



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Illocutionary Acts in Iconic Musicals: A Pragmatic Study of Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables

Marsya Purnanditha Kusuma¹,

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI

Jalan Nangka No. 58 Jakarta Selatan

Rifari Baron²,

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI

Jalan Nangka No. 58 Jakarta Selatan

Nurjanah³,

Universitas Indraprasta PGRI

Jalan Nangka No. 58 Jakarta Selatan

e-mail: marsyapurnanditha@gmail.com ¹

e-mail: rifaribaron1@gmail.com ²

e-mail: nurjanah3434@gmail.com ³

Volume 7, Issue 3,
December 2024 – March 2025
p-ISSN: 2615-8671
e-ISSN: 2615-868X

Received: 28-02-2025

Revised: 21-04-2025

Accepted: 21-04-2025

Corresponding Author:
Marsya Purnanditha Kusuma
marsyapurnanditha@gmail.com

Handling Editor:
Shinta

DOI:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/inference.v7i3.28205>

Published by:
Universitas Indraprasta PGRI



Licensed under a Creative
Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-
NoDerivatives 4.0
International License

Abstract: This study aims to determine: 1) The social and contextual aspects of each story influencing the illocutionary behaviors in Les Misérables and Jesus Christ Superstar, 2) The kinds of conversational implicature and politeness methods do the characters in Les Misérables and Jesus Christ Superstar use to negotiate power dynamics and interpersonal problems, and 3) The pragmatic force of illocutionary acts strengthened in the dialogue of Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables. The research approach used is qualitative descriptive. The research subjects are the drama scripts. The findings of this study reveal that there is a significant difference between Judas and Valjean illocutionary acts that lead to distinctive the social and contextual aspect. Moreover, there is a pivotal similarity between Judas and Valjean to navigate the power dynamics and interpersonal conflicts. At last, there is a pragmatic force between Judas Iscariot and Jean Valjean to communicate complex emotional and social dynamics.

Keywords: speech acts; pragmatics; musical drama; illocutionary acts

Tindakan Ilokusi dalam Musik Ikonik: Studi Pragmatis tentang Superstar Yesus Kristus dan Les Misérables

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan: 1) Aspek sosial dan kontekstual dari setiap cerita yang memengaruhi perilaku ilokusi dalam Les Misérables dan Jesus Christ Superstar, 2) Jenis implikatur percakapan dan metode kesantunan yang digunakan karakter dalam Les Misérables dan Jesus Christ Superstar untuk menegosiasikan dinamika kekuasaan dan masalah interpersonal, dan 3) Kekuatan pragmatik dari tindakan ilokusi yang diperkuat dalam dialog Jesus Christ Superstar dan Les Misérables. Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Subjek penelitian adalah naskah drama. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa ada perbedaan yang signifikan antara tindakan ilokusi Yudas dan Valjean yang mengarah pada aspek sosial dan kontekstual yang khas. Selain itu, ada kesamaan penting antara Yudas dan Valjean untuk menavigasi dinamika kekuasaan dan konflik interpersonal. Akhirnya, ada kekuatan pragmatik antara Yudas Iskariot dan Jean Valjean untuk mengomunikasikan dinamika emosional dan sosial yang kompleks.

Kata kunci: tindak tutur; kajian pragmatik; drama musikal; tindak tutur ilokusi

Introduction

Language plays a pivotal role in communication. It aligns with Soeparno (Mumrikoh et al., 2019); human and language are relatable. Language is required for both oral and written communication media. Language facilitates the sharing of collective objectives and enables emotional expression, complex idea exploration, cultural and historical preservation, and entertainment. Language is expressed through literary texts, and understanding these texts involves recognizing certain regularities (Hundarenko, 2019). Likewise, literary texts that use multiple literary devices often showcase the creative potential of language. According to Mariani, Mu'in, & Al Arief (2019), whereas all human dialects share specific core highlights and standards, there are critical differences and variety in how dialects are organized and utilized. These differing qualities reflect the complexity and richness of human dialect and culture.

