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A Speech Act Analysis of Jim Preston and Aurora Lane in *Passengers*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the types and frequency of speech acts used by the main characters, Jim Preston and Aurora Lane, in the film *Passengers*. Drawing on Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts, the research aims to identify and categorize the speech acts to uncover patterns in character interaction. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, analyzing 873 utterances transcribed from the film. Results indicate that both protagonists predominantly used representatives (Jim: 48.2%; Aurora: 46.8%) and directives (Jim: 30.6%; Aurora: 31.8%). Commisives and expressives occurred less frequently, and declaratives were rare. These findings suggest that representative and directive speech acts are central to the characters' dialogue, reflecting their attempts to convey information and exert influence within the narrative. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of pragmatics in cinematic discourse and offers insights relevant to the analysis of language use in fictional texts.

Keywords: Speech acts, pragmatics, film dialogue, Searle's taxonomy, *Passengers*

1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental medium for expressing thoughts, intentions, and emotions. Mercer (2002) describes language as "a tool for carrying out our joint intellectual activity, a distinctive human inheritance designed to serve the practical and social needs of individuals and communities." The systematic study of language, or linguistics, includes branches such as morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Among these, pragmatics focuses on how context influences meaning and how utterances function as actions.

Speech act theory, pioneered by Austin (1975) and further developed by Searle (1976), provides a framework for analyzing the performative functions of language. According to this perspective, speakers not only convey information but also perform acts such as requesting, promising, or declaring. These functions are especially relevant in film narratives, where dialogue advances the plot and reveals character relationships.

Passengers (2016) is a science fiction film that tells the story of two passengers who awaken prematurely during interstellar travel. This study investigates the speech acts used by the protagonists, Jim Preston and Aurora Lane, aiming to categorize their utterances and explore how speech acts reflect their interaction and development throughout the film.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech Act Theory

Austin (1975) introduced the concept that to say something is often to do something, coining the term "speech act." He distinguished between three acts performed when uttering a sentence: locutionary acts (producing a meaningful utterance), illocutionary acts (performing an action such as requesting or promising), and perlocutionary acts (producing effects on the hearer). Building on Austin's work, Searle (1976) proposed a more systematic classification of illocutionary acts:

- **Representatives:** Assert or describe a state of affairs.
- **Directives:** Attempt to get the hearer to do something.
- **Commisives:** Commit the speaker to a future course of action.
- **Expressives:** Express the speaker's psychological state.
- **Declaratives:** Bring about change in institutional reality through their utterance.

This classification remains influential in pragmatic analysis across various contexts, including literary and cinematic discourse.

2.2 Speech Acts in Film

Film dialogue functions not only to convey narrative information but also to create relationships, express emotions, and advance plot developments (Richardson, 2010). Prior studies, such as Kurniati (2012), have applied speech act theory to analyze short stories and other fictional texts, demonstrating that pragmatic analysis can reveal patterns of communication and character dynamics.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to categorize and analyze speech acts used by the two main characters in *Passengers*.

3.2 Data Collection

The data consisted of all utterances produced by Jim Preston and Aurora Lane, transcribed from the film. A total of 873 utterances were identified: 461 from Jim and 412 from Aurora.

3.3 Data Analysis

Each utterance was classified based on Searle's (1976) taxonomy into one of five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The frequency and percentage of each category were calculated to compare patterns between the two characters.

4. Results

4.1 Speech Acts by Jim Preston

Among the 461 utterances by Jim Preston:

- Representatives: 222 (48.2%)
- Directives: 141 (30.6%)
- Expressives: 78 (16.9%)
- Commissives: 20 (4.3%)
- Declaratives: 0 (0%)

Representatives were the most frequent, indicating Jim's focus on stating facts and conveying information.

4.2 Speech Acts by Aurora Lane

Among the 412 utterances by Aurora Lane:

- Representatives: 193 (46.8%)
- Directives: 131 (31.8%)
- Expressives: 73 (17.7%)
- Commissives: 14 (3.4%)
- Declaratives: 1 (0.3%)

Aurora also predominantly used representatives and directives, with very limited use of declaratives.

4.3 Comparison of Speech Act Use

The data show similar patterns in the speech of both characters, with representatives and directives accounting for the majority of utterances. Although Jim produced more utterances overall, the proportional distribution of speech acts was comparable. Declaratives were nearly absent, reflecting the characters' limited institutional authority within the narrative.

5. Discussion

The prevalence of representatives suggests that much of the characters' dialogue serves to describe, assert, and explain their circumstances, which is consistent with a narrative centered on survival and problem-solving. The frequent use of directives highlights their attempts to influence each other's actions, while the lower frequency of commissives and expressives indicates a more restrained emotional commitment or self-disclosure in many scenes.

The near absence of declaratives aligns with the narrative context, as neither character holds institutional power to perform declarations that alter social reality (e.g., pronouncements, legal actions). These findings demonstrate how speech act patterns in film dialogue can reflect characters' goals and limitations within the story.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed the speech acts of Jim Preston and Aurora Lane in *Passengers*, revealing that representatives and directives constitute the majority of their dialogue. The findings illustrate the pragmatic functions of film dialogue in constructing narrative, expressing interpersonal dynamics, and advancing plot development. Future research could apply similar analyses to other film genres or examine cross-cultural differences in cinematic speech acts.

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