

Directive Act in Team Dynamic: A Pragmatic Study in The Expendables 4 Movie (2023)

Faustine Engelberto¹, Rahman Taufiqrianto Dako², Fahria Malabar³

¹²³English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Cultures, State University of Gorontalo

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 January 2026

Revised 19 January 2026

Accepted 03 February 2026

Available online 06 February 2026

Keywords

Directive Acts, Military Communication, Pragmatic, Situational Aspects, The Expendables 4



This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.
Copyright © 2025 by Author. Published by Yayasan Daarul Huda

ABSTRACT

This research addresses the limitations of pragmatic studies focusing on directive acts within the high-pressure context of modern military action movies. The study aims to investigate the types and situational aspects of the functions of directive acts used by main characters in The Expendables 4 (2023). Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research integrates Searle's (1975), taxonomy directive acts with Leech's (1983) framework of situational aspects to analyze movie dialogue. Data collection involved watching the movie, transcribing relevant scenes, and classifying utterances based on Searle's (1975) and Leech's (1983). The findings revealed 30 directive utterances, categorized into five types: 15 commands, 6 warnings, 4 requests, 3 instructions, and 2 suggestions. Commands were the most dominant form of the data, which reflects the hierarchical and urgent nature of military operations where immediate compliance is critical. The study concludes that situational urgency and combat intensity have a direct impact on the linguistic realization of directive acts, favoring brevity and force over politeness, but cooperative directive acts like requests and suggestions still play a strategic role in team coordination.

ABSTRAK

Abstrak: Penelitian ini membahas keterbatasan studi pragmatik yang berfokus pada tindak tutur direktif dalam konteks tekanan tinggi film aksi militer modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis dan aspek situasional fungsi tindakan perintah yang digunakan oleh karakter utama dalam The Expendables 4 (2023). Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini menggabungkan taksonomi tindak tutur direktif klasifikasi Searle (1975) dengan kerangka pragmatik aspek situasional Leech (1983) untuk menganalisis dialog film. Pengumpulan data melibatkan menonton film, mentranskrip adegan-adegan relevan, dan mengklasifikasikan ucapan berdasarkan taksonomi klasifikasi Searle (1975) dan kerangka pragmatik Leech (1983). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan 30 ucapan direktif, dikategorikan menjadi lima jenis: 15 perintah, 6 peringatan, 4 permintaan, 3 instruksi, dan 2 saran. Perintah merupakan bentuk yang paling dominan dalam data, yang mencerminkan sifat hierarkis dan mendesak dari operasi militer di mana kepatuhan segera sangat kritis. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa urgensi situasional dan intensitas pertempuran memiliki dampak langsung pada realisasi linguistik tindakan direktif, mengutamakan kesederhanaan dan kekuatan daripada kesopanan, namun tindakan direktif kooperatif seperti permintaan dan saran tetap memainkan peran strategis dalam koordinasi tim.

INTRODUCTION

Language is fundamentally an instrument of action, functioning not merely to convey information but to influence the behavior of others and shape social reality. In the field of linguistics, pragmatics addresses this phenomenon by studying how utterances are interpreted within specific contexts. Central to this discipline is Speech Act Theory, introduced by Austin and developed by Searle, which posits that speaking is a performance of action. Within this framework, directive acts, utterances intended to get the listener to do something, such as commands, requests, and warnings, are particularly significant. While these acts govern everyday interactions, their function becomes intensified in cinematic narratives, specifically in action genres where characters must navigate high-stakes environments that demand immediate compliance and precise coordination.

Recent scholarship has extensively explored speech acts in cinema, establishing a state-of-the-art understanding of how film dialogue mirrors social power dynamics. For instance, Utari et al. (2025) analyzed directive acts in the historical comedy *The King's Speech* (2010), finding a predominance of requests (37.84%) over commands, a pattern attributed to the film's focus on education and interpersonal politeness. Similarly, studies like those by Florensia (2025) have investigated speech acts to understand how filmmakers portray politeness and conflict in dramatic contexts. In the specific realm of action movies, Putra (2024) examined *The Expendables 2* (2010), identifying 37 instances of directive acts. These studies have successfully demonstrated that film dialogue provides rich data for pragmatic analysis, highlighting how character relationships influence linguistic choices.

However, a critical limitation persists in the current literature. Most research on directive acts focuses on genres characterized by dramatic, romantic, or comedic themes, where the emphasis remains on politeness strategies and social maintenance. There is a distinct gap regarding the pragmatic analysis of modern military action movies, such as *The Expendables 4* (2023). While Putra (2024) touched upon the action genre, that study focused primarily on identifying directive types without deeply exploring how situational aspects, such as combat urgency, tactical planning, and crisis management, fundamentally alter the form and function of these utterances. Existing studies rarely account for how the high-pressure environment of military operations necessitates a departure from standard conversational norms, prioritizing efficiency and authority over social etiquette.

