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## Classification of Illocutionary Acts and Cooperative Principle in Marc Forster’s Movie, A Man Called Otto

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Abstract	Article information
<p><i>This paper investigates how language functions as action within the film A Man Called Otto, directed by Marc Forster, by examining characters’ utterances through a pragmatic lens. Specifically, the study analyzes the use of illocutionary acts, as classified by Searle—representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative—as well as the application (and occasional violation) of Grice’s conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research draws on selected dialogues spoken by the main characters. The findings point to 30 instances of illocutionary acts, with directive and expressive types being the most prevalent. Additionally, 16 utterances demonstrate the relevance of cooperative principles in shaping the flow and tone of conversations. These results suggest that the film employs pragmatic strategies not only to deliver meaning but also to reflect character development and emotional depth—often through deliberate adherence to or flouting of Gricean norms.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Illocutionary acts; Cooperative principle; Speech act theory; Pragmatics; Film dialogue</p>	<p><i>Received:</i> 1 Juni 2025</p> <p><i>Revised:</i> 15 Juni 2025</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 28 Juni 2025</p>

### Introduction

Language serves not only as a vehicle for conveying information but also as a powerful tool for performing actions and shaping social relationships. Within the field of pragmatics, scholars examine how speakers use language to achieve intended meanings, often beyond the literal content of

their words. Central to this inquiry are two influential frameworks: Searle’s speech act theory, which focuses on the types of actions conveyed through utterances, and Grice’s cooperative principle, which outlines the conversational norms that allow discourse to be coherent and purposeful.

Searle's classification of illocutionary acts—comprising representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives—highlights the varied intentions speakers may have when they communicate. At the same time, Grice's maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner serve as implicit rules that interlocutors generally follow (or flout) to maintain effective communication.

This study seeks to explore how these pragmatic principles are embedded in the dialogues of *A Man Called Otto*, a film that delves into themes of grief, transformation, and human connection. By analyzing the interactions among its characters, the research aims to uncover the types of speech acts performed and the ways in which the cooperative principle is either upheld or violated.

To that end, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What types of illocutionary acts are found in the film?
2. How are Grice's cooperative maxims observed, adhered to, or flouted by the characters?

## Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the pragmatic elements present in the film *A Man Called Otto*. The primary data consisted of selected utterances spoken by characters in the film, which were transcribed and analyzed for their relevance to speech act theory and the cooperative principle. The selection of data focused specifically on dialogues that carried pragmatic significance—those that revealed communicative intent, emotional tone, or conversational strategy.

The analysis was grounded in two key theoretical frameworks:

- Searle's classification of illocutionary acts, which includes five categories—representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative.

- Grice's cooperative principle, which consists of four conversational maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

To collect the data, the researchers watched the film multiple times to ensure a comprehensive understanding of context and character interaction. Relevant utterances were identified, transcribed, and then classified according to their illocutionary function and their alignment with (or violation of) Gricean maxims. The combination of close viewing and theoretical categorization allowed for a nuanced analysis of how language is used to perform actions and manage cooperation within the narrative.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Illocutionary Acts

A total of 30 utterances were identified and categorized based on Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. The distribution of these speech acts is presented in the table below:

Type	Frequency
Directive	13
Expressive	10
Representative	4
Commissive	2
Declarative	1

*The most frequently occurring category was directive acts, with 13 instances. These utterances typically involve commands, suggestions, or instructions, often used by Otto to assert control over his environment. An example can be seen when Otto exclaims, "Put that down!", illustrating his authoritative and straightforward communication style.*

*Expressive acts appeared in 10 utterances and reflected the emotional states of characters. These included expressions of regret, gratitude, frustration, and other affective responses. Such acts are especially prominent in scenes that reveal Otto's inner transformation from isolation toward connection and empathy.*

*Representative acts, though fewer in number, served to state facts, opinions, or shared experiences. These utterances helped move the narrative forward by providing context or affirming relationships among characters.*

*Commissive acts, which were found in two instances, involved promises or commitments. Though less frequent, these acts carried significant narrative weight by highlighting changes in character intentions or future-oriented dialogue.*

*Lastly, only one declarative act was identified in the film. Despite its rarity, this act played a pivotal role in marking a significant moment in the storyline, emphasizing its functional importance despite limited frequency.*

## 2. Cooperative Principle

The analysis identified 16 utterances in the film that correspond to Grice's four conversational maxims. The distribution of these utterances is summarized in the table below:

<i>Maxim Type</i>	<i>Instances</i>
<i>Quantity</i>	5
<i>Quality</i>	4
<i>Relation</i>	4
<i>Manner</i>	3

*Among these, the maxim of quantity was most frequently observed, suggesting that characters generally provided information that was neither excessive nor insufficient. However, violations of the maxims of relation, manner, and quality were also notable and often carried specific pragmatic functions.*

*Otto, in particular, is shown to frequently flout the maxim of relation by offering responses that are irrelevant or sarcastic. These violations reflect his emotional distance and tendency to resist meaningful engagement with others, especially in the early parts of the film.*

*Similarly, violations of manner and quality—such as unclear or exaggerated statements—often serve to emphasize emotional resistance, discomfort, or even inject humor into tense interactions. These pragmatic choices are closely tied to character development and the tone of the scenes.*

*By contrast, Marisol's dialogue generally adheres to all four maxims. Her speech is*

*cooperative, relevant, and clear, which contributes to her portrayal as warm, empathetic, and socially attuned. This contrast between Otto and Marisol further highlights the function of pragmatic strategies in shaping relationships and driving the emotional arc of the narrative.*

*The findings suggest that flouting conversational maxims often aligns with the use of expressive illocutionary acts, reinforcing emotional subtext or comedic tone. In this way, the film demonstrates how deviations from cooperative norms are not communicative failures but rather intentional choices that enrich character expression and narrative depth.*

## Conclusion

The film *A Man Called Otto* showcases a rich variety of illocutionary acts and conversational strategies that serve to construct both character identity and narrative progression. Among the five categories of speech acts, directives and expressives appear most frequently, highlighting the film's emotional intensity and the evolving interpersonal dynamics among its characters. These acts are particularly instrumental in portraying Otto's transformation—from a withdrawn, irritable figure to someone capable of empathy and connection.

Equally significant is the way in which the film engages with Grice's cooperative principle. The intentional violation of conversational maxims, especially by Otto, is not random but serves specific communicative purposes—such as revealing sarcasm, emotional discomfort, or resistance to social norms. These pragmatic choices enrich the film's storytelling by adding depth and nuance to everyday dialogue.

Overall, the study affirms that applying Searle's theory of illocutionary acts and Grice's conversational maxims provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding language use in fictional discourse. Through this lens, film dialogue emerges not merely as scripted conversation, but as a complex reflection of human intention, emotion, and interaction.

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