

# Illocutionary Acts in the Play

## *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang

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### Abstract

A speech act in linguistics and the philosophy of language is an utterance that has a performative function in language and communication including locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. People not only produce utterances containing grammatical structure and words but also perform action through those utterances. The aim of the present research is to study illocutionary acts in the play *The Sound of a Voice*. The objectives of this research are to identify the utterances into five types of speech acts based on Searle's (1979) basic taxonomy: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, declarative and to investigate which type of illocutionary acts is the most frequently used and which is the least frequently used in the play. The results of the research show that the most frequently used type in the play is assertive as the author mostly creates the true propositions, conditions and situations among his characters in their social relationship. The second frequently used type is directive as the author makes up the sincerity condition that is the want or wish and desire of the two main characters. The third frequently used type is expressive because the writer invents the real psychological state of the speaker. Illocutionary acts of commissive are the least frequently used as he rarely contrives the propositional content that the speaker does some future action. The declaratives are not found in the play.

### 1. Introduction

Language is one of the important devices of communication. People have to produce utterances by using language to communicate each other. People can give and share information or express something to others by using utterances. The speakers have to produce appropriate utterances for the suitable context which involved their wants, desires and emotions to understand one utterance perfectly.

According to Searle's Communication Studies Theories, to understand language, one must understand the speaker's intention. Since language is intentional behavior, it should be treated like a form of action. Thus Searle refers to statements as speech acts. The speech act is the basic unit of language used to express meaning, an utterance that expresses meaning, an utterance that expresses an intention. Normally, the speech act is a

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sentence but it can be a word or phrase as long as it follows the rules necessary to accomplish the intention. When one speaks, one performs an act. Speech is not just used to designate something; it actually does something. Speech act stresses the intent of the act as a whole. According to Searle, understanding the speaker's intention is essential to capture the meaning. Without the speaker's intention, it is impossible to understand the words as a speech act. Speech act theory was introduced by the philosopher Austin (1962) and developed by further philosophers, according to Austin (1962), three levels of speech act are locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. Out of three speech acts, illocutionary act is the basic unit of human linguistic communication. This paper focuses on analyzing illocutionary speech acts in the play *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang based on Searle's (1979) speech act theory.

The present research was conducted on the three related researches. The first one is "Speech Act Analysis to Short Stories" written by Altikriti (2011), English language Department, Al Isra University Amman, Jordan. The second one is "Speech Act Analysis of Anton Chekhov's *The Segull*" conducted by Yarahmadi and Olfati (2011), Islamic Azad University. The third one is "Illocutionary Acts in the Movie of My name is khan" organized by Puspitasari: (2013), of English Department, Faculty of Letters Udayana University.

This present research aims to study speech acts in the play *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang. The objectives are to identify utterances into the five types of speech act: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative and to investigate which type of illocutionary acts is the most frequently used and which is the least frequently used in the short story. This present research contains five main chapters. Chapter one presents the introduction of the research. Chapter two describes literature review with theoretical background, a biography of the author, a synopsis of the play and related researches. In chapter three, research methodology containing data collection is mentioned. Chapter four consists of findings and discussion. The last chapter is the conclusion of the paper followed by the references and appendices.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter consists of a biography of the author, a synopsis of the play *The Sound of a Voice*, theoretical background and related researches.

## 2.1 A Biography of the Author

David Henry Hwang was born on August 11 1957, in Los Angeles, California, to his immigrant parents, Henry Yuan; a native of Shanghai, China, and Dorothy Hwang, who was born in China but raised in Philippines. Hwang's mother and father met after immigrating to the United States. While attending the University of Southern California, where his mother studied music and his father majored in business. Although the theme of Chinese ancestry has played an important role in many of Hwang's works, he has said that his ethnicity was not a significant concern as he was grown up. While attending Stanford University, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree in English in 1979, Hwang became involved in a search of his cultural roots and took an interest in what it meant to be an immigrant. While at Stanford, Hwang wrote his first play, F.O.B. (fresh off the boat), which was first produced on campus. Hwang's father who rebuked his son for wanting to be a writer, a profession that Hwang's father felt merited little respect, later praised and encouraged his son after watching the performance of his play F.O.B. was later produced off - Broadway in 1980 and went on to win an OBIE for best new play.