Addressing this gap, the primary objective of this research is to investigate the types and situational functions of directive acts used by the main characters in *The Expendables 4* (2023). The central research question asks: What are the types of directive acts used by the main characters in the movie *The Expendables 4* (2023)? By integrating Searle's (1975) taxonomy with Leech's (1983) situational aspect theory, this study aims to reveal how directive acts operate as strategic tools for survival rather than mere social exchanges. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the "action" aspect of pragmatics, highlighting how urgency and hierarchical structures in military cinema create a unique communicative dynamic that favors strong illocutionary force, distinct from the politeness-heavy patterns observed in other genres.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to provide an in-depth analysis of linguistic phenomena within their natural narrative setting. This approach was selected as it is particularly suitable for interpreting the meaning, function, and context of utterances found in movie dialogues. The subject of this research was the action movie *The Expendables 4* (2023), with a specific focus on the directive speech acts performed by the main characters, such as Barney Ross, Lee Christmas, and other team members. The study concentrated on scenes depicting teamwork, command exchanges, strategic planning, and conflict to capture the authentic use of military-themed language.

The primary instrument for this study was the researcher, who was responsible for observing, transcribing, and interpreting the data. Data collection was conducted through a systematic procedure beginning with repeated viewings of the movie to identify relevant scenes. Following identification, dialogues containing potential directive acts were transcribed from the subtitle track and verified against the spoken audio to ensure accuracy. The researcher then selected specific utterances that functioned as commands, requests, suggestions, instructions, or warnings, while simultaneously recording the social relationships and situational contexts associated with each utterance.

The data analysis technique employed a theoretical synthesis to ensure valid categorization. First, the collected utterances were classified into types of directive acts based on Searle's (1975) taxonomy. Second, the pragmatic aspects of each utterance were analyzed using Leech's (1983) framework, which examines the speaker and interlocutor relationship, the context of the utterance, the purpose, the utterance as a form of action, and the utterance as a verbal product. This dual-layer analysis allowed the researcher to determine the classification not solely by linguistic form but by integrating the illocutionary force with situational evidence, resulting in a comprehensive interpretation of how directive acts function within the movie's specific environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the classification and pragmatic analysis of directive speech acts identified in *The Expendables 4* (2023). Based on the analysis of 30 distinct data entries, the study categorized the utterances into five types of directive acts: commands, requests, suggestions, instructions, and warnings. The frequency of these acts is presented in Table 1 below.

The Directive Act in *The Expendables 4* (2023)

Table 1. Directive Act

No	Type of Directive Act	Frequency
1	Commands	15
2	Warnings	6
3	Requests	4
4	Instructions	3
5	Suggestions	2
Total		30

As illustrated in Table 1, Commands emerged as the most dominant directive act, constituting 15 of the total utterances. This prevalence is indicative of the strict hierarchical structure and high-stakes environment depicted in the movie, where leaders like Barney Ross and Lee Christmas require immediate compliance to ensure mission success. For instance, the utterance "Touch and go!" exemplifies a command with strong illocutionary force, necessitated by the urgent need for rapid deployment into a combat zone. The analysis confirms that the linguistic realization of these commands is typically concise and imperative, designed to eliminate ambiguity and maximize operational efficiency. Warnings were the second most frequent type (6), reflecting the constant presence of threat in the narrative. Utterances such as "Don't let Rahmat leave with those detonators or there's gonna be a lot of dead people" function pragmatically to alert the team to imminent danger and trigger preventive action. Requests (4) and Suggestions (2) appeared less frequently but played a crucial strategic role. Cooperative utterances like "Gunner, we need help" and "Get creative" demonstrate that even within a military hierarchy, softer directive forms are employed when the situation demands specific expertise or adaptive problem-solving rather than blind obedience. Instructions (3) served to provide procedural guidance, bridging the gap between authority and technical execution.

The discussion of these results directly addresses the research gap by revealing that situational urgency is the primary determinant of directive form in action cinema. Unlike previous studies in other genres that prioritize politeness strategies, this research confirms that combat contexts compel speakers to utilize strong illocutionary force. When compared to prior research,

