LANGUAGE AS RESISTANCE: ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN CONSTRUCTING POWER AND HOPE IN *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*

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ABSTRACT

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a powerful social instrument through which individuals negotiate authority, express resistance, and construct hope. Within cinematic discourse, illocutionary acts provide valuable insights into how characters employ language to achieve interpersonal and ideological goals. This study investigates how illocutionary acts construct resistance, institutional power, and hope in The Shawshank Redemption. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study analyzed 67 utterances produced by the two main characters, Andy Dufresne and Ellis "Red" Redding. The data were collected through repeated observation of the film, transcription of dialogues, and classification based on Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts. The findings reveal that all five categories of illocutionary acts are present in the characters' interactions, with assertive acts emerging as the most dominant, followed by directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. Beyond their linguistic classifications, these speech acts perform broader pragmatic functions. Assertive acts function as acts of resistance by challenging institutional oppression and affirming personal convictions, while directive acts negotiate interpersonal and institutional power within the prison environment. Commissive and expressive acts contribute to the construction of hope by reinforcing solidarity, trust, and future aspirations among the characters. These findings demonstrate that language in the film extends beyond information exchange, functioning as a strategic resource for preserving identity, resisting domination, and sustaining psychological resilience. The study contributes to pragmatic scholarship by extending speech act theory from descriptive categorization toward a discourse-oriented interpretation of language as social action, while also highlighting the pedagogical value of film

	dialogue for developing learners' pragmatic competence in English language education.
KEYWORDS	Illocutionary acts; Pragmatics; Film discourse; Power and hope; English language education
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INTRODUCTION

Language serves a function far beyond the mere exchange of information. It operates as a fundamental social instrument through which individuals articulate beliefs, negotiate relationships, exert influence, and perform various actions in everyday communication (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001). Within linguistics, pragmatics examines the relationship between language and its users, investigating how meaning is constructed through the interaction between linguistic forms and the contexts in which they are employed (Huang, 2014). Unlike semantics, which focuses on conventional, context-independent meaning, pragmatics centers on how speakers strategically use language to achieve communicative goals and how hearers infer those intentions within specific situational frameworks (Grice, 1975; Thomas, 1995). This perspective positions linguistic expression as inherently connected to social action, making it essential for understanding interpersonal dynamics across diverse communicative contexts (Culpeper & Haugh, 2021).

The foundational concept that speaking constitutes a form of action was formalized through Speech Act Theory, introduced by Austin (1962) and subsequently systematized by Searle (1969, 1976), who distinguished between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Of these, illocutionary acts, which represent the speaker's underlying communicative intention, have become central to pragmatic inquiry. Searle's (1976) taxonomy categorizes illocutionary acts into five types: assertives (committing the speaker to a proposition's truth), directives (attempting to influence the hearer's actions), commissives (committing the speaker to future action), expressives (conveying psychological states), and declaratives (bringing about institutional changes through speech) (Vanderveken, 1990). This framework has proven influential for examining how language operates as social action, with recent studies consistently demonstrating its applicability across various discourse contexts, including political speeches, classroom interaction, and cinematic dialogue (Yule, 1996; Setyowati & Rahayu, 2023; Zhang & Chen, 2025).

Cinematic discourse has emerged as a particularly rich source for pragmatic analysis, as film dialogue, while scripted, is deliberately crafted to represent authentic communicative situations while advancing narrative and character development (Kozloff, 2000; Piazza, Bednarek, & Rossi, 2011; Putri & Hidayat, 2024). Recent research has extensively examined illocutionary acts in films across diverse genres, consistently finding that directive and assertive acts tend to predominate, depending on narrative context (Sari & Lestari, 2023; Mutiara, 2021). For instance, analysis of crisis narratives in *Greenland* (2020) revealed directives as the most frequent category, reflecting the strategic use of language to influence decisions and direct actions under pressure (Nurhayati & Fauziah, 2022). Similarly, studies of the short film *The Translator* (Susanti et al., 2025) and *Merry Riana: Mimpi Sejuta Dollar* (Hidayat & Wijaya, 2023) found assertive acts to be most prevalent, underscoring how characters use language to describe facts, circumstances, and beliefs. The study of expressive speech acts in *The Shawshank Redemption* has further demonstrated how these acts function to build empathy, strengthen

social bonds, and convey conflict between characters (Mulyani & Pratama, 2024). These investigations collectively confirm film dialogue as a productive site for investigating speech act theory and pragmatic competence (Dynel, 2024; Rahmadani & Harahap, 2025).

