

## ENCOURAGING ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS IN THE SONG LYRICS OF THE GREATEST SHOWMAN MOVIE BY MICHAEL GRACEY

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### ABSTRACT

The lyrics of a song are not just a collection of beautiful words; they also serve as a form of communication that can carry pragmatic meanings, including speech acts that encourage. This research aims to identify and analyze illocutionary acts with encouraging functions in the lyrics of the movie *The Greatest Showman*. The encouraging function is understood as a type of utterance that offers support, enthusiasm, and motivation to the interlocutor or listener. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, using the speech act theory from Searle (1970) and Searle & Vanderveken (1985) as the basis for classification. The classification includes five types of speech acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The data consist of lyrics collected from nine songs in the film, analyzed in the context of speech events, propositional content, and the effects of the utterances. The results indicate that the encouraging function in the song lyrics can manifest through various types of speech acts, not only in the form of explicit invitations but also through personal statements, commitments, and emotional expressions. Thus, the song lyrics in this movie serve not only as entertainment but also as a practical and pragmatic motivational tool.

**Keywords:** *encouraging; illocutionary; pragmatic; song lyrics; speech act; The Greatest Showman*

### INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a communication tool in human life. In its use, communication occurs not only through direct interaction but also via media, one of which is music. Music has the ability to convey messages emotionally and create atmosphere in various settings, including movies. It plays a crucial role in films, especially in musical movies. Song lyrics often contain messages that motivate, touch, and even shape characters and storylines. Lyrics are not just a series of beautifully arranged words but also include speech acts that serve pragmatic functions (Safitri et al., 2021). This means that every word in the lyrics can be a linguistic action that influences the listener.

Additionally, songs can be viewed as mini literary works, where language is combined with melody to evoke emotions. Songs can touch the heart and inspire the listener's spirit, even motivating someone to act or change (Jarassri & Phennapha, 2020). One common type of speech found in song lyrics is encouragement, which is positive reinforcement. According to the Collins English Dictionary (2025), to encourage means to give hope or confidence to someone. This demonstrates that communication through songs can serve as a means to convey supportive messages with a profound emotional impact.

In the context of pragmatics, the relevant way to analyze encouraging speech is through the speech act theory developed by Austin (2020) and refined by Searle (1970). They argued that when someone speaks, they not only say something but also do something through their speech. Austin (2020) categorizes speech acts into three types: locution (what is said), illocution (intent and speech), and perlocution (the effect of speech). Illocutionary

speech acts are key to this pragmatic analysis because they are directly connected to the speaker's intent. Searle (1970) then classifies illocutionary acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, each with different characteristics and purposes. Encouragement is found within illocutionary speech acts and is mainly present in assertive and expressive categories.

Regarding encouragement, an encouraging illocutionary speech act is a form of communication that aims to provide support, motivation, or hope to speech partners. This type of communication occurs not only in everyday life but also in various art and entertainment settings, including song lyrics. Matsuoka et al. (2012) emphasized that encouraging behavior, both verbal and nonverbal, is crucial for supporting mental and physical recovery, especially in challenging situations. Therefore, song lyrics are a potential medium for expressing encouraging speech acts that can influence the listener's psychology.

Several prior studies have explored illocutionary speech acts in different contexts. Putri et al. (2022) analyzed comments from judges on Indonesian Idol and found that assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts mainly serve to encourage participants. Meanwhile, Jarassri & Phennapha (2020) examined song lyrics with themes of encouragement and discovered that representative speech acts are the most common, followed by directive and commissive acts. Safitri (2024), in his study of the song "*Bunda*" by Potret, also found that expressive speech acts mainly convey love and longing for mothers.

However, all three studies have limitations within their contexts. Putri et al. focus on spoken comments in reality shows, while Jarassri's research analyzes randomly selected songs, and Safitri's research examines songs with maternal emotional themes in Indonesian culture. There has been no research specifically analyzing the use of encouraging illocutionary speech acts in a sequence of songs from a musical film that are thematically and narratively integrated. This is the unique contribution of this research.

