

Directive Speech Acts and Character Dynamics in *The Addams Family* (2019)

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify, classify, and analyze the forms and pragmatic functions of directive speech acts in the animated film *The Addams Family* (2019). The method employed was a pragmatic analysis of the dialogue, focusing on classification and quantitative frequency counts. The findings confirmed the presence of all four directive categories (commands, requests, suggestions, and prohibitions), with Commands being the most dominant (42.86%) and Prohibitions second (28.57%). This distribution aligns with the film's thematic emphasis on assertive character traits and familial authority. The results underscore how directives act as critical instruments for narrative progression and reinforce character identity and relational power dynamics. The primary limitation is the study's exclusive focus on directive speech acts within a single animated film. Future research is recommended to broaden the scope by examining multiple film genres and utilizing mixed-methods for a nuanced understanding of directives.

Keywords: *Directive speech-acts; Pragmatics; Film dialogue; The Addams-Family.*

INTRODUCTION

Language transcends mere communication; it is a fundamental tool for executing social tasks, expressing selfhood, and directly influencing the actions of others (Yule, 2020). The field of Pragmatics focuses on how meaning is constructed and interpreted within context, exploring the speakers' intent and the listeners' perception based on environmental, social, and cultural aspects. Central to pragmatics is Speech Act Theory Austin, which provides insight into how language performs actions like commanding, requesting, or prohibiting. Among various speech acts, Directive speech acts are critically important as they explicitly demonstrate power dynamics, interpersonal relations, and strategic language use, where the speaker aims for the listener to undertake a specific action (Sri Haryanti et al., 2021). Understanding these directives is essential for analyzing how language acts as social action across diverse contexts, from casual conversations to cinematic discourse, where language provides a dramatic, yet reflective, portrayal of real-life social interactions (Maghfira & Ariyanti, 2014).

Previous studies have extensively documented the forms and functions of directive speech acts in various settings. Thomson et al. (2023) and Igaab & Wehail (2023) confirmed the dominance of commands and requests in EFL classroom settings, highlighting their role in instructional clarity and management. Studies

analyzing fictional media, such as Lupas & Muico, (2022) and (Setianingrum et al., 2021), identified commands, requests, and suggestions as frequent directives, noting that their use is often determined by situational context rather than character personality. Furthermore, Rasyid et al. (2025) provided a socio-cultural dimension, showing how directives in a local Indonesian TV series reflected embedded cultural norms [10]. These works collectively establish the functional significance of directives in both real-world and fictional communication, often classifying them into core categories such as commands, requests, suggestions, and prohibitions (Eragamreddy, 2024).

While previous research has focused on pedagogical settings and conventional animated or fictional narratives, there remains a pragmatic research gap concerning films that deliberately exaggerate social and emotional dynamics for comedic or satirical effect. Specifically, none of the existing studies have analyzed the use of directive speech acts within the animated film *The Addams Family* (2019). This film, with its unique fusion of gothic humor, intricate familial dynamics, and cultural satire, offers a compelling framework for analysis. The film’s exaggerated, yet perceptive, portrayal of character interactions requires a focused pragmatic analysis to reveal how directive speech acts—given their role in expressing worries, imposing restrictions, and issuing orders—serve to shape identity, propel narrative development, and reflect underlying social positions in a non-conventional setting.

This study concentrates on examining the forms and pragmatic functions of directive speech acts as portrayed by characters in *The Addams Family* (2019). The primary aim is to systematically identify, classify, and analyze the utterances that belong to directive categories (commands, requests, suggestions, and prohibitions). The study seeks to answer: 1) What categories of directive speech acts are utilized? 2) Which types are most predominantly employed? and 3) In what ways do these acts contribute to character development and narrative structure? This research is expected to provide theoretical significance by enriching pragmatic studies through illustrating the practical implementation of directives in a unique cinematic context. For pedagogical significance, the findings can be integrated into language education to enhance students’ pragmatic competence through exposure to authentic and contextualized language use in media.

