A Prosodic Analysis: Intonation Effect On Illocutionary Speech Acts

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Abstract. This study discusses the influence of intonation on Illocutionary speech acts in the films Encanto (2021) and Lilo & Stitch (2025). This study aims to analyze shifts in illocutionary force caused by intonation used. In answering the problem of the statement, the objective of this study is to analyze how intonation influences the intended meaning of illocutionary speech acts in selected dialogues from the films Encanto (2021) and Lilo & Stitch (2025). The study uses a descriptive qualitative method and applies a literary pragmatic approach, employing Searle's (1979) theory of speech acts and Crystal's (1969) prosodic system, with a focus on intonation. The results show that intonation causes shifts in the illocutionary force of utterances, leading to changes in speech act types. This research found 27 utterances, identified in which intonational patterns altered the intended meaning, resulting in four types of shifts: assertive to expressive, assertive to directive, directive to expressive, and directive to assertive. Assertive to expressive occurs when factual statements are delivered with emotional or sarcastic intonation. Assertive to directive arises when rising intonation turns a statement into an indirect prompt. Directive to expressive is found when a command is intonated to express emotion rather than instruct. Directive to assertive happens when a directive is softened by intonation and perceived as a neutral assertion. The implicature of this study is that intonation serves not only as a prosodic element, but as a pragmatic device that reshapes meaning and facilitates indirectness in everyday communication.

Keyword: *Illocutionary, Intonation, Pragmatics, Prosodic*

INTRODUCTION

Communication, as the core of human interaction, conveys meaning, emotion, and intention. According to Rakaj (2023), communication is successful when both the speaker and the listener are aware of what is being talked about and share a mutual understanding of the context and intention. In spoken interaction, the message is not conveyed solely through the words used, but also through how those words are spoken. In pragmatics, this functional use of language is analyzed through speech act theory. The theory of speech acts first introduced by John L. Austin (1962), he proposed that when people speak, they are not merely uttering words but also performing actions. Austin categorized this process

into three interrelated components: the locutionary act, which refers to the act of saying something with a particular meaning; the illocutionary act, which reflects the speaker's intended function or purpose; and the perlocutionary act, which concerns the effect that the utterance has on the listener. Searle (1979) further refined the understanding of illocutionary acts into five categories. The first one is representatives, which describe states of affairs (e.g., asserting, concluding); directives, which attempt to get the listener to do something (e.g., requesting, ordering); commissives, which commit the speaker to a future action (e.g., promising, offering); expressives, which convey the speaker's psychological state (e.g., apologizing, thanking); and declaratives, which bring about change in the external situation merely through their utterance (e.g., resigning, naming).

In actual spoken interaction, the same sentence form may be used to perform different kinds of speech acts depending on the speaker's tone of voice, emotional state, and interpersonal goals. For example, a sentence that appears declarative in structure may be interpreted as a question, a complaint, or even an insult, depending on how it is delivered. This observation points to the importance of prosody, the set of suprasegmental features that accompany speech and contribute to its pragmatic interpretation.

David Crystal (1969) categorized various prosodic systems, such tone, pitch range, pause, loudness, tempo, rhythmically, and tension, as non-segmental phonation features, or do not relate to individual sounds or phonemes. Among these features, intonation is influence how meanings are perceived and interpreted. As Crystal (1969) defines it, intonation is a key component of prosody, which refers to the suprasegmental features of speech, including pitch movement, stress, and rhythm. A rising intonation at the end of a sentence may signal uncertainty, a request for confirmation, or a polite suggestion, while a falling intonation may indicate finality, confidence, or even resignation.

This research focuses in the interaction in how intonation shape or shift the illocutionary meaning that examined through the lens of cinematic dialogue, specifically in fictional films that feature expressive spoken interactions between characters. The data for this research are drawn from two Disney productions: Encanto (2021), a fully animated film, and Lilo & Stitch (2025), a live-action/CGI hybrid adaptation film. These films are selected because their dialogues present emotionally rich exchanges, where intonation often carries interpretive weight. Vocal delivery in such films can enhance or even shift the perceived intention of an utterance, making them suitable sources for examining how prosodic elements, especially intonation. While many studies have analyzed speech acts in film dialogues from structural or grammatical perspectives, relatively few have focused on the intonational dimension, particularly how prosody affects the interpretation of illocutionary meaning. This research aims to fill this gap by highlighting the role of intonation in change of shifting the meanings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of pragmatics, speech acts refer to the actions performed by speaking. Speech acts are the meaning of communicating with interlocutors that have consequences so that what is communicated can influence the actions that will be taken, Solikhah et al., (2022).

These speech acts can be broadly categorized into two main types based on the relationship between what is said and what is meant: direct speech acts and indirect speech acts. John Austin, a British philosopher of language, introduced the speech act theory in his 1962 book, *How To Do Things With Words*. He argued that utterances are not merely descriptive but performative, Austin (1962), meaning they actively do things. In 1969, John Searle continued the development of research conducted by his teacher, John Austin. John Searle developed speech act theory with a focus on how language is used to perform actions. Saragi, V. et al. (2019) stated that speech act theory is concerned with the traditions by which words function not only for transferring information but also to do actions. In his book entitled Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts in 1979, Searle supported Austin's theory by classifying illocutionary speech acts into five main categories, they are representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative.

