

PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN THE MOVIE "DEAD POETS SOCIETY"

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the perlocutionary acts used by the main character of Dead Poet Society, Mr. Keating, towards his students. The study employed the qualitative approach, examining the data from Mr. Keating's words and actions. The study then analyzed the data by classifying the speech acts, on the aspect of perlocutionary acts, and also comparing the speech acts to the actions and the values in the movie Dead Poets Society. The findings of the study revealed that Mr. Keating frequently used the perlocutionary acts to inspire and motivate the students. Therefore, he used a variety of teaching methods in his class in order to continuously encourage and motivate his students to work toward their aspirations.

KEYWORDS: *Dead Poets Society, Speech Acts, Perlocutionary Acts.*

INTRODUCTION

The study of pragmatics examines how language is utilized in communication in relation to sentences, contexts, and situations. Communication is needed to connect people with one another (Sarair, 2018; Sarair et al., 2021). There are various elements that should be taken into account when discussing pragmatics, and these elements establish pragmatics' definition. Implicature, speech acts, presupposition, context, adjacency pairs, and deixis and distance are the contributing variables. Both verbal and nonverbal communication frequently include speech acts, a type of communication and a subset of pragmatics (Levinson et al., 1983). Pragmatics refers to the study of meaning in relation to speaking circumstances (Leech, 1983). Pragmatics concerns with the meanings of utterances, and it focuses on the relationship between language and context (Yule, 1996). This present study particularly concerned with speech acts. Speech acts, as stated by Yule (1996), are the study of how speakers and listeners utilize language. There are three forms of action in speech acts that transcend the act of

utterance, according to Austin (1962), which are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary.

Here, the study focused on the form of perlocutionary acts. A perlocutionary act is an utterance that has the potential to change the listener's state of mind or course of action (Austin, 1962; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000). For instance, "This room is so hot" may suggest that the room should be cooled by turning on the air conditioner. The speaker's utterance here gives an effect toward the listener by doing something as a result.

In this study, the focus was on the perlocutionary acts used by Mr. Keating, the main character in the movie *Dead Poets Society*. *Dead Poets Society* is a movie having the subject of education as its focus. It is interesting to see how speech acts playing a role in communication between Mr. Keating, as the teacher, and his students in this movie. The study intended to answer the following question: What are the kinds of perlocutionary acts uttered by Mr. Keating towards his students in *Dead Poets Society*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

SPEECH ACTS AND PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS

According to Austin (1962), there are three types of speech acts: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. The locutionary act refers to the act of performing an utterance, the illocutionary act refers to the speaker's intentional behavior, and the perlocutionary act is the effect a saying has towards the listener.

Searle (1979) describes that there are only five illocutionary points—assertive, commissive, directive, declaration, and expressive—can be made by speakers in relation to propositions in an utterance. Assertive is when speakers describing the state of something, commissive is when speakers are made to do something, directive is when speakers try to persuade listeners to do something, declaration is when speakers alter the state of something simply by saying it, and expressive is when speaker express their opinions about something.

DEAD POETS SOCIETY MOVIE

The movie *Dead Poets Society* tells a story about John Keating, played by Robin Williams, a new English teacher who is assigned to an exclusive prep school for boys known for its strict standards and long-standing traditions. Keating approaches his students in an unconventional way because they are under a lot of pressure from their parents and the school. A number of students such as Todd Anderson (played by Ethan Hawke) and Neil Perry (played by Robert Sean Leonard), and others learn to come out

of their shells, chase their aspirations, and live each day to the fullest with Keating's guidance (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d.).

In the course of the film, the director makes references to the teaching and learning process by showing how certain words spoken—particularly the perlocutionary acts of the actors playing teachers who deliver the lines and the audiences playing students who take the teacher's words to heart and put them into practice—are connected to the implementation of speech acts. The words that Mr. Keating has said in the film can be viewed as a communication tool that help teachers and students create relationships. Talking to one another within class is just one aspect of communication; teachers should also consider how their words could influence the choices made by their students.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

A study by Rumaria (2015) has investigated the speech acts in the movie *Dead Poets Society*. Her study focused on extracting speech acts from movie dialogue and distinguishing just the illocutionary and perlocutionary of the main character's utterances when it comes to classroom instruction. The results demonstrated that Mr. Keating, who is an excellent teacher in the *Dead Poets Society*, frequently gives instructions to the students in the form of questions, which is appropriate classroom language. He also uses illocutionary acts primarily as commands, asking the students to complete tasks such as homework assignments, read aloud, present, and come to the front, among other things. Compared to other acts, he motivates his students more frequently. Lastly, he rarely insults his students.

Another study by Rahman (2015) examined the illocutionary and perlocutionary act in the *Detective Conan* comic. Her study focused on how illocutionary acts were used in the *Detective Conan* comic book and how they successfully or unsuccessfully counteracted the perlocutionary acts. Her research sought to identify the types of illocutionary acts employed in the *Detective Conan* and how the audience influenced the speakers' perlocutionary effects. Her study discovered all five categories of illocutionary acts—Declarations, Representatives, Expressive, Directives, and Commissive—were used in the *Detective Conan*. The study also discovered numerous ways in which the perlocutionary effects were successful or unsuccessful once the speech act was spoken. Some perlocutionary effects were effective with the help of body language.