METHODS

Subject of Research

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to explore and interpret the use of directive speech acts within the film *The Addams Family* (2019). Rather than relying on statistical measurement, this method aims to uncover the pragmatic meaning and function of utterances. The subject of research is the film's dialogue,

and the primary data consist specifically of character utterances from the film's script that exhibit directive speech acts. These utterances are selected based on their alignment with the defined categories of directives (e.g., commands, requests, suggestions, prohibitions). The film serves as a rich data source due to its diverse representation of interpersonal communication in a fictional, socially nuanced environment.

Instrument

In line with qualitative research principles, the researcher functions as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation. The researcher actively engaged with the data by viewing the film and analyzing the script to identify relevant utterances. The primary instrument is supported by a secondary instrument: a data classification sheet. This sheet served as a systematic tool to record and categorize each identified directive speech act according to its specific type and its communicative function. While the data classification itself is guided by the typology, the overall functional interpretation relies on broader pragmatic principles, such as those discussed by scholars in the field (though the original text specifically mentions 'Schmitt's theoretical framework' alongside Safitri, the core classification used remains consistent).

Data Collection and Analysis

The procedure for data collection involved a three-step process. First, the researcher initiated an attentive viewing of *The Addams Family* (2019) to identify the directive language used in context. Second, this initial observation was validated by reading and analyzing the film's script to cross-reference the observed utterances. Third, the relevant speech acts were extracted and categorized based on the directive speech act typology proposed, including categories such as commands, requests, suggestions, prohibitions, and related forms. The data analysis technique followed a qualitative descriptive method. This analysis commenced by formally identifying all utterances that qualify as directive speech acts. These utterances were then classified into the established categories (command, request, suggestion, prohibition). A frequency calculation was performed to determine the most dominant directive forms. Finally, the core of the analysis involved interpreting the pragmatic function and contextual significance of each directive within the flow of dialogue and character interaction, revealing how these linguistic choices shape character behavior and narrative progression.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis regarding the directive speech acts identified in the animated film *The Addams Family* (2019). A total of 35 utterances categorized as directive speech acts were found within the film. These expressions

were classified into four main types based on the general framework of directive speech acts: commands, requests, suggestions, and prohibitions. Each utterance was examined for its linguistic structure and communicative function as it appeared in varying narrative contexts. The distribution was as follows: 15 instances of commands, 5 instances each of requests and suggestions, and 10 instances of prohibitions. These findings demonstrate that directive speech acts in the film serve diverse pragmatic purposes such as exerting control, offering guidance, restricting behavior, and seeking cooperation. Their usage also reflects the characters' personalities and the evolving dynamics of interaction throughout the storyline.

Table 1. Dominance of Directive Speech Act Categories in the Utterances of The Addams Family (2019)

No.	Utterance	Category	Frequency Percentage
1.	Grab onto my hairy hump!	Command	Command: 15 sentences (42.86%)
2.	Thing, have Ichabod wake the children.	Command	
3.	Pugsley! It's time for sword practice.	Command	
4.	Go stand beside it.	Command	
5.	Dig up your brother. At once.	Command	
6.	We must go down there and introduce ourselves at once.	Command	
7.	Do not speak to your mother that way.	Command	
8.	Don't cut your eyes on my crew unless you're ready to dance.	Command	
9.	You are never going to that school again.	Command	
10.	Go think about that in your room. With no social media.	Command	
11.	Come down and say hello to your Auntie Sloom.	Command	
12.	We are going to march down that hill and do a live show!	Command	
13.	Get out!	Command	
14.	Don't make me come up there!	Command	
15.	Stop! Right there! Don't touch another thing!	Command	
16.	I think it would be good for me.	Request	Request: 5 sentences (14.29%)
17.	I want to go back to school.	Request	
18.	Let us have our own design intervention.	Request	
19.	Would you mind helping me with this?	Request	
20.	Could you pass the salt?	Request	
21.	When you're older, you can travel to your heart's content. But for now, it's safer for you here.	Suggestion	Suggestion: 5 sentences (14.29%)
22.	We have to win them over.	Suggestion	
23.	Trust Wednesday. Like you, she'll do the right thing.	Suggestion	
24.	The key to the Mazurka is confidence.	Suggestion	
25.	We shouldn't judge them just because they're different.	Suggestion	
26.	You are never leaving this house again.	Prohibition	
27.	No more fighting, we are all neighbors now.	Prohibition	