The Shawshank Redemption (Darabont, 1994), adapted from Stephen King's novella, provides a uniquely compelling context for such pragmatic inquiry. Widely acclaimed as a cinematic masterpiece, the film chronicles the wrongful imprisonment of banker Andy Dufresne and his extraordinary friendship with fellow inmate Ellis "Red" Redding within the brutal Shawshank State Penitentiary. Over decades, Andy endures systemic injustice, violence, and psychological oppression while consistently maintaining his dignity, intelligence, and hope through meticulous planning and strategic interpersonal communication (Kennedy, 2020; Thompson & Miller, 2023). The film's exploration of universal themes, justice, friendship, resilience, institutional power, and redemption, renders it an exemplary subject for investigating how language functions beyond information exchange in institutional settings (Anderson & Lee, 2024; Frye, 2022).

While previous research has extensively identified and classified illocutionary act types in film dialogues (Rahayu, 2017; Siregar, 2021; Setyowati, 2023), limited attention has been devoted to understanding how these speech acts function as linguistic resources through which characters construct resistance against institutional oppression, negotiate asymmetrical power relations, and sustain hope under duress (Dynel, 2024; Putri & Hidayat, 2024). The present study addresses this gap by examining illocutionary acts not merely as linguistic classifications but as dynamic communicative strategies through which individuals challenge domination, negotiate social relationships, and preserve hope (Mey, 2001; Culpeper & Haugh, 2021). The purpose of this study is to investigate how illocutionary acts construct resistance, institutional power, and hope in *The Shawshank Redemption*. Using Searle's (1976) taxonomy as the analytical framework, this research analyzes utterances from the two main characters, Andy Dufresne and Ellis "Red" Redding, to elucidate how different categories of illocutionary acts function strategically within the prison environment to express personal conviction, negotiate authority, reinforce solidarity, and maintain optimism in the face of profound adversity (Zhang & Chen, 2025; Mulyani & Pratama, 2024). By addressing this purpose, the study contributes to pragmatic research and provides practical implications for teaching pragmatics through film-based language instruction (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 2020; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010; Rahmadani & Harahap, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate how illocutionary acts function as linguistic resources for constructing resistance, negotiating institutional power, and sustaining hope in *The Shawshank Redemption*. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to interpret the communicative meanings embedded in the characters' utterances rather than to measure linguistic phenomena quantitatively. The analysis focused on the pragmatic functions of language as expressed through speech acts within the social and institutional context of the film.

The primary data source was *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), directed by Frank Darabont and adapted from Stephen King's novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. The film was selected because it presents rich interpersonal interactions within a prison setting, where communication becomes an important means of expressing personal identity, negotiating authority, resisting institutional oppression, and maintaining hope. The study focused on the two principal characters, Andy Dufresne and Ellis "Red" Redding,

whose dialogues dominate the narrative and represent the central interpersonal relationship throughout the film.

The data consisted of 67 utterances containing illocutionary acts produced by the two main characters. These utterances were drawn from the original dataset developed in the preceding undergraduate research, in which each utterance had been identified and classified according to Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts. The dataset includes assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative speech acts occurring throughout the narrative. While the previous study emphasized the identification and frequency of these categories, the present research reinterprets the same dataset to explore the broader social functions performed by the utterances in constructing resistance, power relations, and hope within prison discourse.