Highlights of Hwang's career include two plays that were written in 1981. Both plays contain Chinese immigration themes and were produced in New York - The Dance and Railroad (a Pulitzer Prize finalist) and Family Devotions. Sound and Beauty (1983), which is the combined title for two one act plays, *The Sound of a Voice and The House of Sleeping Beauties*, takes on a Japanese setting and style, a departure from Hwang's exploration of Chinese identity. Then in 1986, Hwang stepped even further away from his roots with his play *Rich Relations* as he experimented with an all-Caucasian cast.

Hwang was served as vice president of Theatre Communications Group, conducted interviews on arts-related topics for the PBS cable television show Asian American, and was appointed to the president's Committee on Arts and the Humanities by President Clinton. Hwang is married to actress Kathryn Layng, and the couple has two children, Noah David and Eva Vanne.

## 2.2 A Synopsis of the play

The play *The Sound of a Voice* is a fable about a samurai who shows up at the house of a woman who lives deep in the woods. She asks him in for tea, and he ends up staying for weeks. The play is very minimalist. Some scenes consist of the two actors simply working at their daily tasks. He practices with his swords and she takes care of her plants. Her domestic talents are numerous but she is also skilled at the martial arts. The samurai distrusts her because she is so superior to him. It turns out that she is suspected of being a

witch and that he wants to kill her to regain his former glory. He loves her, though; he can't bring himself to do it. However, he can't stay, either; his masculine pride won't allow him to be with her. When he tells her, he is leaving, she makes a tragic threat. As cited in (about:reader?url=danielandbonita.wordpress.com/2015)

### **2.3 Theoretical Background**

A "Speech Act" is an utterance that serves as a function in communication. The term "Speech Act" was introduced by linguistic philosopher, Austin (1962) identifies three kinds of speech act. They are locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts.

#### **Locutionary Acts**

The locutionary act is the act of saying something the act of uttering certain expression, well-formed, from a syntactic point of view and meaningful. For example, "What a gorgeous dress!" is an interrogative utterance.

#### **Illocutionary Acts**

An illocutionary act is central to the concept of a speech act. An illocutionary act is the performance of an act in saying something. It corresponds to the force that utterance has in a particular context; order, request, challenge. For example, "Can I borrow it?" can be regarded as a request; it includes the speaker's purpose or intention.

#### **Perlocutionary Acts**

The perlocutionary act corresponds to the effects brought about by performing an illocutionary act, to its consequences (intentional or non-intentional) on the feeling, thought or action of the participants. The speaker by saying what he or she says, performs another kind of act (like persuading, convincing or alerting) because he or she can be taken as responsible for those effects. For example, "I will take you to Disneyland for your birthday" may be the hearer jumped up and downed with joy i.e it effects on the hearer.

According to Searle's (1979) basic taxonomy, these are five main types of illocutionary acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative.

#### **(i) Assertive**

Assertive are speech acts that commit the speaker to something being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition. Assertive focuses on the strong belief of the speaker of the fact to be stated that can be evaluated to be true or false. The direction of fit is words to world eg. stating, boasting, instructing, conducting, responding, wishing, complaining, informing, answering, reciting, affirming, believing, claiming, describing, deducting.

**(ii) Directives**

Directives are speech acts which are attempted by the speaker to get hearer to do something in a particular action. It expresses what the speaker wants. The direction of fit is world to words and the sincerity condition is want or wish or desire. eg. asking, ordering, requesting, suggesting, urging, advising, insisting, excusing, begging, challenging, recommending, forbidding, permitting, warning, questioning, instructing.

