing for the communication disruption during a phone call with her friend. The use of the word "sorry" explicitly conveys Day feeling of regret due to poor phone reception at her house, which causes the interaction to be interrupted or disturbed. This utterance reflects Day social attentiveness and responsibility in maintaining smooth communication, despite her anxiety in handling the situation.

### 3.1.3 Perlocutionary Act

Perlocutionary acts are an important part of speech acts because they deal with how an utterance can affect the listener or the action they take after hearing something. The listener's reaction depends on how they understand the utterance, and this can be influenced by their point of view or feelings.

#### Data 1

Day : ARE YOU KIDDING ME RIGHT NOW? (Eighth Grade film ,2018, 00:05:30)

In the utterance "ARE YOU KIDDING ME RIGHT NOW?", Day performs an expressive illocutionary act that conveys an outburst of anger and frustration. This statement occurs inside the car while Day is talking with her father, Mark. At that moment, her father is trying

to calm her down or speak kindly, but Day, who is experiencing high social anxiety and emotional instability, responds with anger.

### 3.2 Illocutionary Act dominantly

The distribution of illocutionary acts shows that Expressive acts are the most frequent, appearing 23 times (41.06%) out of 56 total utterances, followed by Representatives 17 (30.36%), Directives 10 (17.86%), Commissives 5 (8.93%), and Declaratives 1 (1.79%). Expressive acts dominate because Day frequently communicates her emotions, thoughts, and personal experiences, particularly her social anxiety, nervousness, and moments of gratitude, which are central to her character.

## IV CONCLUSION

After analyzing the Burnham's Eighth Grade film, the researcher identified various utterances that reflect the anxiety experienced by the main character, Kayla Day. The data were collected through direct observation by watching the film carefully and noting the character's dialogues, which were then analyzed using a pragmatic approach to determine the illocutionary acts present in her speech. This analysis was based on the speech act theories proposed by Searle (1979) and Yule (1996),

which classify illocutionary acts into five categories: representative, commissive, directive, declarative, and expressive. Based on the findings, out of a total of 56 utterances related to anxiety, 17 utterances were categorized as representative acts (30.36%), 5 as commissive acts (8.93%), 10 as directive acts (17.86%), 1 as a declarative act (1.79%), and 23 as expressive acts (41.06%). Thus, the most dominant type of illocutionary act used by Day in expressing her anxiety is the expressive act.

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