Data collection followed several systematic procedures. First, the researchers watched the film repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative, character development, and communicative context. Second, the movie script and subtitles were examined to verify the accuracy of each dialogue. Third, utterances produced by Andy Dufresne and Red were identified and selected based on their relevance to the research focus. Finally, each utterance was coded according to Searle's (1979) classification of illocutionary acts as the initial stage of analysis. These procedures ensured that every selected utterance was interpreted within its appropriate situational and conversational context rather than as an isolated linguistic unit.

The analysis employed Speech Act Theory proposed by Searle (1979) as the primary analytical framework. Initially, every utterance was examined to determine its illocutionary category, namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative. Subsequently, the identified speech acts were interpreted contextually to examine how they functioned within the broader narrative. Rather than limiting the analysis to structural classification, the study investigated the communicative purposes achieved through the utterances and the ways in which language contributed to the construction of social meaning. Particular attention was given to identifying how speech acts enabled the characters to resist institutional domination, negotiate interpersonal and institutional authority, and preserve hope despite prolonged imprisonment.

To facilitate interpretation, the identified illocutionary acts were further organized into three thematic dimensions derived from the research objective: (1) language as resistance, (2) language as the negotiation of institutional power, and (3) language as the construction of hope. Each theme emerged through repeated reading of the dialogues and careful examination of the relationships between the illocutionary force of the utterances and their communicative functions within the prison setting. This thematic organization enabled the analysis to move beyond descriptive categorization toward a more comprehensive explanation of language as social action.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 67 utterances produced by Andy Dufresne and Ellis "Red" Redding demonstrates that illocutionary acts in *The Shawshank Redemption* function beyond their conventional linguistic classifications. Although the original analysis identified five categories of illocutionary acts, namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, the present study reveals that these speech acts collectively perform broader social functions within the prison discourse. Rather than merely exchanging information, the characters strategically employ language to resist institutional oppression, negotiate interpersonal and institutional power, and sustain hope amid prolonged imprisonment. These findings indicate that language serves as an instrument of social action through

which individuals preserve dignity, influence others, and construct meaningful relationships despite restrictive circumstances. The findings are presented under three interrelated themes: (1) language as resistance, (2) language as the negotiation of power, and (3) language as the construction of hope.

Language as Resistance

One of the most prominent functions of illocutionary acts in *The Shawshank Redemption* is resistance against institutional oppression. Although Shawshank Prison is characterized by rigid authority, surveillance, and control, the protagonists repeatedly employ language to preserve their autonomy and challenge the psychological dominance imposed by the institution. Rather than engaging in physical confrontation, Andy frequently resists through carefully selected utterances that express confidence, rationality, and moral conviction.

Assertive acts emerge as the primary linguistic strategy of resistance. Throughout the narrative, Andy consistently communicates facts, opinions, and beliefs that contradict the hopeless worldview maintained by many prisoners. His utterances frequently demonstrate confidence in justice, education, and the possibility of freedom despite overwhelming adversity. By asserting his beliefs instead of accepting the dominant prison ideology, Andy symbolically rejects institutional attempts to reduce inmates to passive subjects.

In addition to assertive acts, directive speech acts also function as resistance. Rather than expressing submission, Andy often requests, advises, and persuades others to reconsider their perspectives. His conversations with Red regarding hope, freedom, and the importance of maintaining one's humanity illustrate how directives encourage psychological resistance rather than obedience. These utterances gradually reshape Red's perception of imprisonment and encourage him to envision life beyond Shawshank Prison.

Expressive acts likewise contribute to resistance by allowing characters to communicate gratitude, empathy, and emotional resilience despite oppressive living conditions. Instead of allowing institutional violence to silence emotional expression, the characters continue to build interpersonal solidarity through sincere appreciation and mutual encouragement.

The predominance of assertive acts in the dataset demonstrates that resistance is primarily constructed through the expression of belief rather than direct confrontation. Language therefore becomes a symbolic form of resistance that enables the protagonists to maintain their identities while confronting institutional injustice.