**(iii) Commissives**

Commissives are speech acts that commit the speaker to some future course of action. The direction of fit is world to words and the sincerity condition. The propositional content always commits that the speaker does some future action. Commissives can be performed by the speaker alone or by the speaker as a member of group. eg. promising, refusing, guaranteeing, inviting, swearing, volunteering, agreeing, planning, offering, threatening, vowing.

**(iv) Expressives**

Expressives are speech acts which express the psychological state of the speaker. It shows the emotions of the speaker. There is no direction of fit. eg. apologizing, surprising, congratulating, greeting, thanking, welcoming, condoling, accepting, blaming.

**(v) Declaratives**

Declaratives are speech acts told by the speaker's authority. The speaker changes certain situations by using declarative bring utterances. In declarative, these directions of fit are both words- to- world and world- to- words. The actual expression of declaration brings about a change in reality.

### **3. Research Methodology**

In this research, the source of data was taken from the play *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang. The utterances of all characters in the play were collected and analyzed by using Searle's (1979) classification of illocutionary acts, and then were interpreted. So, this section consists of two parts: (1) data collection and data analysis, (2) data interpretation.

### 3.1 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Firstly, in collecting the data, the utterances uttered by the characters are taken from the play *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang. Then, the collected utterances are numbered as shown in the appendix and classified based on Searle's five types of illocutionary acts such as assertive, directives, commissive, expressive and declarative. The classification of speech acts found in the play can be seen in the table (1). This table has altogether six columns. The first column is the serial number. The second column is the utterance numbers in the story from which the utterances are taken. The third and the fourth columns show the speaker and hearer in the play. The fifth one states the utterances. The classification of utterances into five types of illocutionary acts are included respectively.

**Table 1: Sample analysis of Illocutionary Acts used in the play  
*The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang**

Sr. No.	Utterance No.	Speaker	Hearer	Original Utterances	Types of Illo				
					As	Di	Co	Ex	De
1	1	Man	Woman	You're very kind to take me in.				√	
2	2	Woman	Man	This is a remote corner of the world. Guests are rate	√				
3	3	Man	Woman	The tea you pour it well.				√	
4	4	Man	Woman	The sound it makes in the cup very soothing.				√	
5	6	Woman	Man	And some vegetables?		√			
6	7	Man	Woman	No, thanks you.				√	
7	8	Man	Woman	Thank you.				√	
8	10	Woman	Man	Please. Eat. It will give me great pleasure.		√			
9	11	Man	Woman	This is magnificent.				√	
10	12	Woman	Man	Eat		√			

### 3.2 Data Interpretation

In this section, five kinds of illocutionary acts; assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives are mentioned for data interpretation.

The data analyzed by using Searle's (1979) speech acts theory are interpreted. In the play *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang. So, only the interpretation of four

types of illocutionary acts are presented below. The three utterances of assertive, the three utterances of directives are selected and interpreted. The three utterances of expressive are selected and interpreted. Only three utterances of commissive are selected and interpreted.

**(i) Sample Data interpretation of the use of Assertive Illocutionary Acts**

**'This is a remote corner of the world. Guests are rare' (Utterance-2)**

. The woman says these words to the man that the place she lives is very far away from other people and she doesn't usually have any guest. So the utterance is assertive.

**"I don't know" (Utterance - 18)**

When the man asks her how long it has been since she last had a visitor, she replies that she can't remember. So, this utterance is assertive.

**"I have more," (Utterance - 25)**

In this utterance, the woman tells the man that she has so much food to serve. So, this is assertive.

**(ii) Sample Data interpretation of the use of Directive Illocutionary Acts**

**"And some vegetables?" (Utterance - 6)**

The woman asks the man if he would like some food such rice or vegetables. This is asking. So, this speech is directive.

**"How long has it been since you last had a visitor?" (Utterance - 17)**

The man wants to know the last time that the woman had a visitor. This utterance is asking information. Thus, this speech is directive.

**"Or did you not sleep at all." (Utterance - 29)**

The woman wonders if the man does not get any sound sleep at all because he has slept near the waterfall the previous night. So, this utterance can be said that to be directive.