I chose the musical movie *The Greatest Showman* (2017) as the subject because it features a series of songs that align with the storyline and character traits. The movie not only showcases stunning performances but also delivers powerful messages about dreams, courage, self-acceptance, and the spirit of perseverance. Songs like "This Is Me," "A Million Dreams," and "From Now On" serve as the main tools for conveying moral and motivational messages in the film. Each song serves not only as entertainment but also as part of the characters' dialogue and conflicts, making their speech highly communicative.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to identify the types of encouraging illocutionary speech acts in the song lyrics of *The Greatest Showman* movie. Additionally, the pragmatic approach is chosen because pragmatics analyzes language use within the surrounding context of a speech event (Sukmawan, 2017, p. 4). Rohmadi (2023) emphasizes that pragmatics is the study of language that is context-dependent. Therefore, selecting this approach is highly appropriate.

The object of this research is the lyrics of the songs in the movie *The Greatest Showman* (2017), including *A Million Dreams*, *Come Alive*, *The Other Side*, *Never Enough*, *This Is Me*, *Rewrite the Stars*, *Tightrope*, *From Now On*, and *The Greatest Show*. These songs were chosen because they convey strong messages that motivate, inspire enthusiasm for life, and offer moral encouragement, all of which are relevant to the concept of *encouraging* illocutionary speech acts.

The data collection used the Simak Bebas Libat Cakap (SBLC) technique, as described by Sudaryanto (2015). The researcher listened to the song lyrics without directly engaging in the interaction. Data was gathered by listening to the movie and manually recording the lyrics. This process involved (1) selecting songs based on the theme of encouragement, (2) listening to the lyrics sung in the movie, (3) transcribing and recording lyrics that might

contain encouraging illocutionary speech acts, and (4) categorizing data according to the type of speech act and speech context.

The data analysis technique used is the pragmatic commensurate method, which combines the basic technique of separating the determining elements (PUP) with the advanced technique of comparative equating (HBS), as described by Sudaryanto (2015). The researcher analyzes each lyric to identify the encouraging illocutionary speech acts (assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative) based on the clarification provided by (Searle, 1970).

This study not only identifies speech act types based on Searle's main classification (1970), but also categorizes speech forms into sub-types based on their illocutionary propositions. Although sub-categories such as stating, predicting, or conveying beliefs are not explicitly mentioned in Searle's theory (1970), they are used to facilitate the analysis and description of speech acts in the context of song lyrics. These sub-types are organized based on the analysis of the *propositional content* and *illocutionary point* contained in Searle & Vanderveken's speech (1985).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion in this article classifies the utterances in the lyrics of the song *The Greatest Showman* based on the theory of speech acts by Searle (1970) and Searle & Vanderveken (1985), focusing on utterances that serve an encouraging function. Each utterance is analyzed considering the context, proposition content, and effects. To simplify the analysis, the data is grouped into four types of illocutionary speech acts identified: assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive.

Table 1  
Recapitulation of the Use of *Encouraging* Illocutionary Acts in Song Lyrics in the Movie *The Greatest Showman*

No	Type of speech act	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Assertive	13	35,14%
2.	Directive	11	29,73%
3.	Commissive	6	16,22%
4.	Expressive	7	18,92%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Based on the analysis of 37 speech data contained in the song lyrics of *The Greatest Showman* movie, four out of five types of illocutionary speech acts according to the classification of Bidang Searle (1970) and Searle & Vanderveken (1985), namely assertive, directive, coercive, and expressive. Assertive speech acts dominate with 13 data (35.14%), followed by directive with 11 data (29.73%), expressive with 7 data (18.92%), and commissive with 6 data (16.22%). No declarative speech acts are found in the analyzed song lyrics because the context of the lyrics does not involve intuition or formal authority that can change social status through language.

