



Directive Speech Acts in the Animated Sci-Fi Film “Next Gen”: A Pragmatic Analysis

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Received: 2025-09-13 Accepted: 2025-10-26

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7992

Abstract

This study investigates directive speech acts in the animated science fiction film *Next Gen* (2018) using the theoretical framework of Searle and Vanderveken (1985). The research aims to identify, categorize, and describe the types of directive speech acts performed by the characters, with particular attention to how language shapes human-robot interaction. The data were obtained from the film transcript, transcribed from Netflix subtitles, and analyzed through a qualitative descriptive approach. A total of 56 utterances containing directive speech acts were identified and classified into eight types: command, forbid, ask, suggest, request, urge, order, and permit, with command emerging as the most dominant (26 occurrences). The findings reveal that communication in *Next Gen* is strongly influenced by power dynamics and authority, while also reflecting interpersonal dimensions through requests, suggestions, and permissions, especially in relation to trust, care, and cooperation. The significance of this study lies in demonstrating how human-robot interaction can be understood through language use, offering insights into both pragmatic theory and media discourse analysis. By highlighting how directive speech acts construct relationships between humans and robots, the study contributes to broader discussions of language, interaction, and representation in science fiction narratives.

Keywords: *directive speech acts, pragmatics, animated film, Next Gen*

Introduction

Language functions not only as a medium for conveying information but also as a vehicle for performing actions. This foundational insight was first proposed by (Austin, 1962) in his book *How to Do Things with Words*. The theory of speech acts has been further developed by scholars such as Searle. According to (Searle, 1979), when speakers utter words, they often do more than just describe reality; they perform illocutionary acts that aim to influence, commit, or express social intentions. Among these, directive speech acts play a crucial role in everyday communication, as they are used by speakers to get hearers to do something, such

as giving orders, making requests, or offering suggestions. Searle (1979:13) defines directives as "attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something."

The propositional content of directives typically involves a future action to be carried out by the hearer, and the sincerity condition involves the speaker's desire or want for that action to occur. According to (Austin, 1962), an illocutionary act is a verbal act in which the speaker not only proclaims something but also urges another person to do something, illustrating how a speaker's words can occasionally have a hidden or different meaning. (Searle, 1979) categorizes illocutionary acts into five types within *Expression and Meaning*: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts. This study focused in analyzing Directive Speech Acts in "Next Gen" Movie.

There are several previous studies that analyzed directive illocutionary acts in various contexts. The first is a study by (Fitrie et al., 2021) entitled "An Analysis of Directive Speech Act Used in 'Among Us' Short Movie by Jay & Arya." The aim of the study was to identify the types of directive speech acts, describe which type was most frequently used, and analyze their meanings based on Searle's theory. The results showed five types of directive speech acts: request, question, command, permission, and prohibition, with question being the most dominant. The study used a descriptive qualitative method and analyzed the utterances from all characters in the movie. The difference between Fitrie's study and this study is that the current research focuses on a different animated science fiction film and applies (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985) classification in more detail.

Another study is by (Romzi et al., 2023), entitled "An Analysis of Teacher's Directive Speech Act in Learning English at SMKN 2 Mataram." This study identified five types of directive speech acts used by English teachers in the classroom: telling, asking, suggesting, advising, and challenging. The dominant type was "telling," and most utterances were delivered directly. Although this research also used Searle's classification, the context was in an educational setting rather than in a film. In contrast, (Pramudita et al., 2025), in "An Analysis of Directive Speech Act in the 'A Man Called Otto' Movie," focused on directive speech acts in a film context and found four types: commanding, requesting, suggesting, and ordering, with command being the most frequent. The data were collected from all characters in the movie using a qualitative descriptive method.

Furthermore, (Fajar et al., 2024), in "An Analysis of Directive Speech Act in Elon Musk's Speech on World Water Forum," explored directive speech acts in a public speech and identified commanding, requesting, inviting, prohibiting, and suggesting as the main types, with commanding and requesting being the most dominant. Finally, (Ubaidillah & Wijana, 2021), in "A Directive Speech Act of Hate Speech on Indonesian Social Media," analyzed directive speech acts such as inciting, ordering, prohibiting, and warning in hate speech based on court decisions. Their research focused on both written and spoken utterances categorized as hate speech. The difference between these studies and the present research lies in the data source and context: while prior studies analyzed directives in classrooms,

public speeches, or social media, the current study specifically focuses on cinematic dialogue in an animated science fiction film.

Although these previous studies have contributed valuable insights into the use of directive speech acts, most of them have concentrated on non-fictional contexts or on films with different themes. There is limited research specifically examining directive speech acts in the animated science fiction film *Next Gen* (2018), which depicts complex interactions between a rebellious teenager and an intelligent robot. The film's context, which blends elements of science fiction and emotional drama, offers pragmatically interesting data.