Linguistics is essential in applying language. Linguistics has explicit application to all language speakers, and it is the study of language in all its forms (Rahmawati et al., 2019). Therefore, comprehensive linguistics is demanded to ensure an unmistakable comprehension of language interpretation. Linguistics is a science that studies the procedures for using language. It is in line with (Mariani et al., 2019) that linguistics is the science of language, delving into phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Moreover, the syntax analysis stage of a compiler will take a string of tokens created by the lexer. From this, a sentence structure tree for the string can be built by determining the string from the beginning image of the linguistic use (Mogensen, 2024).

Pragmatic is one of the linguistics branches that considers how linguistics explains human speech and its influence. Indirect speech, where the intended meaning differs from the literal meaning of the spoken sentence, is commonly employed in conversation. Consequently, researchers analyze speech acts and context in this research. Communication involves symbols, words, sentences, speech, and behavior. Pragmatics assists in determining the meaning of the context between the speaker and the listener. In pragmatic inquiry, context is crucial because it relates to the assumed background information shared by both the speaker and the listener, which determines how the listener perceives the speaker's meaning when they utter. In reality, various aspects of pragmatics have been explored, including deixis, distance, reference, inference, presupposition and entailment, interaction and etiquette, speech act and event, and mode. However, the researchers' sole priority here is the speech act. According to Mono (2018), pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that concentrates on the relationship between speech situations and language. As noted by Supriyadi (2020), comprehending spoken utterances involves the listener (speech partner) employing heuristic analysis strategies, whereas the speaker uses a means-end approach. By proposing hypotheses and then evaluating them using available data, the heuristic approach aims to determine the pragmatic force of a speech.

A speech act is the action performed by a speaker's utterance. It is in line with Yule, as cited in Mufiah and Rahman (2018:126), "speech acts consist of three related acts; locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts." The first is a locutionary act, which is the essential act of utterance or producing a meaningful linguistic expression. Primarily, we produce utterances not just to form well-formed sentences, but to achieve a purpose. We form an utterance with some function in mind. The second dimension is the Illocutionary act, which represents the communicative force of an utterance. We create utterances with a function, intending them to have an effect. This is the third dimension, the perlocutionary act.

Illocutionary acts relate to the function of words in conveying the speaker's specific intention. Illocutionary acts are a primary focus in pragmatic studies because they directly concern the intended meaning and effect of utterances. Each category of illocutionary acts mentioned above has a distinctive meaning and is used in specific contexts. The first is representative, expressing the speaker's belief about the truth of a proposition. The second type is directive, in which the speaker encourages the listener to do something. The third type, commissive, commits the speaker to a future action. The fourth is expressive, conveying the speaker's feelings about a situation. The final one is

declarative; the utterance alters the world. Illocutionary acts are frequently employed in literature, including songs, poetry, films, and other media.

Conducting research on illocutionary acts applied in drama musicals such as Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables perhaps brings significantly benefits to English language learning, especially in the context of drama education at high schools. Drama can be an educational strategy that allows students to interact with language in actual contexts by having them listen, speak, and understand dialogues. By exploring the pragmatic features of illocutionary acts, students become better equipped to recognize the inferred meanings, emotions, and intentions behind the words. This aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes the pragmatic use of language in addition to grammatical structures. Consequently, this approach significantly contributes to the development of English speaking and listening abilities (Watson, 2020). High school students participate in annual musical dramas, like this year's Jesus Christ Superstar, which offer an immersive learning setting where language and performance meet, promoting language proficiency and cultural awareness.

Additionally, exploring musicals like Jesus Christ Superstar within pragmatic studies encourages critical thinking about how English is used to perform illocutionary acts such as demanding, interrogating, and claiming. The theatrical and emotional elements of musicals require students to understand language used in diverse settings, from biblical allusions to the revolutionary feelings in Les Misérables. This exposure deepens their understanding of how language functions beyond literal meaning and improves their appreciation of both literary and conversational English (Smith, 2019). Students who actively participate in drama gain confidence in their ability to communicate in English, which is a necessary skill in both social and academic contexts.

Research Method

This research employs a qualitative approach. The researcher analyzed the types of illocutionary acts performed in the Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables drama musicals. Moreover, the research analyzed the character development of Judas Iscariot and Jean Valjean. Qualitative research aims to provide comprehensive descriptions of the research topic. In fact, this research approach emphasizes meaning and comprehension rather than numerical data. Therefore, this research focuses on discussing illocutionary act types and character development.