### Assertive

Assertive speech acts are used to convey something the speaker believes to be true, whether it's a belief, opinion, or statement of fact, as discussed by Searle (1970) and Searle & Vanderveken (1985). In the song lyrics from the movie *The Greatest Showman*, this type of speech act appears as statements about dreams, hopes, and self-identity. Although they are not commands, these utterances carry a strong impulse because of the power behind the statement.

- (1) **Context:** the speech event occurs when little P.T. Barnum takes young Charity around to the empty house that symbolizes Barnum's dream, he sings passionately about his dream, despite coming from a poor family. The speech event that took place involved young PT Barnum as the speaker and young Charity as his speech partner.

*"Cause every night I lie in bed  
The brightest colors fill my head  
A million dreams are keeping me awake"  
(A Million Dreams)*

The above speech shows the use of *assertive* speech acts in the form of *asserting* beliefs. In his speech "*A million dreams are keeping me awake*", the speaker reveals to the speech partner that his dreams are so strong that he is always awake in every sleep. The speaker's statement reflects confidence and hope that can motivate speech partners. By considering the context, this speech is classified as an *assertive* speech act (*assert*) and contains the spirit of *encouraging*.

- (2) **Context:** This speech takes place in the musical scene when Barnum and Charity (his future wife) sing about their hopes for the future. Despite coming from different backgrounds, they envision an ideal life that they want to achieve together.

*"They can say, they can say it all sounds crazy  
They can say, they can say I've lost my mind  
I don't care, I don't care, so call me crazy  
We can live in a world that we design."  
(A Million Dreams)*

This lyric belongs to the assertive speech act of *predicting*. Speakers convey the possibility or belief that they can create the world the way they want, this is clearly seen in the quote "*We can live in a world that we design.*" Although the form is a statement, the communicative purpose is to reinforce their vision and hope. The *encouraging* effect arises from the optimism in the speech, which encourages the listener that the future can be shaped through belief and hard work.

## Directive

Directive speech acts are speech acts that aim to influence speech partners to perform an action. According to Searle, (1970) , this type includes suggesting, requesting, commanding, inviting, and so on. In the song lyrics of the movie *The Greatest Showman*, directive speech acts appear in the form of invitations to dare to dream, rise up, and show their true selves. Although not always directly, many lyrics implicitly encourage listeners or other characters to act, so the *encouraging* effect remains strong.

- (3) **Context:** this speech event occurs when Barnum sings to a group of people who have felt excluded from society because of their physical appearance or background. Through this song, Barnum invites them to join the circus show and get out of social isolation.

*"Come alive, come alive, go and light your light let it burn so bright  
Reachin' up to the sky and it's open wide you're electrified"  
(Come Alive)*

This is a directive speech act of inviting and encouraging. Sentences such as "*come alive*" and "*let it burn so bright*" show an invitation to speech partners to start shining and believe in themselves. This speech act aims to encourage nyaa's action, which is to appear confident and accept each other's difficulties. Although delivered through a musical style, the moral message is very strong. The encouraging effect of this lyric is very prominent because it gives an emotional push for someone to rise up and show their true self.

- (4) **Context:** The lyrics are sung by Barnum to Phillip Carlyle while trying to persuade him to join the circus. It appears in the form of a *musical* dialog, in which Barnum offers Phillip a chance to get out of a boring life and promises something more free.

*"Don't you wanna get away from the same old part you gotta play?  
Cause I got what you need, so come with me and take the ride  
It'll take you to the other side"  
(The Other Side)*

This is a directive speech act of invite & persuade. Although the form is a question, its illocutionary function is to direct the speech partner to consider a new choice. In the theory of illocution Searle, (1970) and Searle & Vanderveken (1985), rhetorical questions like this can still be classified as directive because the goal is not to get an answer, but to encourage action. The encouraging effect in these lyrics lies in the encouragement to step out of the comfort zone and take risks.