**(iii) Sample Data interpretation of the use of Expressive Illocutionary Acts**

**"You're very kind to take me in" (Utterance - 1)**

The man produces these words H congratulates her that she is a very generous woman to let him stay in her house. So, this speech is expressive as the speaker shows his feeling in this utterance.

**“The tea you pour is well.” (Utterance -2)**

The man says these words to the woman that the tea she serves him is very tasteful. This utterance is condoling. So, this speech is expressive.

**“No, thank you” (Utterance- 7)**

The man says “No, thank you” to the woman as he doesn’t want any more food that she asks him to eat. This utterance is thanking. So, this speech is expressive.

**(iv) Sample Data interpretation of the use of Commissive Illocutionary Acts**

**“Here let me try.”(Utterance - 149)**

The man tells the woman to let him get the stain on the floor out once. This utterance is offering. Thus, this utterance shows commissive.

**“Ask me a question about music. Any question. I’ll answer incorrectly. I guarantee it,” (Utterance-141)**

The man claims that he can’t play any music. This utterance is guaranteeing. So, it is a commissive type.

**“I will.” (Utterance-170)**

The man says these words to the man as he definitely hears her voice of playing shakuhachi. So, this speech is commissive.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

The present research aims to make the analysis of illocutionary acts in the play *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang.

According to Searle’s (1979) theory of speech acts, the utterances in the play *The Sound of a Voice* are collected and analyzed into five types of illocutionary acts: assertive, directives, commissive, expressive and declarative. The analysis of illocutionary act utterances found in the play is shown in table (1). There are altogether 421 utterances in play: 213 assertives, 149 directives, 12 commissives, 47 expressives but declaratives is not found.

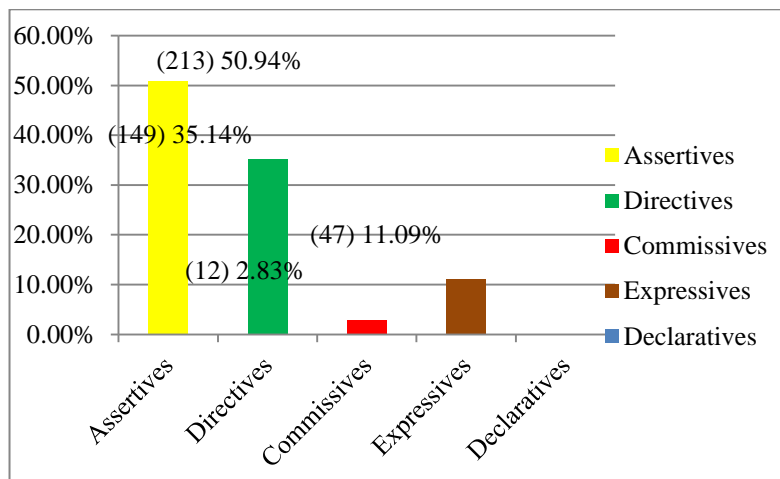
Frequency and percentage of five types of illocutionary acts used in the play can be seen in the table (2).



**Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Illocutionary Acts in the play *The Sound of a Voice***

Sr. No.	Types of Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Assertives	213	50.94%
2.	Directives	149	35.14%
3.	Commissives	12	2.83%
4.	Expressives	47	11.09%
5.	Declaratives	0	0%
Total		421	100%

As shown in the above table, the total frequency of the utterances used in the play was 421. The percentage of the use of illocutionary acts of assertive utterances is 50.94%, illocutionary acts of directive utterances is 35.14%, illocutionary acts of commissive utterances is 2.83% and illocutionary acts of expressive utterances is 11.09%. But the illocutionary act of declarative is not found in the play.



**Figure 1: Percentage of Illocutionary Acts found in the play *The sound of a Voice*.**

Figure 1 shows that illocutionary acts of assertive was the most frequently used in the short story among the five types of illocutionary acts. Then, illocutionary acts of directives was the second frequently found and illocutionary acts of expressive was the third frequently found and the least frequently was illocutionary acts of commissive. The use of illocutionary acts of declaratives was not found.