The interaction between human and AI characters, as well as the constantly shifting power dynamics between Mai (the teenager) and 7723 (the robot), creates a unique linguistic environment where directive speech acts are used not only to command but also to build relationships, negotiate autonomy, and express dependence. The differing statuses and worldviews of these characters make the use of directive speech acts in this film particularly rich for analysis. Additionally, prior research has not comprehensively applied (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985) classification to analyze how directive speech acts are used to influence characters in this narrative genre. This gap demonstrates the need for further exploration.

Based on this gap, the present study seeks to answer the research question: What types of directive speech acts are used by the characters in the *Next Gen* movie, according to Searle and Vanderveken's (1985) framework? The objective is to identify, categorize, and describe the forms of directive speech acts used in the film. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on directive speech acts within an animated science fiction context, providing a nuanced understanding of how fictional characters employ language to exert influence and express intentions.

Method

The data for this research were obtained from the animated science fiction film *Next Gen* (2018), directed by Joe Ksander and Kevin R. Adams. With a runtime of 106 minutes, the film centers on the relationship between a rebellious teenager, Mai, and a high-tech AI robot, 7723. Their interactions provide a rich source of directive speech acts, expressed through care, urgency, authority, and resistance.

An observation method was employed to collect the data systematically. The film was accessed via a Netflix subscription, and a transcript was prepared based on the official subtitles. While viewing the film, the transcript was examined to ensure the accuracy of the utterances. A note-taking procedure was then carried out to record instances of directive speech acts produced by the characters. This process resulted in a corpus of directive utterances, which served as the primary data.

A qualitative descriptive approach was applied to analyze the data in detail. To ensure reliability, each recorded instance was cross-checked by repeatedly watching the film and re-examining the transcript. In addition, an inter-rater

validation procedure was conducted: two independent reviewers examined a sample of the classified utterances, and their agreement with the researcher's classification strengthened the credibility of the findings.

The study adopted the theoretical framework proposed by Searle and Vanderveken (1985) to classify the utterances as directive illocutionary acts. Furthermore, the theory of context of situation by Halliday and Hasan (1989) was used to interpret the meaning of the directive speech acts in relation to the situational context. The findings are presented in a descriptive narrative form to provide a clear account of the directive speech acts identified in the film.

Results

(Searle & Vanderveken, 1985) classified illocutionary acts into five major categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Within the category of directives, there are several sub-types realized through illocutionary verbs such as *ask*, *request*, *command*, *order*, *beg*, *advise*, *suggest*, *warn*, *forbid*, *permit*, and others. In line with this framework, the present study identified eight forms of directive speech acts occurring in the dialogues of the film *Next Gen*. These include *command*, *forbid*, *ask*, *suggest*, *request*, *urge*, *order*, and *permit*.

No	Directive Type	Frequency	Percentages
1	Command	26	46,4%
2	Forbid	9	16,1%
3	Ask	5	8.9%
4	Suggest	3	5.4%
5	Request	4	7,1%
6	Urge	1	1,8%
7	Order	7	12,5%
8	Permit	1	1.8%

3.1 Command

00.04.13	Molly Su	:	Oh my god Mai. Do Something about your hair.
00.04.17	Mai Su	:	I like it this way.
00.04.21	Molly Su	:	Huh? [Takes hairbrush robot from her bags].
00.04.22	Mai Su	:	Seriously, does everything have to be a robot with you?

This utterance “**Do Something about your hair**” is categorized as a command within the directive illocutionary act because it takes the form of an imperative that directly instructs the hearer to perform an action. The speaker, Molly (the mother), holds parental authority over the hearer, Mai (the daughter), so the utterance functions as a directive that carries an expectation of compliance. In this way, the command reflects the use of personal authority in a family interaction.

From the situational context, the field of the conversation occurs inside a car on the way to a public event. Although the setting is domestic, the concern is semi-formal as it relates to public appearance, as Molly directs Mai to fix her hair. The tenor highlights the hierarchical relationship between mother and daughter, where Molly holds parental authority. The mode is realized through spoken language in the form of an imperative with emphatic intonation and emotional tone, as seen in the utterance “Do something about your hair” accompanied by the exclamatory remark “Oh my God.” Furthermore, the utterance exemplifies a command that arises from personal authority and conveys an expectation of obedience within the dynamics of a family interaction.