RESEARCH METHODS

This qualitative study used the movie titled *Dead Poets Society* as the object of the study. The data source was the utterances of the main character, Mr. Keating. In this study, there were two instruments; they were the investigators and the *Dead Poets Society* movie script. The investigators here were the researchers as the human instrument who examined the movie script to get the data information. To analyze the data, the researchers planned, collected, examined, and reported the results of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

THE PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS USED BY THE MAIN CHARACTER

Mr. Keating used the following perlocutions the most in class: to motivate the audience with 27.34% and to inspire them with 25.78%. The findings indicated that Mr. Keating, who enjoyed teaching, did express an interest in teaching poetry to his students. As a result, he constantly employed a variety of teaching techniques in the classroom and a conversational approach with his students. His lessons and teaching style consistently inspired and motivated his students to pursue their goals. It is interesting to note that Mr. Keating frequently used the perlocutionary acts "to enlighten the listener with 14.06%." In the film, Mr. Keating used poetry to motivate his students and shared a number of stories with them. The responses from his students varied depending on their interests and needs. Because of his unconventional teaching style, Mr. Keating's students appeared to adore him.

However, not all of the students appeared to concur with Mr. Keating's methods or teaching style. Surprisingly, two types—to affect the listener and to persuade the listener—had the same percentage. The data show an example when Mr. Keating used the phrase "why do I stand here?" From the perlocutionary act, Mr. Keating wanted the listener to act in the same way that he did. Here, to persuade the students to carry out the identical behavior without the use of command phrases was a further justification. The result was that all of the students did what Mr. Keating did, which was to stand on the table. A further example of this movie's perlocutionary acts was to offend the listener. This type was chosen to serve as an illustration of how to behave politely in any circumstance, as said by Mr. Keating here:

"Congratulations, Mr. Hopkins. You have the first poetry ever to receive a low Pritchard rating."

In this case, Mr. Keating's words may not have been intended to offend the students directly, but rather to issue a small caution. Another observation of Mr. Keating's speech

during the teaching process revealed the perlocutions that were used the least frequently: to make the listener comprehend something and to urge them to do something. Because Mr. Keating tended to exclusively provide the facts he knew when he was younger, the results showed that these two types were rarely employed by him in the classroom. The manner in which Mr. Keating spoke affected the students or the listener in different ways. The adjustments that the students displayed in this film truly contributed to their psychological well-being but were rejected by the school's administration. Mr. Keating employed every teaching strategy he had to help the students pay attention, discover their own interests, and have courage when making life decisions on their own. Mr. Keating may have taught his students in a variety of creative ways. The students might accept it, but the other teachers might not. The forms of perlocutionary acts Mr. Keating used in his speech during the teaching process revealed that he did not simply want the students to learn about the poet; they also needed to understand the significance and purpose of the poets' work.

Here, only eight of the 13 different perlocutionary acts were revealed by the aforementioned explanation for all perlocutionary types. The most often employed sorts of rhetorical devices in Mr. Keating's speeches when lecturing in the Dead Poets Society movie were those intended to motivate and inspire the listener. Each category indicated a different proportion of results. These two sorts had a bearing on how the students responded to the teacher's words. In this instance, the results were consistent with the effects of the students' actions. Mr. Keating demonstrated the boldness of a progressive literature instructor by challenging his students to defy expectations, challenge the current quo, and live life without apology. His goal was to help his students develop their creativity and discover their passion so they would not squander their youth on something they did not enjoy.

One of the movie's main protagonists, Todd, was drawn to the Mr. Keating's method of instruction. He initially displayed a lack of interest in Mr. Keating's presence, but Mr. Keating was already aware of the students who had taken an active interest in his class and subject. This can be seen in the way of Mr. Keating utterance:

Todd: "A sweaty toothed madman."

Mr. Keating: "Good. Good, boy, *there's a poet in you after all.*"

The example showed us how Mr. Keating's use (italicized and underlined words) aimed to impress the listeners with his poetic ability. As a result, Mr. Keating encouraged the student to stand in front of the class and let him express his emotion. Additionally, it demonstrated which perlocutionary acts, as a percentage, were the most common. The relationship between the perlocutionary findings in the film Dead Poets Society and the effects on the main character of his teacher's remarks about practicing poets in

front of the class revealed the importance of a teacher using speech acts in their lessons to help their students become more self-assured and creative in front of his peers.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that Mr. Keating's most common persuasive strategies in class was inspiring and motivating the students. The findings showed that Mr. Keating, who loved teaching, did indicate a desire to teach poetry to his students. Hence, he frequently used a variety of instructional strategies in the classroom and a conversational style while speaking with his students. His classes and instructional methods continuously encouraged and motivated his students to work toward their aspirations.

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