

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE OF A STALKER IN 'CAN I TELL YOU A SECRET?': A FORENSIC LINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the illocutionary acts used by the stalker in the Netflix docuseries 'Can I Tell You a Secret?'. Illocutionary acts are analyzed to understand the intended meaning of the stalker's communication strategies. The objectives of the study are to find out the dominant illocutionary acts used by stalker and their intended meaning. This study employs the qualitative descriptive design and uses the subtitle of the series as its data. The data of the study are taken from the subtitle of the Netflix docuseries 'Can I Tell You a Secret?', and then are classified into Searle's illocutionary act types. The study finds that the stalker commonly uses directive illocutionary acts (49,3%) in his dialogues. This phenomenon shows that the stalker uses his communication strategies to manipulate and control the victim. His strategies also instill fear and doubt in his target. Besides, other types of illocutionary acts are also being employed in stalker's dialogues. This maintains a continual threat and keeps the victim anxious about what might happen next.

Keywords: *Cyberstalking, Illocutionary Force, Forensic Linguistics, Speech Act.*

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INTRODUCTION

Studies have demonstrated that individuals, especially young ones, are at risk of online harassment and stalking (Bossler et al., 2011). The ease and accessibility of digital communication and social networking platforms have empowered stalkers to sustain and intensify their stalking activities (Bracewell et al., 2020). Intimate relationship stalking involves the use of several technologies including social media. This demonstrates the connection between technology and stalking behaviours (Southworth et al., 2007). Online harassment containing stalking, insulting comments, and threats, is a prevalent occurrence, with a notable proportion of persons confessing such abuse (Kozyreva et al., 2022). Women, specifically, face a significant danger, as a considerable proportion of them encounter online abuse that poses a threat to their physical well-being (Im et al., 2022).

To comprehend the intended meaning and consequences of a stalker's communication, it is essential to have a clear understanding of illocutionary acts and their categories. Illocutionary acts reflect the speaker's intentions and can be categorized into many types, including representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarations (Searle, 1969). The illocutionary force refers to the intentional impact of an utterance, such as making a request, stating something, telling a joke, or other speech acts (Skovholt et al., 2014).

This study explored the illocutionary force in the Netflix docuseries ‘Can I Tell You a Secret?’ particularly uttered by the stalker. The series was chosen as data of the study since it tells about the terrifying experiences of women who were the victims of an online stalker. Women are more likely to be victims of cyberstalking compared to men. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, women are more than twice as likely to experience stalking, including cyberstalking, with about 1.8% of women reporting such incidents compared to less than 1% of men (Morgan & Truman, 2022).

The analysis of illocutionary acts has been a subject of interest in various studies. For instance, Sukmawati (2022) focused on the illocutionary acts in the movie ‘Sing’, while Ernayanti (2022) examined the directives function in the movie ‘UP’ and found various types of illocutionary acts. Fitriani et al. (2020) analyzed illocutionary acts in a fantasy movie and (Ratri et al., 2022) explored the subtitle of the movie ‘Rampage’, while (Ratri & Bram, 2022) studied the illocutionary acts of ‘Raya and the Last Dragon’. The findings across these studies revealed the prevalence of various types of illocutionary acts.

While previous studies have extensively explored illocutionary acts across a variety of films, they have not specifically addressed the intended meanings of illocutionary acts within the dialogues. This gap in the literature highlights a need for focused research on how illocutionary acts are employed in the context of the dialogues, particularly in stalker dialogues in the Netflix series ‘Can I Tell You a Secret?’. The study relies on interpretative analysis without empirical backing from actual victim reports. This limits the ability to confirm whether the observed illocutionary acts align with those used in actual stalking cases. Therefore, this study is structured around two key research questions, which are outlined as follows.

1. What are the dominant illocutionary acts used by stalker in the Netflix docuseries ‘Can I Tell You a Secret?’?
2. What are the intended effects of stalker’s dialogues in Netflix's docuseries ‘Can I Tell You a Secret?’