28.	Shut up!	Prohibition	
29.	Stop this madness!	Prohibition	
30.	Get out!	Prohibition	Prohibition: 10 sentences (28.57%)
31.	You mustn't go down there.	Prohibition	
32.	Don't talk back to your father.	Prohibition	
33.	You can't force me to be like you.	Prohibition	
34.	Don't let them near the house!	Prohibition	
35.	You're not allowed outside until you've changed.	Prohibition	

From the table above, it can be seen that the type of directive speech act most frequently used by the characters is Command with 15 occurrences (42.86%). This shows that the characters in the film tend to use language to give strong instructions or orders. Meanwhile, Prohibition appears 10 times (28.57%), indicating frequent use of forbidding or restricting language. Both Request and Suggestion appear 5 times each (14.29%), showing that polite or advisory speech acts are less frequent but still present. These findings will be further discussed and analyzed in the next chapter to explore the dominant type of directive speech act and the implications of their use in the film.

Directive Command Speech Acts

Directive speech acts categorized as Commands are utilized when a speaker intends to directly prompt the listener to perform a specific action. In the dialogue of *The Addams Family* (2019), 15 utterances were identified as commands, establishing this category as the most frequent type of directive speech act in the film (with a frequency of 42.86%). These utterances typically possess a high degree of illocutionary force, serving to instruct, demand, or compel immediate compliance.

1. Direct Command in High-Stakes Context.

Utterance: "Grab onto my hairy hump!" Speaker: Uncle Fester Context: This command occurs during a moment of immediate crisis where the Addams family faces imminent danger. Uncle Fester, acting as a protector, instructs his family to cling to him for swift and safe movement. Analysis: This phrase functions as a direct command, explicitly urging the hearer to act without delay. The use of the imperative verb "Grab" combined with the urgent situational context reinforces the command's forcefulness. This utterance exemplifies a clear attempt to control the listener's behavior in a high-stakes scenario, demonstrating the authority and commanding power embedded in direct directive speech..

2. Indirect Command via Causative Structure

Utterance: "Thing, have Ichabod wake the children." Speaker: Morticia Addams Context: Morticia issues this directive within the family home. Instead of directly addressing the children or Ichabod, she instructs Thing (the family's pet living hand) to delegate the task of waking the children to Ichabod. Analysis:

Although the sentence is not structured using a traditional imperative verb directed at the final agent (Ichabod), its function remains clearly directive. This illustrates that commands can be delivered indirectly depending on the speaker's strategy and the social context. Morticia uses a causative construction (*have + object + base verb*), which serves the illocutionary function of assigning a task or instructing someone to delegate action. The inclusion of the vocative term "Thing" at the beginning clearly signals the addressee, reinforcing the directive intent. Therefore, even though the form is technically an indirect command, the speaker's expectation for compliance ensures it functions effectively as a command, demonstrating that a command's directive force is not diminished by its indirect structure.

Directive Request Speech Act

Directive speech acts expressed as Requests are characterized by a polite or tentative manner, allowing the speaker to encourage the listener to act without applying direct pressure or authority. In *The Addams Family* (2019), five utterances were categorized as requests (14.29% of total directives), demonstrating the characters' use of softer, more cooperative communication strategies when seeking action or permission.