the findings support Putra's (2024) analysis of *The Expendables 2*, reinforcing the consistency of command-heavy communication patterns across the military action franchise. However, these results contrast sharply with Utari (2025), who found that requests dominated in the animated film *Big Hero 6* due to its focus on collaboration and social harmony. This divergence highlights that pragmatic choices are genre-dependent; while family-oriented narratives may favor negotiation, military action narratives prioritize survival. Furthermore, this study extends previous knowledge by utilizing Leech's situational aspects to explain why commands override requests in critical moments, offering a deeper understanding of the interplay between authority and crisis.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that directive speech acts in *The Expendables 4* (2023) function as essential strategic mechanisms for operational control and survival rather than mere conversational exchanges. The analysis reveals that commands constitute the most dominant type of directive, underscoring the strict hierarchical structure and the necessity for immediate compliance inherent in military-themed narratives. However, this dominance is intricately tied to situational aspects; the high-pressure combat environment compels characters to utilize concise, forceful imperatives to ensure rapid coordination, validating the strong link between situational urgency and illocutionary force. Beyond pure authority, the presence of requests and suggestions highlights a strategic flexibility, where cooperative language emerges during moments requiring problem-solving or specific expertise, demonstrating that military interaction also accommodates collaboration when tactical situations demand it. These findings theoretically reinforce the integration of Searle's classification with Leech's contextual framework, demonstrating that in action cinema, linguistic choices are dictated by the immediate peril and tactical goals of the characters. Based on these insights, future researchers are encouraged to explore comparative studies across different action franchises or apply politeness theories to further dissect character dynamics. Additionally, educators can utilize these authentic dialogue samples to teach pragmatic competence regarding illocutionary force, while screenwriters may draw upon these patterns to craft more realistic and impactful military dialogue.

REFERENCES

- Artika Br Sinulingga, R., Octavia Simarmata, R., & Sidabutar, U. (2024). An Analysis of Language Style in The "Maleficent 2: Mistress of Evil" Movie: A Sociolinguistics Approach. *INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research*, 4, 981-991.
- Eragamreddy, N., & Unit, E. L. (2024). Pragmatics in Daily Conversations Among University. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 4778, 1455-1481.
- Fitria, T. N. (2019). An Analysis of Directive Speech Act Found in "Koi Mil Gaya" Movie. *Journal of Pragmatics Research*, 1(2), 89-99.
- Florensia, M. P. (2025). Investigating Speech Acts in "Miss Perfect": A Pragmatic Perspective. *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 3(1), 31-35.
- Ismani, S. D., & Effendi, T. (2022). Speech Act Analysis on The Main Character's. *Journal of English Language Studies*, 3(1), 49-56.
- Mailani, O., Nuraeni, I., Syakila, S. A., & Lazuardi, J. (2022). Bahasa Sebagai Alat Komunikasi Dalam Kehidupan Manusia. *Kampret Journal*, 1(1), 1-10.
- Prof, A., Jabur, E., & Radhi, I. A. (2025). A Study of the Speech Acts of Command, Advice, and Warning in English. *Journal of English Education*, 11(11), 68-80.

- Putra, G. (2024). An Analysis of Directive Speech Acts Found In "The Expendable 2" Movie. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 4778, 2404-2414.
- Putri, N. A. Y., Yanti, R., Shabri, I., Yalmiadi, & Maiza, T. S. (2023). An analysis of directive speech acts by the main characters in Jurassic World Dominion movie. *Prologue: Journal on Language and Literature*, 9(2), 379-391.
- Rahardi, K. (2020). Mendeskripsi Peran Konteks Pragmatik: Menuju Perspektif Cyberpragmatics. *Transformatika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pengajarannya*, 3(2), 164.
- Rahayu, E. A. P., Degaf, A., & Anggrisia, N. F. (2024). Exploring Speech Acts In "Heidi": An Analysis of Direct and Indirect Communication in Cinematic Dialogue. *Journal of Pragmatics Research*, 6(2), 148-168.
- Rizki. (2023). An Analysis of Directive Speech Acts By Main Character In "Ke Jogja" Short Movie. *JISHUM (Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora)*, 2(1).
- Sari, I. F. (2020). The Speech Act of Cartoon Movie: Spongebob Squarepants' The Movie. *Linguists: Journal Of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 6(1), 126.
- Sirait, Z., Tinggi, S., Informatika, M., & Royal, K. (2024). Pragmatics Aspects in Daily Life. *Journal of Scientific Research*, 4307(August), 828-832.
- Suri, N. K., Noviyanti, S., Agustina, A. T., & Berbahasa, K. (2024). Teori pragmatika bahasa dan kesantunan berbahasa. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 7, 17676-17682.
- Susanto, D. (2025). Speech Acts in Pragmatic Linguistics: A Conceptual Review and Its Applications. *Lexeme: Journal of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 271-278.
- Utari, S., & Tarihoran, I. H. (2023). Directive Speech Acts In The Movie. *Global*, 1, 43-50.
- Van Thao, N., & Martua Purba, P. (2021). Pragmatics Analysis on Commisive Speech Act in A Movie. *European Journal of Humanities and Educational Advancements (EJHEA)*, 2(7), 70-74.
- Wea, T. N., & Bram, B. (2022). Directive and Expressive Speech Acts Used By Travis Parker in the Choice Movie. *KREDO: Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 5(2), 691-707.
- Widyawanti, A., Siti Aisyah, & Yudy Prasetyo. (2024). Illocutionary Speech Acts in The Short Movie "The Translator": Pragmatic Study. *Jelita*, 5(1), 144-165.