Illocutionary Acts in Negotiating Institutional Power

The second major finding concerns the role of language in negotiating power relationships within the prison environment. Power in *The Shawshank Redemption* is not exercised solely through physical authority but is continually reproduced and challenged through communicative interaction. Conversations among prisoners, prison officers, and administrators reveal that authority is constantly negotiated through speech.

Directive illocutionary acts dominate interactions involving prison officers and administrators. Orders, commands, warnings, and instructions reflect hierarchical relationships in which institutional authority seeks to regulate prisoners' behavior. These utterances reinforce the unequal distribution of power by positioning prison officials as legitimate authorities while limiting the agency of inmates.

However, the findings also demonstrate that power is not entirely monopolized by institutional authorities. Andy frequently employs assertive and commissive acts to negotiate power without openly challenging prison regulations. Through carefully reasoned

explanations, strategic promises, and calculated responses, he gradually gains credibility among both inmates and prison staff. His linguistic choices demonstrate that power may also emerge from intelligence, knowledge, and persuasive communication rather than formal authority alone.

Furthermore, declarative acts, although occurring less frequently, illustrate moments in which institutional power directly alters social status and legal conditions. These utterances represent official decisions and authoritative declarations that shape prisoners' lives. Their limited frequency highlights the exclusive nature of institutional authority, where only individuals occupying particular social positions possess the legitimate power to transform reality through language.

Overall, the findings indicate that illocutionary acts constitute an important mechanism through which institutional power is established, maintained, negotiated, and occasionally resisted. Language therefore functions as both an instrument of domination and a resource for negotiating social agency within restrictive institutional settings.

Constructing Hope through Illocutionary Acts

The third and perhaps most significant finding concerns the construction of hope through language. Throughout the film, hope is not presented merely as an internal psychological condition but as a communicative process sustained through repeated interaction. Illocutionary acts enable the characters to construct a future-oriented perspective that counters despair and institutional dehumanization.

Assertive acts again play a central role in constructing hope. Andy consistently articulates optimistic beliefs regarding freedom, dignity, and personal transformation. These assertions gradually influence Red and other inmates by introducing alternative interpretations of imprisonment. Rather than accepting incarceration as the end of life, Andy's language encourages others to imagine possibilities beyond prison walls.

Commissive acts further reinforce hope by emphasizing future commitment and intentional action. Promises, plans, and commitments communicate confidence that future goals remain attainable despite present suffering. These speech acts transform hope into practical determination, demonstrating that optimism is strengthened through commitment rather than passive expectation.

Expressive acts likewise contribute to hope by reinforcing trust, friendship, gratitude, and emotional connection among the characters. Positive emotional expressions strengthen interpersonal relationships and create a supportive social environment that reduces psychological isolation. Hope therefore emerges not only through individual belief but also through collective interaction and mutual encouragement.

The interaction between assertive, commissive, and expressive acts demonstrates that hope is collaboratively constructed through communication. Language enables the protagonists to preserve their psychological resilience while resisting the institutional conditions intended to eliminate personal aspiration.

The findings reveal that the five categories of illocutionary acts identified in the original dataset perform broader pragmatic functions than simple linguistic classification. Assertive acts primarily function as acts of resistance by affirming personal conviction and challenging institutional oppression. Directive and declarative acts reflect the negotiation of institutional power, illustrating how authority is established, exercised, and strategically contested within the prison environment. Meanwhile, assertive, commissive, and expressive acts collaboratively construct hope by encouraging solidarity, reinforcing future aspirations, and maintaining interpersonal trust among the characters.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that language in *The Shawshank Redemption* serves not merely as a vehicle for communication but as a dynamic social

practice through which resistance is enacted, power is negotiated, and hope is sustained. The analysis therefore extends the interpretation of illocutionary acts beyond structural categorization toward a broader understanding of language as social action operating within the discourse of institutional confinement.