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Acts Theory

The theory of speech act was first popularized by J.L. Austin, who brought a paradigm shift in understanding language. Austin proposed the idea that speaking is not just about conveying information or stating facts but is also a form of action (Saifudin, 2019). In his view, when we speak, we are not just uttering words, but actively doing something through those words. This can provide a better understanding of the impact of language on social interactions.

In his theory, Austin classified speech acts into three categories namely locution, illocution, and perlocution (Grundy, 2008). Locution is the act of making a statement with a clear semantic meaning. For example, when someone says, "The sky is blue," they are performing a locution that states a fact about the world. Illocution, on the other hand, is the action performed through that utterance, such as commanding, asking, or making a promise. For example, when a teacher says, "Open your book," they are not just stating a locution but also performing an illocution in the form of a command. Perlocution is the effect that the utterance has on the listener. For example, if the utterance makes someone feel

inspired or scared, then that is the perlocutionary result of the utterance. Austin emphasized that perlocutionary effects can vary greatly, depending on the context and the individual's interpretation who hears it. The importance of perlocution lies in its influence on the behaviour and emotions of others, an aspect that is often crucial in the dynamics of social communication (Levinson, 1983).

Austin's theory was further developed by Searle, who classified speech acts in five categories namely representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarations (Levinson, 1983; Mey, 2001). Representative speech acts include those whose purpose is to state a belief or claim about the state of the world considered true by the speaker. These utterances are used to convey information or facts, and their success is measured based on the truthfulness of what is expressed. This category is also referred to as Assertive (Mey, 2001). In this study, the researchers prefer to use the term 'assertive', instead of 'representative'. Assertive speech acts are a fundamental aspect of communication where speakers aim to convey information that is verifiable as true or false (Ardiani, 2023). These speech acts involve the speaker asserting the truth of the proposition being expressed (Lahunduitan et al., 2022). They are characterized by statements that are intended to be factual and can be proven to be true or false (Waluyo et al., 2019). For example, when someone says, "The door is locked," they are using a representative speech act to report the condition or status of the door.

Directive aims to get the listener to do something. These speech acts are intended to prompt the listener to perform a specific action in line with the speaker's intentions (Qomariyah, 2017). Directive speech acts can manifest in various forms, such as commanding, prohibiting, ordering, recommending, advising, suggesting, inviting, daring, entreating, and challenging (Ardiani, 2023). They are characterized by the speaker's desire for the listener to act upon the communicated message (Sutedjo, 2021) Mey, 2001). For example, when a mother tells her child, "Please clean your room," she is using a directive speech act to ask her child to perform a specific task.

Commissive involves the speaker's words of the future actions. This speech act involves the speaker expressing a commitment to carrying out a specific action in the future (Mohamad et al., 2018). Commissive speech acts can take various forms, including promises, guarantees, refusals, threats, volunteering, and offers (Mohammed, 2023). They bind the speaker to fulfill the actions mentioned in their speech (Dewi et al., (2020), Mey, (2001)). For example, when someone says, "I promise to help you tomorrow," they are making a commitment through a commissive speech act.

Expressive is used to convey the speaker's emotions or attitudes toward a particular setting. It encompasses a wide range of actions such as praising, thanking, criticizing, expressing hopes, agreeing, disagreeing, expressing optimism, expressing wants, insinuating, making jokes, and appreciating (Abbas et al., 2021). Expressive is more related to the psychological condition of the speaker rather than to influencing external reality or the activities of the listener (Mey, 2001). When someone says, "I apologize for my mistake," for example, they are using an expressive speech act to show regret.

Declarations are speech acts that describe a state of affairs or bring about new conditions (Ardiani, 2023). They change the status or condition of the world through the statement itself. Declaration speech acts are used to convey

information, describe situations, or make statements of fact (Soleimani & Yeganeh, 2016). They are essential for providing information and shaping the understanding of a given context (Syafryadin et al., 2022). When a judge declares "I pronounce you husband and wife," or when a boss says "You are fired", it declares the truth of a proposition or makes statements that can be evaluated as true or false (Dewi et al., 2020). Declarations are unique because the changes they convey occur instantly through the utterance of the words themselves, directly altering social or legal reality (Mey, 2001).