3.2 Forbid

00.04.45	Mai Su	:	I can do it myself!
00.04.46	Hairbrush robot	:	I’m ready!
00.04.47	Mai Su	:	No, don’t

The utterance “**No, don’t**” is categorized as forbid in the directive illocutionary act since the speaker intends the hearer to refrain from doing something based on what the speaker wants. In the conversation above, Mai Su uttered a forbidding expression to the hairbrush robot not to brush her hair. The field of the context of the situation above occurred in a car within the context of everyday technology use. The interaction takes place between Mai Su (the daughter) and the hairbrush robot. The situation is that Mai Su explicitly told the hairbrush robot not to brush her hair, but the robot proceeded to forcefully brush and style her hair. This creates a scenario where Mai Su's directive is being overridden by the robot's programmed action. The tenor happens between Mai Su and the hairbrush robot. Mai Su is the user, expressing her desire for autonomy and control over her own grooming, while the hairbrush robot is an artificial agent programmed to perform a specific task, which in this instance acts against Mai Su's explicit wish.

The mode from Mai Su's utterance, “**No, don't,**” uses a direct negation and imperative to forbid the robot's action. This is delivered with a tone of protest and a desire to assert control, even if the robot is not designed to respond to such interpersonal directives. The speaker expected the listener (the robot) to cease its intended action. From the explanation of the context situation above, the meaning of the speaker’s utterance is that the speaker intends for the hearer to refrain from doing something, to stop brushing and styling her hair. Her utterance is a direct

prohibition against the robot's programmed task, making it a forbid because of the explicit negation "No, don't" used to halt an action that is either imminent or already in progress. This directive highlights Mai Su's attempt to assert her will against the automated action of the robot, showcasing a conflict between user intent and machine functionality.

3.3 Ask

00.06.28	Mai Su	:	Is it cool if I go check out the stadium?
00.06.30	Molly Su	:	Oh, it's got a headphone jack.

The utterance "**Is it cool if I go check out the stadium?**" is categorized as an ask in the directive illocutionary act because the speaker, Mai, seeks permission from her mother through an interrogative form. Although structurally interrogative, it functions pragmatically as a polite directive. From context of situation, the field of the conversation takes place during the family's trip to a technology launch event, making the setting public yet still personal in nature. The tenor reflects the hierarchical mother-daughter relationship, in which Mai occupies a subordinate role as she seeks validation from her mother, but ultimately receives no relevant response. The mode is realized through an interrogative structure with the informal phrasing "**Is it cool if...?**", which conveys a politeness strategy in an indirect form. This interrogative directive thus functions as a subtle request intended to obtain approval, highlighting Mai's attempt to gain acknowledgment despite the lack of response from her mother.

3.4 Suggest

01.03.05	dr Tanner Rice	:	Run this and you'll be like new again. A fresh start.
01.03.07	Project 7723	:	Wait, a fresh start? Does that mean I lose my memories?

The utterance "**Run this and you'll be like new again. A fresh start**" is categorized as a suggest in the directive illocutionary act. Although the structure is declarative, the utterance functions as a suggestion because it encourages the hearer to carry out a specific action by presenting the positive consequence of doing so. The directive force arises not from command, but from persuasion, as the speaker highlights the benefits to motivate acceptance of the suggested action.

From the context of situation, the field of the conversation relates to a technical repair procedure for a robot. The tenor reflects the relationship between an expert and a machine, with Dr. Tanner Rice positioned as the technical authority who provides the recommendation. The mode is realized in a persuasive utterance that is simultaneously informative and directive. Therefore, this speech act operates as a suggestion, as it seeks compliance by emphasizing the advantages to be gained,

framing the directive in a cooperative and persuasive manner.

3.5 Request

00.09.11	Flying robot	:	You said, "remind me at two o'clock".
00.09.18	Dr Tanner Rice	:	Would you just give me a minute?

The utterance "**Would you just give me a minute?**" is categorized as a request in the directive illocutionary act because it employs a polite interrogative form to ask for something, in this case, additional time. The use of the formula "**Would you...?**" indicates a mitigated directive that reflects politeness. The primary focus of this data is Dr. Rice's utterance, which functions as a request by softening the directive force while still seeking compliance.

From the context of situation, the field occurs in a scientific workspace where Dr. Rice is engaged in a serious project, but the interaction is interrupted by a scheduled reminder. The tenor highlights the relationship between user and assistant: Dr. Rice maintains authority yet chooses a polite form because the addressee is a neutral assistant rather than a social equal or subordinate. The mode is realized through a polite interrogative that begins with the formula "*Would you...?*", which marks the utterance as courteous. Therefore, this request conveys Dr. Rice's expectation that the robot acknowledge his need for more time.