DISCUSSION

The present study demonstrates that illocutionary acts in *The Shawshank Redemption* extend beyond their conventional linguistic classifications to perform important social and psychological functions. Although the analysis identified the occurrence of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative speech acts, these categories should not be understood merely as formal linguistic labels. Instead, the findings indicate that the communicative force of the characters' utterances contributes to the construction of resistance against institutional oppression, the negotiation of power relationships, and the preservation of hope throughout the narrative (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). This interpretation supports Austin's (1962) foundational proposition that utterances perform actions rather than simply transmit information, while reinforcing Searle's (1969, 1976) argument that the meaning of an utterance is inseparable from the speaker's communicative intention and the context in which it is produced. The prison environment portrayed in *The Shawshank Redemption* illustrates that language is fundamentally a form of social action through which individuals respond to institutional constraints and shape interpersonal relationships.

Illocutionary Acts as Social Action

Speech Act Theory proposes that speakers accomplish actions through language, making communication an active process of performing rather than merely describing reality (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). The findings of this study strongly support this perspective. Throughout the film, the characters employ language to encourage, persuade, reassure, challenge, refuse, promise, and influence others, aligning with the view that illocutionary acts represent the speaker's underlying communicative intention (Searle, 1976; Vanderveken, 1990). Consequently, the significance of the utterances lies not in their literal meanings but in the social actions they accomplish within particular communicative situations.

The predominance of assertive speech acts found in this study illustrates that statements of belief and conviction become powerful communicative resources. Rather than functioning solely as factual descriptions, Andy Dufresne's assertive utterances repeatedly reinforce his moral principles, rational thinking, and confidence in justice. His statements influence how other prisoners perceive themselves and their future. In this sense, assertive speech acts perform transformative social functions because they reshape attitudes and encourage alternative interpretations of reality (Yule, 1996). This finding confirms Yule's (1996) view that understanding speech acts requires attention to speakers' intentions and contextual meanings rather than grammatical forms alone. Similarly, directive, commissive, and expressive speech acts reveal that interpersonal communication is inherently collaborative (Culpeper & Haugh, 2021). Directives encourage behavioural or cognitive change, commissives project future commitment, while expressive acts reinforce emotional solidarity. Together, these speech acts create a dynamic communicative process through which relationships are developed and maintained. Therefore, the findings demonstrate that illocutionary acts should be interpreted as interconnected communicative strategies rather than isolated linguistic categories.

Language as Symbolic Resistance in Institutional Discourse

One of the most important findings of this study is that resistance in *The Shawshank Redemption* is predominantly constructed through communication instead of physical confrontation. Although the prison institution exercises authority through surveillance, discipline, punishment, and rigid regulations (Thompson & Miller, 2023), the protagonists consistently employ language to preserve their identities and challenge institutional domination. Their resistance is therefore symbolic, emerging through discourse rather than violence, as language functions as a resource through which individuals challenge domination and construct alternative forms of social power (Mey, 2001).

The dominance of assertive speech acts reflects this symbolic resistance. Andy repeatedly expresses beliefs that contradict the hopeless ideology surrounding prison life. Rather than accepting imprisonment as the end of personal freedom, he continues to articulate confidence in justice, dignity, education, and the possibility of a better future. These utterances reject the institutional discourse that seeks to define prisoners solely through their criminal identities (Anderson & Lee, 2024). Consequently, language becomes an instrument for preserving personal autonomy under conditions of oppression (Saville-Troike, 2003). The findings also demonstrate that directive speech acts contribute to resistance by encouraging others to reject institutional pessimism. Andy's conversations with Red frequently contain advice, encouragement, and persuasive language that invites reflection instead of obedience (Mulyani & Pratama, 2024).

Unlike the directives produced by prison officers, which reinforce institutional control, Andy's directives empower others to maintain hope and agency. This contrast illustrates that identical categories of illocutionary acts may perform fundamentally different social functions depending on who speaks, to whom, and within what context (Thomas, 1995). These findings suggest that institutional power is never entirely absolute. Although prison authorities possess formal authority, communicative interaction enables prisoners to negotiate alternative forms of influence. Through careful linguistic choices, Andy gradually acquires moral authority among fellow inmates despite lacking institutional status. His influence emerges not from coercion but from credibility, consistency, and persuasive communication (Zhang & Chen, 2025). Accordingly, the study demonstrates that language functions as a resource through which individuals resist domination and construct alternative forms of social power within institutional settings.