Relevance of Speech Act Theory to the Stalker Communication Analysis

Speech act theory is highly relevant to the analysis of stalker communication as it provides a framework for understanding the intentions and effects of verbal interactions. By applying speech act theory to the study of stalker communication, researchers can delve into the illocutionary acts embedded in the messages sent by stalkers. Stalkers may employ several kinds of illocutionary acts, including directive (commands or requests), expressive (emotional expressions), or assertive (statements of fact), to convey their intentions and exert control over their victims (Bahing et al., 2018; Della & Sembiring, 2018; Nicolle, 2022). Analyzing stalker communication through the lens of speech act theory allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations and psychological dynamics at play. For instance, identifying the illocutionary force of a stalker's messages can reveal whether they are issuing threats, seeking compliance, or expressing obsessive emotions (Bara et al., 1997; Yessenbayeva et al., 2020).

Moreover, considering the perlocutionary effects of stalker communication, such as instilling fear or intimidation in the victim, can provide insights into the impact of these messages on the recipient (Finin et al., 1994). Furthermore, speech act theory offers a structured approach to categorizing and interpreting the communicative strategies employed by stalkers. By recognizing speech acts as the basic unit of communication, researchers can dissect the linguistic elements of stalker messages and uncover the manipulative tactics or coercive behaviours embedded within them. This analytical framework enables a nuanced examination of how stalkers use language to exert power, control, and psychological influence over their victims.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used qualitative descriptive design focusing on the illocutionary acts employed by the stalker in the Netflix docuseries 'Can I Tell You a Secret?'. Qualitative descriptive studies aim to stay close to data and offer straightforward descriptions of phenomena, making it a method of choice when detailed, factual summaries are needed (Sandelowski, 2000). The subtitle of the series was used as the data of the research. The subtitle was taken from a website that provides movie subtitles called opensubtitle.org. Before being analyzed, the subtitle was validated by comparing the subtitle with the original video to check the accuracy of the transcription. This involves listening to the dialogues and reading the subtitles simultaneously to spot any discrepancies in wording, timing, or contextual meaning. The subtitles were then analyzed and classified into Searle's categories of illocutionary acts, namely directive, assertive, expressive, commissive, and declarations. The total number of illocutionary acts that occurred

was then counted and converted into percentages. The last step was describing the intended effects of the stalker's dialogue based on the illocutionary act he used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dominant illocutionary acts used by the stalker

Can I Tell You a Secret? is a Netflix series that aired in February 2024. It consists of two episodes, and each episode lasts for 50 minutes. In the series, there are a total of 599 utterances, and all were being analyzed. See the table below for the details of the illocutionary acts used in the series.

Table 1. Dominant Illocutionary Acts in The Series

No.	Illocutionary types	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Directive	88	14,7%
2.	Assertive	305	50,9%
3.	Expressive	197	32,9%
4.	Commissive	4	0,7%
5.	Declarations	5	0,8%
	Total	599	100%

The table above displays the distribution of utterances across five categories, namely assertive, expressive, directive, declarations, and commissive. Assertive are the most common type, accounting for 50.9% of the total occurrences, which amounts to 305 cases. There was a total of 197 instances of expressive acts, which accounted for 32.9% of the total. The directive acts were witnessed 88 times, accounting for 14.7% of the total. Commissive acts and declarations acts had the lowest frequency, with 4 (0.7%) and 5 (0.8%) occurrences, respectively. The total number of examined illocutionary acts is 599 utterances.

After going over the results of the illocutionary acts, which included 599 instances of assertive, expressive, directive, commissive, and declarations acts, it is essential to look at how the stalker talks. The stalker used the illocutionary techniques listed below.