### Commissive

A commissive speech act is an utterance that contains the speaker's commitment to a future action. According to Searle, (1970), this type includes promises, vows, or intentions that show the speaker's attachment to do something. In the song lyrics of the movie *The Greatest Showman*, the commissive form appears through statements that show the intention to change, commit to something, or leave old habits. This kind of speech gives an encouraging effect because it shows the ability to choose and choose and improve oneself.

- (5) **Context:** this speech event occurs after Barnum experiences a turning point in his life. He realizes that he has been chasing popularity too much and neglecting the things that really matter, such as his family and the people who support him. This song is a form of reflection and a statement of personal determination.

*"From now on these eyes will not be blinded by the lights  
From now on what's waited till tomorrow starts tonight  
Tonight  
Let this promise in me start  
Like an anthem in my heart"  
(From Now On)*

This lyric is a commissive speech act because the speaker expresses a determination to no longer be trapped by the temptations of the entertainment world. The phrase "*from now on*" indicates future time and is a marker of promise or commitment. Although it does not use the word "*I promise*" the commissive meaning is very clear, namely the determination to change. The encouraging effect arises from the strength of the utterance which provides an example that change is possible, and that one can decide to take a different direction in life. This speech not only has a personal meaning, but it can also inspire the listener to dare to make better decisions in life.

- (6) **Context:** this speech event occurs when Phillip Carlyle tries to convince Anne Wheeler to fight for their relationship. Anne feels that their relationship is impossible because of the difference in social status and pressure from the environment. This song is a *musical* dialog between the two, where Phillip conveys his belief and commitment to fight fate for their love.

*What if we rewrite the stars?  
Say you were made to be mine  
Nothing could keep us apart  
You'd be the one I was meant to find  
It's up to you, and it's up to me  
(Rewrite The Stars)*



This is a commissive speech act because it shows the speaker's commitment to the possibility of a different future. The phrases "*say you were made to be mine*" and "*you'd be the one I was meant to find*" reflect a strong intention to be together, despite external obstacles. Although these lyrics begin with a statement (what if...), the communicative purpose is to convince the speech partners to believe in the future that they themselves create. The encouraging effect arises from the strength of the speech in defying social constraints and showing a willingness to fight for love. It reinforces the spirit of courage and hope in the face of uncertainty.

### Expressive

Expressive speech acts are speech acts used to express the speaker's feelings such as pride, gratitude, disappointment, or hope (Searle, 1970; Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). In this speech act, the speaker does not intend to convey information or influence the speech partner's actions, but rather expresses his/her psychological state. In the movie *The Greatest Showman*, expressive forms appear through lyrics that voice self-acceptance and pride in their existence. Although not directive, expressiveness in these songs can still have an *encouraging* effect because it encourages listeners to feel and acknowledge their own feelings positively.

- (7) **Context:** this speech event is the climactic part of the song *This Is Me*, sung by fringe characters who have experienced rejection because of their appearance.

*When the sharpest words wanna cut me down  
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out  
I am brave, I am bruised  
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me  
(This Is Me)*

This lyric is an expressive speech act because the speaker expresses feelings of pride and courage to accept himself. The phrases "*I am brave*" and "*I'm meant to be*" are forms of emotional affirmation towards oneself. This speech does not request a response or action from others, but serves to convey the emotional and psychological state of the speaker. The *encouraging* effect is powerful because it inspires listeners to love themselves for who they are, regardless of any hurt or rejection they have experienced.

### CONCLUSION

Assertive speech acts in songs are mostly used to express beliefs, dreams, and self-identity that bring out the *encouraging* effect implicitly. Directive speech acts appear in the form of invitations, suggestions, and explicit motivation to act or change. Commissive speech acts are used to express determination and commitment to the future, both in personal and relationship contexts. Meanwhile, expressive speech acts appear in the form of expressing feelings of pride, courage, and rejection of shame or social rejection.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that *encouraging* as an illocutionary function is not limited to one particular type of speech act, but can appear in various forms of speech, both explicitly and implicitly. This shows that the motivational and affirmative power of a song depends not only on the sentence structure, but also on the emotional and propositional context of the utterance itself.

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