1. Indirect Request through Hedged Declarative

Utterance: "I think it would be good for me." Speaker: Wednesday Addams
Context: Wednesday uses this statement to subtly propose an activity, likely one that deviates from the Addams family's eccentric norms (such as attending a conventional school), requiring her parents' approval.
Analysis: Although the sentence is declarative in form, its underlying illocutionary function is a polite request. Pragmatically, requests often manifest as expressions of desire that allow the hearer the option to respond freely without the utterance constituting a Face-Threatening Act (FTA). The phrase "I think" acts as a crucial hedging device, softening the statement. This technique implies that Wednesday is not demanding but rather *inviting consideration* and suggesting the idea is beneficial. By framing her personal desire this way, the utterance successfully seeks parental approval while preserving interpersonal harmony and maintaining politeness.

2. Request Expressed as a Personal Desire

Utterance: "I want to go back to school." Speaker: Wednesday Addams
Context: This line occurs when Wednesday openly states her wish to return to school, a decision that directly challenges her family's expectations for isolation.
Analysis: The utterance, despite being a declarative statement (using the form 'Subject + verb of desire'), performs the function of a request. As per the Safitri

et al. (2021) classification, expressing a strong desire for an action that requires the listener's cooperation or permission qualifies as a request. The phrase "I want" clearly signals a personal longing and hope to influence the hearer's response. This is a common and effective pragmatic strategy in English, especially in sensitive contexts like parent-child conversations, where the speaker seeks approval indirectly. By focusing on the *personal benefit* or *desire*, the speaker maintains a respectful and non-confrontational posture while still seeking cooperation for the desired action.

Directive Suggestion Speech Act

Suggestions represent a type of directive speech act where the speaker proposes an idea, solution, or course of action primarily intended to benefit the hearer. Distinct from commands, suggestions are typically delivered with a cooperative, non-imposing tone, preserving the listener's autonomy. In *The Addams Family* (2019), five utterances were categorized as suggestions (14.29% of total directives), demonstrating the characters' use of indirect persuasion and encouragement in interpersonal exchanges.

1. Suggestion through Reassurance and Value Appeal

Utterance: "Trust Wednesday. Like you, she'll do the right thing."
Speaker: Gomez Addams Context: This statement is delivered by Gomez to reassure another family member—most likely Morticia—during a moment of parental worry, affirming that Wednesday can be trusted to make responsible decisions. Analysis: The utterance uses the imperative form "Trust Wednesday", but its illocutionary force functions as a mild, supportive suggestion rather than a coercive command. Suggestions involve offering encouragement in a way that respects the hearer's autonomy. Gomez strategically reinforces the suggestion with the supportive comparison, "Like you, she'll do the right thing," which appeals directly to the hearer's values and past behavior. This rhetorical strategy strengthens the persuasive tone, making the proposal more acceptable and emotionally resonant. The utterance thus serves as a non-coercive prompt, guiding behavior (trust) through affirmation and reassurance.

2. Suggestion Phrased as a Key Insight

Utterance: "The key to the Mazurka is confidence." Speaker: Gomez Addams Context: This is said during a preparatory or advice-giving scene, where Gomez imparts crucial insight to Pugsley or another family member about successfully performing the traditional family ritual, the Mazurka. The phrase is meant to encourage and guide behavior. Analysis: Although phrased as a declarative statement ("The key to X is Y"), the illocutionary force behind this utterance is clearly suggesting guidance or advice. This is a form of indirect

directive, where the speaker offers a recommendation on how to act or behave by identifying a crucial factor for success. Gomez subtly encourages the listener to be confident in their performance by emphasizing that confidence is the "key." By defining an important value, the speaker motivates the listener to adopt the corresponding attitude or action, thereby influencing behavior in a positive and encouraging, non-threatening way. Hence, this sentence aligns with the suggestion function because it offers practical guidance meant to positively influence the listener's behavior.