Table 2. Dominant Illocutionary Acts Used by Stalker

No.	Illocutionary types	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
1.	Directive	37	49,3%
2.	Assertive	28	37,3%
3.	Expressive	7	9,3%
4.	Commissive	3	4,0%
5.	Declarations	0	0,0%
	Total		100%

The stalker in 'Can I Tell You a Secret?' employs specific illocutionary acts, which are demonstrated in the above table, showcasing a deliberate use of different speech acts. The data suggests that the stalker primarily uses directive and assertive illocutionary types. More precisely, directive behaviours are the most employed, with a total of 37 instances, accounting for 49.3% of the stalker's

statements. In addition, the stalker frequently employs assertive actions, with a total of 28 occurrences representing 37.3% of their verbal expressions. Expressive acts are infrequently used, with only 7 instances documented, making up 9.3% of the encounters. Commissive acts are few, accounting for only 3 instances, or 4% of the overall illocutionary acts. Significantly, the stalker's communication completely lacks declaration acts, highlighting a complete absence of such acts among all the illocutionary acts recorded. To conclude, even though the series is predominately assertive and expressive, we can infer from the data that the stalker's communication tactics are more directive.

Intended Effects of Stalker's Dialogues

In the Netflix docuseries "Can I Tell You a Secret?", stalker dialogues primarily employ directives, a dominant form of illocutionary act, to manipulate and control the victim. This usage aligns with John Searle's classification of speech acts, which includes directives aimed at causing the listener to take some action (Searle, 1969). The stalker's repeated use of this speech act type reflects a strategic approach to exert power and induce compliance from the victim.

Dialogue min 4.58 – 8.37

No	Speaker	Line of Dialogue	Illocutionary Act
1.	Zoe	"Then, around a week later, I got a message through on Snapchat..."	Assertive
2.	Zoe	"...which was a little bit more unusual because Snapchat isn't really a platform I ever use,"	Assertive
3.	Zoe	"...and it comes through from a pool photographer."	Assertive
4.	Stalker	"Hey."	Expressive
5.	Stalker	"Hiya."	Expressive
6.	Zoe	"It was, 'Would you be interested in working together?'"	Directive
7.	Stalker	"Can I tell you a secret?"	Directive
8.	Zoe	"'You can trust me.'"	Commissive
9.	Stalker	"Promise you'll keep this between us."	Directive
10.	Zoe	"'What is it? Yeah, tell me what's happened?'"	Directive
11.	Zoe	"'What do you know?'"	Directive
12.	Stalker	"If I confess, it would spoil our friendship."	Assertive
13.	Zoe	"I had that fear in me of, like, 'Oh God. What am I going to find out?'"	Expressive
14.	Zoe	"I'm about to hear some information that's going to really rock me."	Assertive

The stalker used the directive "Can I tell you a secret?" (as shown in dialogue no. 7) to request confidentiality and also create a sense of intrigue and

trust. In this situation, the victim 'Zoe' puts her trust in the stalker by replying "You can trust me" (dialogue 8). It shows that she established her trust and opened for secrecy. The stalker then used another directive "Promise you'll keep this between us" (dialogue 9) to enforce secrecy, further manipulating Zoe into a position of trust, making Zoe expressed her curiosity and interested in the secret by saying "What is it? Yeah, tell me what's happened?" and "What do you know?" (dialogue 10 and 11). From dialogues no. 7 to 11, it is seen that the directives "Can I tell you a secret?" and "Promise you'll keep this between us" can be assumed that it is not merely a request for confidentiality. Instead, they are constructed to establish a controlled environment where the victim trusts the stalker. This manipulation of trust is a key tactic in relational control and is effective in creating an illusion of intimacy (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000). Such an approach is instrumental in isolating the victim from others by making the interactions seem exclusive and privileged.

The complex range of illocutionary acts used by the stalker includes the assertive, commissive, and expressive, which serve a specific role in the manipulation and control the victim. These acts define what type of interaction will take place and, at the same time, allow the stalker to contribute something that benefits his psychological dominance. Assertive functions as threats under the appearance of future actions, as shown in dialogue no. 12 "If I confess, it would spoil our friendship." This utterance instills fear and anxiety in Zoe. The psychological impact of this statement can lead to a state of continuous fear and anxiety, effectively paralyzing the victim's ability to resist or seek help (Herman, 1992). This is strengthened by Zoe's following statements "I had that fear in me of, like, 'Oh God. What am I going to find out?'" and "I'm about to hear some information that's going to really rock me" (Dialogue no. 13 and 14).