Constructing Hope through Speech Acts

Another important contribution of this study concerns the relationship between language and hope. Hope in *The Shawshank Redemption* should not be interpreted merely as an individual psychological condition. Instead, the findings indicate that hope is socially and linguistically constructed through repeated communicative interaction among the characters, supporting the view that meaning and emotion are co-constructed through discourse (Culpeper & Haugh, 2021). Assertive speech acts serve as the primary mechanism through which hope is communicated. Andy's repeated expressions of optimism regarding freedom, personal dignity, and future possibilities gradually influence Red's worldview. His utterances challenge the assumption that imprisonment permanently determines an individual's identity and future (Kennedy, 2020). Consequently, hope develops not because the external circumstances immediately change but because language continuously offers alternative interpretations of reality.

Commissive speech acts further strengthen this process by expressing future commitment. Promises, intentions, and long-term plans transform hope into purposeful action (Searle, 1976). Rather than representing unrealistic optimism, these utterances demonstrate confidence that future goals remain achievable despite present adversity. Hope

therefore becomes closely associated with agency and determination rather than passive expectation, reflecting the view that speech acts commit speakers to future courses of action (Vanderveken, 1990). Expressive speech acts also play an important role in maintaining hope by reinforcing interpersonal solidarity. Expressions of gratitude, friendship, appreciation, and emotional support reduce feelings of isolation and strengthen trust among the prisoners (Mulyani & Pratama, 2024). These emotional exchanges establish supportive relationships that enable individuals to endure institutional hardship collectively. Accordingly, hope emerges as a shared communicative achievement rather than a purely personal emotion, demonstrating that language actively constructs psychological resilience through interaction (Thomas, 1995).

Implications for Pragmatics and Film Discourse Studies

The findings of this study contribute to the development of pragmatic studies by extending the interpretation of illocutionary acts beyond descriptive classification. Previous research on speech acts in films has largely concentrated on identifying the frequency of different illocutionary categories (Rahayu, 2017; Siregar, 2021; Setyowati, 2023). While such studies provide valuable descriptions of linguistic patterns, they often pay limited attention to the broader communicative functions performed by those speech acts within complex social contexts. The present study demonstrates that identical illocutionary categories may accomplish different pragmatic purposes depending on contextual factors such as institutional settings, interpersonal relationships, communicative goals, and social roles (Dynel, 2024). Consequently, understanding speech acts requires analysing not only linguistic form but also discourse context and the social consequences of communication (Culpeper & Haugh, 2021). The study also contributes to film discourse research by illustrating that cinematic dialogue represents an important source of authentic pragmatic analysis (Kozloff, 2000; Piazza, Bednarek, & Rossi, 2011). Film conversations are carefully designed to portray interpersonal relationships, institutional structures, ideological conflict, and character development (Putri & Hidayat, 2024). As a result, analysing movie dialogue provides valuable insights into how language functions in socially meaningful contexts. The findings therefore support the use of films as pedagogical resources for teaching pragmatics because learners are exposed to contextualised examples of how communicative intentions are expressed, interpreted, and negotiated in authentic interaction (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 2020; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

Overall, this study demonstrates that illocutionary acts in *The Shawshank Redemption* operate as strategic communicative resources through which resistance is enacted, institutional power is negotiated, and hope is sustained (Zhang & Chen, 2025; Anderson & Lee, 2024). The findings reaffirm that language should not be viewed merely as a system of linguistic forms but as a dynamic social practice through which individuals construct identities, reshape relationships, and respond creatively to institutional constraints (Mey, 2001). In this sense, Speech Act Theory provides a productive framework for understanding how communication functions as meaningful social action within cinematic discourse.