This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach, involving the analysis and interpretation of relevant materials (e.g., letters, textbooks, movies, drama scripts, reports). Specifically, this research applies document or content analysis, using the drama scripts of Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables as the primary written content. The intention of this research was to analyze illocutionary acts and character development as portrayed in the scripts of the Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables musicals. Therefore, the researcher focused on analyzing the utterances of two specific characters, Judas Iscariot and Jean Valjean, classifying their illocutionary acts based on established theories. The research process involved the following steps:

1. **Comprehending the Script:** The research began by downloading the scripts for Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables from the internet. The researcher then read the scripts thoroughly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dialogue.
2. **Watching the Drama Musical:** The researcher attended performances of Jesus Christ Superstar and Les Misérables conducted by Gonzaga High School Jakarta. This allowed the researcher to analyze the actors' performances and how they contributed to character development.
3. **Compiling the Script Analysis:** The researcher examined the dialogues within the scripts, focusing on their role in character development.
4. **Gathering the Character's Utterances:** The utterances of Judas and Valjean were collected from the scripts. The researcher sorted these dialogues based on types of illocutionary acts to identify patterns in their usage.

5. Interpreting the Character's Utterances: The researcher created a table to classify each character's utterances according to illocutionary act types. Additionally, the researcher interpreted these utterances based on relevant pragmatic theories.

Results and Discussion

The research results and discussion aim to identify the illocutionary acts used by Judas Iscariot and Jean Valjean. The researcher applied the theory of illocutionary acts developed by Searle (1969). According to Searle (1969), utterances can be classified into five types: representative, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. The results indicate that 61 illocutionary acts were identified for Judas Iscariot (Table 1) and 58 were identified for Jean Valjean (Table 2). Expressive acts were most frequently used by Judas Iscariot (N=17, 27.9%). In contrast, Directive acts were most frequently used by Jean Valjean (N=20, 34.5%). The detailed data are shown in the tables below.

Table 1 Illocutionary Acts by Judas

No	Illocutionary Act Types	Frequency	Percentage
1	Representative Act	13	21.31%
2	Directive Act	15	24.59%
3	Expressive Act	17	27.86%
4	Commissive Act	13	21.31%
5	Declarative Act	3	4.91%
Total		61	100%

Table 2 Illocutionary Acts by Jean

No	Illocutionary Act Types	Frequency	Percentage (Recalculated for N=58)
1	Representative Act	15	25.86%
2	Directive Act	20	34.48%
3	Expressive Act	5	8.62%
4	Commissive Act	10	17.24%
5	Declarative Act	8	13.79%
Total		58	100%

In the scripts, the researcher classified the utterances of Judas Iscariot and Jean Valjean into the five types of illocutionary acts. The classification, consisting of representative, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative acts, is detailed below:

1. Representative Act
Representative acts convey the speaker's belief about the truth of a proposition; they state facts, assert, conclude, describe, etc. Representative acts are realized through words, phrases, and sentences. Based on the research, both Judas Iscariot and Jean Valjean, the main characters studied, frequently used representative acts.
2. Directive Act
According to Searle (1969), directive acts as a kind of illocutionary act in which the speaker's main goal is to persuade the listener to do a particular action. Judas Iscariot revealed 15 (24,59%) directive statements from 58 statements in the drama musical script and Jean Valjean revealed 20 (32,25%) directive states from 61 statements These acts are distinguished by their world-to-

word direction of fit, which means that the speaker intends for the listener's actions to change the world as a result of their words. All directives which might be pleas, instructions, suggestions, or advice require the speaker to have faith in the listener's ability and willingness to follow through on the action.

3. Expressive Act

Expressive acts have fundamental objectives to express emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, or gratitude. For example, "I'm so sorry for you!" conveys the speaker's sadness. Judas Iscariot revealed 17 (27,86%) expressive statements from 58 statements in the drama musical script and Jean Valjean revealed 5 (8.06%) expressive states from 61 statements.