Assertive are also used effectively by the stalker to shape the victim's perception of reality.

Statements such as "Your name was mentioned" or "It was yesterday when I made the fake Facebook of you" introduce so-called facts into the discourse. This type of illocutionary act is powerful in a stalking context, as it creates a sense of the stalker's omnipresence and deep knowledge of the victim's life, thereby heightening feelings of vulnerability and exposure.

The introduction of these 'facts' can lead the victim to question their own privacy and safety, increasing their isolation and paranoia (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Transitioning from the factual to the promissory, commissive plays a crucial role in the stalker's linguistic arsenal. These include threats of future actions, such as "I'm going to come and get you" and "I'll find you, and you'll get hurt."

Commissive extend the stalker's influence into the future, maintaining a continual threat that keeps the victim anxious about what might happen next. This constant anticipation of action ensures that the stalker retains control over the victim's emotional state, perpetuating fear and submission (Searle, 1969).

On the emotional front, expressive reveals the stalker's psychological state and manipulates the emotional tone of the interactions. Expressions like "Thanks, beautiful" or "Oh God, here we go" serve to manipulate the victim's emotions, fostering a confusing blend of intimacy and shared experiences. These utterances can make the stalker appear more human and relatable, which might confuse the

victim and blur the lines between affection and manipulation, deepening the psychological entanglement (J. L. Austin, 1962).

The absence of declarations acts further reflects the stalker's cautious and calculated communication strategy, avoiding any form of speech that might legally or socially bind them to their statements or actions. This strategic communication behaviour enables the stalker to maneuver within the interaction space freely, maintaining flexibility and avoiding potential repercussions.

Together, these illocutionary acts create a multi-layered strategy of communication that underscores the stalker's manipulative prowess. Through directives, the stalker manipulates and controls the victim. Through assertiveness, the stalker sets the informational backdrop; commissive ensures ongoing control through promised actions; and expressive manipulates the emotional undercurrents. This orchestrated use of language not only enhances the stalker's control but also profoundly impacts the victim's psychological well-being and perception of safety, illustrating the potent interplay between language and power in the dynamics of stalking.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, LIMITATION, AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study shows that the dominant illocutionary act used by the stalker is directive acts. A directive is performed extensively throughout the stalker's interactions to command, request, or suggest actions that the victim should undertake. This act is to manipulate the victim into a position of obligation and secrecy. The use of directives serves as a primary tool for exerting control and driving the narrative forward according to the stalker's manipulative agenda. Through assertive, the stalker asserts control by stating supposed facts that instill fear or doubt—like revealing actions the victim was unaware of, which makes the victim feel observed and vulnerable. Commissives commit the stalker to future actions, keeping the victim in a state of constant apprehension about potential threats. Expressive is used to foster an illusion of emotional connection or shared sentiment, complicating the victim's emotional response and blurring the lines between coercion and care.

Implication

The implications of the research into the illocutionary acts used by the stalker in the Netflix docuseries "Can I Tell You a Secret?" are significant and can enhance understanding of communication strategies within abusive or manipulative relationships in several key areas of communication and social psychology. The study implies that different types of illocutionary acts used depict the strategy to control and manipulate others. In other words, it illustrates how language can be a weapon to instill fear and confusion. The implications extend into the field of forensic linguistics, where the analysis of language use in legal contexts can be crucial for understanding criminal behavior, especially in cases of stalking or harassment. The nuanced analysis of illocutionary acts offers a methodology for dissecting threatening or manipulative communication in legal investigations and proceedings.

Suggestion

The Future studies could involve empirical studies that collect data from real stalking cases, analyzing communication patterns between stalkers and

victims. This could validate the theoretical findings with practical evidence. Besides, the next studies could also conduct a cross-cultural analysis by exploring illocutionary acts in stalking across different cultures and languages. It could provide insights into universal and culture-specific communication strategies used by stalkers. This would broaden the applicability of the findings.

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