Out of 421 utterances from the whole play, 213 assertive are found. Assertive are used more than any other types of speech acts in the play as the speakers say the utterances such as stating, describing, answering and telling. 149 illocutionary acts of directives are found in this story because most of the illocutionary acts in the play are in the forms of question and command. The directives deal with direct orders or commands from people. The third type of illocutionary act found in the story is expressive utterances which show the psychological state of the speaker. The writer may want to express the emotions between the woman and the man. Out of 421 utterances, 12 illocutionary acts of commissives are found in the play. In the play *The sound of a Voice*, forms of planning among the characters are found. Illocutionary act of declaratives was not found in the play because the utterances in the play are normal assessment and judgment in their utterances.

Out of 421 utterances in the whole play, the use of assertive and directive at the same time was found in the 32 utterances, for Examples, utterances 5, 8, 23, 26, 33. The use of directive and expressive at the same time was found in the utterance 24 and 213. The use of assertive and commissive at the same time in the utterance 249 and the use of commissive and expressives in the utterance 268. The use of three types of Illocutionary act was found in the same utterance in the play. The use of assertive, directive and expressive at the same time was found in the utterances 43, 254, 344. The use of directive, commissive and expressive in the utterance 118, the use of assertive, directive and commissive together in the utterance 151 and the use of assertive directive and commissive in the utterances 196 and 301. It can be assumed that the playwright used the different types of speech acts in the same utterance to give and ask information as the two characters are strangers, to make a request from the others for their meal and to show their altitude toward each other.

By using these four types of illocutionary acts, the author creates his character's social relationship so that the readers can be more interested in his play. Therefore, the readers can understand the play easily because of the effective utterances of the characters. Hopefully, the findings of this study could provide the readers to capture the intended meaning of the utterances of the characters in this play through the understanding of illocutionary speech acts and knowledge of illocutionary utterances makes the readers understand the communication between the two characters in their daily life.

## 5. Conclusion

In this research, the use of speech acts in the play *The Sound of a voice* by David Henry Hwang is analyzed based on the speech act theory by Searle's (1979). According to Searle's (1979) speech act theory, utterances can be divided into five types. They are assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. It is found that the use of illocutionary acts of assertives is 50.94%, the use of illocutionary acts of directives is 35.14%, the use of illocutionary acts of commissives is 2.83%. The use of illocutionary acts of expressives is 11.09% are found in the play. Out of five categories of speech act, only four categories are found in this story. In classifying utterances into five types of speech acts, illocutionary acts of assertives are the most frequently used type and illocutionary acts of commissives are the least because the speakers in the play do not make much propositional intention such as in promising, refusing, swearing, agreeing, volunteering. There is no illocutionary act of declaratives in this play because the play is an ordinary daily-life story and the utterances in the play are ordinary conversation of ordinary characters. Illocutionary act of assertives becomes the most frequently used because many utterances are said by the woman to the man, by the man to the woman, and they are talking about their dislike of solitude and sharing the fear of being hurt by love, which keeps them locked in their separate psychological cages. Through the dialogues of the characters in the play, how they communicate with each other and types of illocutionary acts that they are performing when they speak can be learnt.

The findings show that illocutionary act is an essential tool in communication. While people communicate, they use illocutionary acts to express what they have in their mind towards the listener. A reader can enjoy a fuller appreciation and a greater pleasure of reading a play if he or she understands the speech acts because speech acts help the reader to grasp the idea of what is happening, to create the psychological state and to anticipate what will happen next and how they can communicate by studying different types of speech acts and to capture their intended action and meaning.

Finally, this research paper focuses on only one play due to the allotted page limit. This research was conducted illocutionary acts in the play *The Sound of a Voice* by David Henry Hwang. This research suggests that the other researchers can study the analysis of illocutionary acts in the other short stories, plays, novels, movies, newspapers and advertisements.

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