4. Commissive Act

According to Searle (1969) Commissive acts are a kind of illocutionary act in which the speaker commits to a particular path of conduct. Judas Iscariot revealed 13 (21,31%) commissive statements from 58 statements in the drama musical script and Jean Valjean revealed 10 (16,12%) commissive states from 61 statements. These actions impose a duty on the individual who speaks to carry out the desired or planned action at a later time. Commissive acts are acts that involve making promises, vows, offers, and pledges. Commissive acts are distinguished by their world-to-word direction of fit, which denotes that an individual intends to alter the world by taking a certain action. The speaker must sincerely intend to follow through on the commitment stated in order to meet the sincerity requirement for commissives.

5. Declarative Act

According to Searle (1969), declarative acts are a type of illocutionary acts, according to John Searle, in which an individual alters the outside environment by the mere act of speaking. Judas Iscariot revealed 3 (4,91%) declaration statements from 58 statements in the drama musical script and Jean Valjean revealed 8 (12,90%) declaration states from 61 statements. When done correctly, these acts of speech accomplish their intended result only because the individual speaking possesses the necessary power or standing. Declarative acts are distinguished by their simultaneous direction of fit—that is, they must equally align the statements of the speaker and the condition of the world, both whole-to-word and word-to-world.

The social and contextual aspects of both *Les Misérables* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* heavily influence the illocutionary behaviors of Jean Valjean and Judas Iscariot. Valjean's commissive and declarative acts are shaped by his ongoing quest for redemption within a rigid social structure, while Judas's directive and constative acts are informed by his fear and moral judgment within the precarious context of Jesus's rising fame. Through the lens of Speech Act Theory, Context Theory, and Pragmatic Linguistics, we can see how each character's speech is a reflection of both personal intention and the broader social and political realities they inhabit. Both Jean Valjean and Judas Iscariot strategically use conversational implicature and politeness methods to navigate the power dynamics and interpersonal conflicts in their respective stories. Valjean uses implicature to assert moral superiority without overtly challenging authority, while his politeness strategies reflect his efforts to maintain dignity and care in his interactions with others. Judas, on the other hand, uses implicature to subtly voice dissent and concern, while his politeness strategies reflect his internal conflict and desire to maintain his relationship with Jesus. Through these linguistic strategies, the characters negotiate complex social and interpersonal dynamics, revealing the intricate role of language in their power struggles.

The analysis of illocutionary acts used by Judas Iscariot in *Jesus Christ Superstar* and Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables* reveals distinct linguistic profiles, offering insights into their characters and narrative functions. The classification, based on Searle's (1969) taxonomy, highlights significant differences in how these characters use language to interact with their world and others. The most frequent illocutionary act type for Judas was Expressive (27.9%), encompassing expressions of feelings, attitudes, pain, or approval. This suggests a character whose language is heavily coloured by emotion and internal state. His frequent use of Expressives aligns with interpretations of Judas as

deeply conflicted, tormented, and reactive. Following closely are Directives (24.6%), indicating attempts to influence others' actions (e.g., advising, warning, perhaps pleading), and Representatives (21.3%) and Commissives (21.3%), showing he also engages in stating facts/beliefs and making commitments or threats. His relatively high use of Commissives might reflect pivotal moments involving promises or vows. The rarity of Declaratives (4.9%) suggests he seldom occupies a position where his words alone can change the state of affairs. Overall, Judas's profile is that of an emotionally driven character who attempts to influence events and makes significant commitments, perhaps reflecting his tragic trajectory.

In stark contrast, Jean Valjean's most dominant illocutionary act type was Directive (34.5%). This heavy reliance on directives (commands, requests, advice) portrays Valjean as a character who frequently seeks to guide, control, or influence the actions of others. This fits his various roles throughout the musical – a man of action, a mayor (M. Madeleine), a protector, and an adoptive father. His second most common act was Representative (25.9%), used for stating facts, describing situations, or asserting beliefs, showing a focus on conveying information. While less dominant, his use of Commissives (17.2%) reflects his character arc involving significant promises and lifelong commitments (e.g., to Fantine, Cosette). Notably, Valjean uses Declaratives (13.8%) more often than Judas, likely reflecting moments where he holds positions of authority (like mayor) allowing him to enact change through speech (e.g., pardoning someone, making official pronouncements). Strikingly, Expressives are Valjean's least frequent act type (8.6%), suggesting his language is less focused on outwardly expressing his feelings compared to Judas. While experiencing immense internal turmoil, his communication style appears more directed towards action, assertion, and commitment than emotional display.