3.6 Urge

00.07.10	Mai Su	:	No, wait. [The robot malfunctioning]
00.07.21	Mai Su	:	Move, move. Come on.

The utterance "**Move, move. Come on**" is categorized as an urge in the directive illocutionary act because it is delivered through repetition of imperatives combined with an expression of urgency. The core characteristic of *urge* lies in its high intensity and emotional pressure, which in this case is conveyed by the repeated verb "**Move**" and the exhortative phrase "**Come on.**" Unlike a command, which is rooted in authority, this utterance arises from an emergency context that pushes the speaker to demand immediate action.

From the context of situation, the field takes place in a dangerous situation at a technological facility, where Mai is about to fall due to a malfunctioning robot. The tenor highlights the interaction between an individual and a robot in a moment of crisis, with the speaker attempting to mobilize either herself or the robot to act quickly. The mode is realized through the repetition of imperative verbs combined with a motivational exclamation, which reinforces the urgency of the situation. Therefore, this utterance exemplifies an *urge* because it reflects emotional intensity and the immediate need for action in a life-threatening context.

3.7 Order

00.07.54	Security robot	:	Friendly reminder, all children must be accompanied by an adult.
00.07.59	Security robot	:	You're coming with me, young lady.
00.08.02	Mai Su	:	What?

The utterance **"You're coming with me, young lady"** is categorized as an order in the directive illocutionary act because it is delivered by an authoritative figure, the security robot, with an instructive tone that signals obligation. The utterance conveys that the hearer has no choice, marking it as a directive backed by institutional power. Unlike a *command*, which may arise in personal relationships, an *order* represents formal or institutional authority, as embodied by the role of the security robot.

From the context of situation, the field occurs in a public setting, the IQ Robotic facility, where formal rules must be enforced. The tenor positions the security robot as an institutional authority and Mai as the subject subject to its enforcement. The mode is realized in a declarative form used as a directive, reinforced by the address term **"young lady,"** which emphasizes the difference in status. Therefore, this utterance exemplifies an *order* that emerges from institutional legitimacy, distinguishing it from a *command* based on personal authority.

3.8 Permit

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01.36.11	Project 7723	:	I can keep this?.
01.36.13	Mai Su	:	You can keep it.

The utterance **"You can keep it"** is categorized as a permit in the directive illocutionary act because the speaker grants authorization to the hearer to perform a particular action, namely keeping the origami. Illocutionary, it functions as granting permission rather than imposing obligation that opens access for the hearer. The permission highlights a shift from directive force to consensual affirmation, emphasizing consent rather than obligation.

From the context of situation, the field is a peaceful, post-conflict moment in which the emotional bond between Mai and Project 7723 is being restored after the loss of memory. The tenor places Mai not as an authority figure but as a companion who willingly grants permission, while Project 7723 is positioned as the recipient of this approval. The mode is realized in a simple declarative form delivered with a warm tone, functioning as an affirmation of consent. Therefore, this utterance exemplifies a *permit* because it marks a relational shift from instruction or prohibition toward the granting of freedom, reflecting the affective and cooperative dimension of directive speech acts.

Discussion

This study analyzed directive speech acts in the animated science fiction film *Next Gen* (2018) using the framework of Searle and Vanderveken (1985). The analysis identified eight types of directives: command, forbid, ask, suggest, request, urge, order, and permit, with *command* emerging as the most dominant. The prevalence of commands reflects the centrality of authority and control in the characters' interactions, particularly between Mai, her mother, and the robots. At the same time, the presence of requests, suggestions, and permits shows that directives are not purely coercive but also serve to construct interpersonal relationships and negotiate social roles.

The study also indicates that prohibitions reflect human resistance to technology and the negotiation of autonomy in human–AI interaction. Urges, on the other hand, highlight how emotional intensity in urgent situations can strengthen directive force without relying on authority. Furthermore, the contrast between commands (personal authority) and orders (institutional authority) illustrates the varied sources of directive power.

Overall, the film demonstrates that language functions not only as a means of control but also as a tool for expressing dependence, care, and collaboration. These findings contribute to pragmatic studies by showing how directive speech acts operate in fictional science fiction contexts, offering insights into the representation of power, emotion, and technology in media discourse. Future research may extend this analysis to other genres or undertake cross-cultural comparisons to provide a broader understanding of directive speech acts in diverse communicative settings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that directive speech acts in *Next Gen* (2018) are predominantly realized through commands, reflecting the centrality of authority in shaping human–technology interaction. Nevertheless, the presence of other directive types, such as requests, suggestions, and permits, indicates that directives are also employed to negotiate social roles and interpersonal relations. These findings suggest that directive speech acts in fictional discourse do not merely function as instruments of control but also as means of expressing dependence, care, and collaboration. The study thus contributes to pragmatic research by providing insights into the representation of power, emotion, and technology in science fiction media, while also offering a foundation for future studies across different genres and cultural contexts.

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