Directive Prohibition Speech Act

Prohibitions constitute a form of directive speech act where the speaker explicitly restricts or forbids the listener from engaging in a particular action. These utterances are frequently marked by negative constructions such as "don't," "must not," or "not allowed," and serve the crucial pragmatic function of enforcing boundaries, establishing control, or preventing undesirable outcomes. In *The Addams Family* (2019), ten utterances were classified as prohibitions (28.57% of total directives), making them the second most dominant type of directive speech act in the film, reflecting the high incidence of conflict and boundary setting in the narrative.

1. Direct Prohibition in Urgent Context

Utterance: "Don't let them near the house!" Speaker: Margaux Nedler
Context: This utterance is delivered in an urgent situation where the speaker expresses immediate concern or fear about outsiders (the Addams family) approaching a residence. This likely occurs during a scene of high tension or perceived threat, emphasizing the need to protect boundaries. Analysis: The utterance clearly fits the prohibitive category as defined by Safitri et al. (2021). The use of "Don't" marks a clear negative imperative, which explicitly signals what must not be done. Followed by the strong imperative verb "let," the sentence carries a high illocutionary force due to the perceived urgency and threat of the situation. The speaker's intent is to assert immediate control and restrict the movement of others, exemplifying how prohibitions function directly to enforce boundaries in high-stakes moments that require swift compliance.

2. Indirect Prohibition via Rule Enforcement

Utterance: "You're not allowed outside until you've changed." Speaker: Most likely Morticia Addams (based on the context of parental discipline within the family). Context: This sentence is spoken when a character (likely Wednesday or Pugsley) attempts to go outside, but their appearance or clothing is deemed inappropriate or unacceptable by the speaker, resulting in a restriction. Analysis: This utterance is a directive speech act with a prohibiting

function, despite being structured as a declarative statement rather than a direct imperative (e.g., "Don't go outside"). The illocutionary force is conveyed through the authoritative phrase "not allowed." This phrase effectively applies institutional or parental authority, establishing a limitation or rule that restricts the listener's action. The prohibition is conditional, forbidding the action (going outside) unless a specific condition (changing clothes) is met. This demonstrates how prohibitions can be delivered indirectly by invoking established rules or conditional restrictions, thereby maintaining control over the listener's behavior.

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study was to identify, classify, and analyze the forms and pragmatic functions of directive speech acts utilized by characters in the animated film *The Addams Family* (2019), specifically using the classification framework proposed by Safitri et al. (2021). The analysis confirmed the presence of all four categories of directive speech acts—commands, requests, suggestions, and prohibitions—in the film's dialogue, demonstrating the applicability of the adopted pragmatic paradigm in fictional media. Directives were primarily used to negotiate interpersonal interactions, express goals, and manage behavior. The quantitative analysis revealed that Commands were the most dominant category with 15 instances (42.86%), followed by Prohibitions with 10 instances (28.57%). Requests and Suggestions occurred with equal frequency (5 instances, 14.29% each). This prevalence of high-imposition directives (Commands and Prohibitions) is consistent with the film's thematic emphasis on strong individualism, assertive character traits, and familial authority within the Addams family unit. The findings underscore the pragmatic complexity of dialogue in animated films, demonstrating how directive speech acts serve as critical instruments for both narrative progression and linguistic expression. By focusing on these patterns, the study advances the body of knowledge in pragmatic studies, specifically by illustrating how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce character identity, relational dynamics, and social power in fictional discourse. This confirms that film dialogue is a valuable, socially nuanced resource for pragmatic analysis. The provided text does not explicitly state the limitations, but based on the research focus, the primary limitation is: This study focused exclusively on directive speech acts within a single animated film (*The Addams Family* 2019). This singular focus restricts the generalization of the findings, as the distribution and function of directives are heavily influenced by the unique genre conventions and highly specific character traits of the Addams family. Future research should broaden the scope by examining multiple film genres and utilizing mixed-methods for a nuanced understanding of directives, while educators

should integrate engaging film dialogues into classrooms to enhance students' pragmatic competence, offering valuable insights for scholars on social power dynamics in media discourse.

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