The differing frequencies reveal distinct communicative strategies. Judas's language is tinged with emotion (Expressives), while Valjean's is primarily action-oriented (Directives). Both characters make commitments (Commissives) and state facts (Representatives), but the balance differs. Valjean's higher use of Directives and Declaratives may reflect his agency and positions of relative power at points in the narrative, whereas Judas's high use of Expressives highlights his internal conflict and emotional responses. These linguistic patterns quantitatively support common interpretations of these complex characters, demonstrating how analysing illocutionary acts can provide empirical evidence for character study within dramatic texts.

Conclusions

In this study, the analysis of illocutionary acts in *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Les Misérables* has revealed the significant role of language in shaping the characters' interpersonal dynamics and social struggles. Through the application of Speech Act Theory, it became evident that Jean Valjean and Judas Iscariot employ various illocutionary acts, such as directives, commissives, and expressives, to convey their internal conflicts and navigate the power dynamics within their respective narratives. Their speech acts are shaped by the specific social contexts in which they operate, reflecting the profound influence of external pressures on their language choices.

The integration of Conversational Implicature, Politeness Theory, and Metaphor Theory has further strengthened the understanding of how Valjean and Judas manipulate language to achieve their goals. Conversational implicature allowed both characters to imply meanings beyond the literal, while politeness strategies helped them to mitigate potential face-threatening acts. Moreover, the use of conceptual metaphors added a deeper layer of meaning to their speech, enriching the illocutionary acts by enhancing their emotional and pragmatic force. These linguistic strategies not only contribute to the development of each character but also highlight the richness of the musicals' dialogue. Overall, this study shows that illocutionary behaviors are effective tools for communicating personal transformation, ethical problems, and social opposition. Jean Valjean and Judas Iscariot's speech acts are intrinsically connected to their histories, expressing their internal and external obstacles. This

study's analysis of their dialogue through the lens of pragmatic linguistics has produced a greater understanding of how language acts as both a personal and social force in these legendary musicals.

References

- Akbarova, M., Tursunova, G., & Abdunazarov, Z. (2020). Pedagogical approaches to the formation of musical literacy of students in the system of Higher Education. *European Journal of Arts*, (1), 125–128.
- Baok, L. F. S. B., Jayantini, I. G. A. S. R., & Santika, I. D. A. D. M. (2021). The analysis of illocutionary act in Hillary Clinton's speech. *ELYSIAN JOURNAL: English Literature, Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 1(2), 98–107.
- Bessadet, L. (2022). Drama-based approach in English language teaching. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 13. (Note: Issue number and page range were missing in the original list).
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hundarenko, O. (2019). Challenges of teaching academic writing skills in ESL classroom (based on international teaching experience). *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională*, 11(4), 70–83.
<https://www.google.com/search?q=https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/158>
- Hutajulu, F. S. L., & Herman, H. (2019). Analysis of illocutionary act in the movie “You Are My Home” English subtitle. *Journal of English Educational Study (JEES)*, 2(1), 29–36.
- Mariani, N., Mu'in, F., & Al Arief, Y. (2019). *An Introduction to Linguistics*. Universitas Lambung Mangkurat.
- Mufiah, N. S., & Rahman, M. Y. N. (2018). Speech acts analysis of Donald Trump's speech. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 1(2), 125–132.
- Mumrikoh, L., Agustina, E., & Kuspiyah, H. R. (2019). A Syntactic Analysis on Sentences Found in the English Textbook for the Tenth Grade Students Entitled “Bahasa Inggris Kelas X” (2017 revised edition) Published by Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia. *Channing: Journal of English Language Education and Literature*, 4(2), 38–49.
- Rachmawati, R., & Al Arif, T. Z. Z. (2019, January). The Development Of Discourse Analysis Text Book For English Students. In *International Seminar and Annual Meeting BKS-PTN Wilayah Barat* (Vol. 1, No. 1).
- Searle, J. R. (1969). Austin on locutionary and illocutionary acts. *The Philosophical Review*, 77(4), 405–424.
- Supriyadi, S. (2022). Effectiveness of the Use of Illocution for Female Teachers in Class Management Processes in Smk Negeri 2 Jember. *Pancaran Pendidikan*, 11(1).