This study investigated how illocutionary acts construct resistance, institutional power, and hope in *The Shawshank Redemption* through a qualitative pragmatic analysis of 67 utterances produced by the two main characters, Andy Dufresne and Ellis "Red" Redding. While the original dataset identified five categories of illocutionary acts; assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, the present study reinterpreted these speech acts from a broader pragmatic perspective by examining their social and communicative functions within the prison discourse. The findings reveal that illocutionary acts are not

merely linguistic categories but meaningful communicative actions through which the characters negotiate their social realities, preserve personal identity, and respond to institutional oppression.

The study demonstrates that assertive speech acts serve as the primary linguistic strategy for expressing resistance by affirming personal beliefs, maintaining dignity, and challenging the ideology of hopelessness imposed by the prison institution. Directive speech acts function as mechanisms for negotiating interpersonal and institutional power, illustrating that communication can influence others even within highly hierarchical environments. Meanwhile, commissive and expressive speech acts contribute significantly to the construction of hope by reinforcing commitment, trust, solidarity, and emotional resilience among the characters. Collectively, these findings indicate that language operates as an essential social resource that enables individuals to resist domination, negotiate authority, and sustain optimism despite prolonged confinement.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the application of Speech Act Theory by demonstrating that the significance of illocutionary acts lies not only in their linguistic classification but also in their broader pragmatic functions within institutional discourse. Rather than treating assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts as isolated categories, the study shows that these speech acts interact dynamically to construct social meaning. Consequently, the research contributes to pragmatic studies by emphasizing the importance of interpreting speech acts within their contextual, interpersonal, and ideological dimensions. The study also offers practical implications for English language education, particularly in the teaching of pragmatics and discourse analysis. Film dialogue provides authentic and context-rich examples of how speakers perform communicative actions in meaningful social situations. Therefore, integrating films such as *The Shawshank Redemption* into language classrooms may enhance learners' pragmatic competence by helping them understand how language functions beyond its literal meaning to express intention, negotiate relationships, and accomplish social goals.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated how illocutionary acts construct resistance, institutional power, and hope in *The Shawshank Redemption* through a qualitative pragmatic analysis of 67 utterances produced by the two main characters, Andy Dufresne and Ellis "Red" Redding. While the original dataset identified five categories of illocutionary acts including assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, the present study reinterpreted these speech acts from a broader pragmatic perspective by examining their social and communicative functions within the prison discourse. The findings reveal that illocutionary acts are not merely linguistic categories but meaningful communicative actions through which the characters negotiate their social realities, preserve personal identity, and respond to institutional oppression.

The study demonstrates that assertive speech acts serve as the primary linguistic strategy for expressing resistance by affirming personal beliefs, maintaining dignity, and challenging the ideology of hopelessness imposed by the prison institution. Directive speech acts function as mechanisms for negotiating interpersonal and institutional power,

illustrating that communication can influence others even within highly hierarchical environments. Meanwhile, commissive and expressive speech acts contribute significantly to the construction of hope by reinforcing commitment, trust, solidarity, and emotional resilience among the characters. Collectively, these findings indicate that language operates as an essential social resource that enables individuals to resist domination, negotiate authority, and sustain optimism despite prolonged confinement.

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Despite these contributions, the study is limited to the analysis of illocutionary acts produced by two main characters in a single film. Future studies may expand the scope by examining interactions among a wider range of characters, comparing multiple films with similar institutional settings, or integrating other pragmatic frameworks such as politeness theory, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, or multimodal discourse analysis. Such investigations would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how language functions as a dynamic social practice across different communicative contexts.

In conclusion, *The Shawshank Redemption* illustrates that language possesses transformative power beyond the transmission of information. Through illocutionary acts, the characters resist oppression, negotiate power, preserve human dignity, and construct hope amid institutional adversity. These findings reaffirm the central premise of pragmatics that speaking is fundamentally a form of social action and demonstrate that language can become one of the most powerful instruments for sustaining resilience, fostering solidarity, and envisioning freedom even within the most restrictive social environments.

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