In analyzing the interaction in how intonation shape or shift the illocutionary meaning that examined through the lens of cinematic dialogue, specifically in fictional films that feature expressive spoken interactions between characters. This study analyzed through Prosody include intonation, pitch, stress, rhythm, and tempo, all of which contribute significantly to how utterances are understood emotionally and pragmatically. For instance, the same words can convey different intentions such as sincerity, sarcasm, or anger depending on how they are spoken with intonation that the pitch of the voice rises and falls, and speakers use this pitch variation to convey linguistic and pragmatic meaning.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative design to analyze and interpret the data. As stated by Creswell (2018), qualitative research involves an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon and the construction of meaning from non-numerical information. The descriptive design allows the researcher to examine the data through detailed, contextual, and functional analysis of spoken utterances, focusing on how intonation affect the interpretation of speech acts. The data for this research consist of selected utterances taken from the spoken dialogues of two films produced by Walt Disney Studios: Encanto (2021), a fully animated feature, and Lilo & Stitch (2025), a live-action/CGI hybrid adaptation. These films were chosen because they feature emotionally expressive and contextually rich dialogues. The data are in the form of short-spoken sentences or phrases that based on their grammatical structure may indicate a particular type of illocutionary act, but through intonational delivery, appear to convey a different intended force. Only character dialogues were included in the analysis; musical scenes and song lyrics were excluded to maintain a focus on spoken language.

Each data was labeled with a specific code such as ENC-01 or LNS-01, where "ENC" stands for utterances from Encanto and "LNS" refers to Lilo & Stitch.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The researcher found 27 utterances from the animated movies Encanto (2021) and Lilo & Stitch (2025) that contain illocutionary acts influenced by intonation. These utterances were found based on their intonation patterns in shifts meaning from the literal illocutionary force to the intended meaning perceived by the listener. The classification is as follows:

Table 1. Classification of Illocutionary Act Shifts Based on Intonation

Speech Acts	Classification		
	Illocutionary Speech Acts	*Intended Illocutionary Acts*	*Number of Utterance*
	Assertive	Expressive	15
	Assertive	Directive	8
	Directive	Expressuve	3
	Directive	Assertive	1

All the data were analyzed using Searle's (1979) theory of illocutionary speech acts, and Kreidler's (1997) in identifying the intonation types. The intonation types observed in the data follow Kreidler's (1997) categorization: rising (↑), falling (↓), rise-fall (^), and fall-rise (V). These prosodic markers were identified by closely examining the pitch movement in each speaker's delivery within the film's audio. The analysis of data will be displayed with representative data.

Assertive to Expressive Intended Meaning

1) Data ENC-01

ALEJANDRA

"It's bigger on ^ the inside ↑"

The utterance above is structured as a declarative sentence, which normally indicates an assertive illocutionary act, a straightforward statement of fact. However, Alejandra's intonation reshapes the function of the sentence entirely. The phrase is spoken with a noticeable rise-fall contour on the word "bigger," followed by the long rise (↑) on "inside." The rise-fall on "bigger" marks emphasis and signals that Alejandra is emotionally struck by the contrast between expectation and reality. The final rise on "inside" carries a tone of surprise and delight, which turns the utterance from a neutral observation into an expressive reaction. The illocutionary act shifts from assertive to expressive due to the rising and rise-fall intonation that conveys wonder and amazement.

Assertive to Directive Intended Meaning

1) Data ENC-08

MIRABEL

"We might wanna ^ hurry."

The utterance above is assertive speech act, but Mirabel's intonation indicates a different function. The illocutionary act shifts from assertive to directive. This polite but firm delivery functions as an indirect directive. Instead of saying "Hurry up," Mirabel softens the command through wording and tone.

Directive to Expressive Intended Meaning

1) Data ENC-06

MIRABEL

"Wait↑"

The utterance above is imperative in form, and indicates a directive act that tells someone to do or stop doing something. However, in this context, the purpose of saying "Wait" is not to command Bruno to stop walking. Instead, it is spoken as a reaction to something unexpected that Mirabel sees on the wall. The intonation used is long rise (↑). The intonation, combined with the pause gives the utterance a different function. It shows that Mirabel is mix of confusion, revelation, and empathy as she processes what she sees.

Directive to Assertive Intended Meaning

1) Data LNS-12

COBRA BUBBLES

"Who says it walked↑?"

The utterance above is grammatically an interrogative sentence, the long rise intonation on "walked" functions not to genuinely seek an answer. At first glance, the sentence "Who says it walked?" looks like a question, so it would be a directive, meant to get an answer. The long rise intonation on the word "walked↑" shows that he doubts what the officer said. His tone sounds more like he's challenging the idea than actually trying to find out who said it. He uses the question form just to push back in a subtle way. So even though it's a question, the real function of the utterance is to disagree and give his own point of view. That makes it an assertive act, not a directive one. The intonation change the meaning from a normal question into a way to express doubt and correction.

CONCLUSION

This research analyzed how intonation affects the intended meaning of illocutionary speech acts in selected utterances from Encanto (2021) and Lilo & Stitch (2025). Using Searle's (1979) classification of speech acts and Kreidler's (1997) framework of intonation, the research identified 27 utterances where the literal illocutionary act shifted due to intonation delivery. These shifts occurred because the speaker's tone of voice added layers of emotional or interpersonal meaning not evident in the grammatical structure alone.

The results show four major types of shifts: assertive to expressive (15 data), assertive to directive (8 data), directive to expressive (3 data), and directive to assertive (1 data). These results highlight the importance of considering prosodic features, particularly

intonation, when analyzing spoken language. Through these findings, the researcher found out that tone of voice can shift the function of a sentence, changing it from a simple statement into a request, a joke, or even an expression of emotion. This proves that in natural spoken interaction, especially in film dialogues, intonation helps listeners grasp the speaker's real intention more clearly.

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