Universitas Putera Batam
BaSis Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris Universitas Putera Batam
p-ISSN: 2406-9809
e-ISSN: 2527-8835
Journal BASIS
Vol. 13 No. 2 October 2026

THE UTILIZATION OF SPEECH ACTS AS A TOOL OF POWER: A CASE STUDY OF MIRANDA PRIESTLY IN *"THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA"*

Mutmainna Rama[1]
Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM), Makassar, Indonesia
e-mail: inarm298@gmail.com

La Sunra[2*]
Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM), Makassar, Indonesia
e-mail: la.sunra@unm.ac.id

Harnita Rosalia[3]
Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM), Makassar, Indonesia
e-mail: harnita.rosalia@unm.ac.id

*Corresponding author: la.sunra@unm.ac.id

Abstract
This research aims to identify the types of speech acts used by Miranda in *The Devil Wears Prada* and analyze how these speech acts function to construct and maintain her authority in the workplace. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the data were collected through repeatedly watching the movie and extracting Miranda's utterances. The data were analyzed using Miles et al.'s (2014) framework of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing & verification. Searle's (1975) theory was used to classify speech acts, while Fairclough's (2013) theory of power guided the interpretation of their roles in workplace power relations. The findings were presented descriptively through selected utterances, their contexts, and their associated power mechanisms. The findings reveal that Miranda utilizes four types of speech acts: directive, assertive, expressive, and commissive, with directives being the most dominant. Directive speech acts are employed by Miranda to control her subordinates' actions through various mechanisms, such as agenda control, time control, participation control, and boundary reinforcement. Meanwhile, assertive speech acts function to evaluate, shape reality, and influence her subordinates' perceptions of professionalism. Expressive speech acts exert psychological pressure through criticism, sarcasm, and expression of dissatisfaction, whereas commissive speech acts enforce compliance through implicit threats and professional consequences. This research concludes that speech acts serve as strategic instruments for maintaining workplace authority, power relations, and institutional hierarchy.

Keywords: power, pragmatics, speech acts, *The Devil Wears Prada*

1. Introduction

Language is the primary means of human communication, serving not only to convey information but also to construct social reality, shape identity, and exercise power (Mammadova, 2025). One linguistic approach that explains how language performs actions is Speech Act Theory, introduced by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969) (Alsamhori et al., 2025). Austin distinguishes speech into three levels: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, while Searle classifies illocutionary acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative (Saifudin, 2019). This framework provides a useful tool for examining how language is strategically used to influence others in social interaction.

When applied to social hierarchies, Speech Act Theory aligns directly with Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly

Fairclough's (2013) conceptualization of power. Fairclough explains that power is exercised through both discourse and the institutional structures that legitimize it. In hierarchical settings such as the workplace, speech acts become primary vehicles for exercising authority, controlling interaction, and maintaining dominance. Consequently, analyzing speech acts within professional contexts reveals not only what speakers intend to communicate, but also how specific linguistic choices operate as instruments of structural power and control.

Popular media, particularly movies, often vividly reflect these complex workplace power dynamics. In this regard, the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) serves as an ideal empirical object for examining linguistic power relations within a professional setting. The narrative centers on Miranda Priestly, the Editor-in-Chief of *Runway* magazine, whose authoritative leadership is largely exercised through language. Rather than relying on physical coercion, Miranda maintains control through concise, direct, and intimidating utterances. Her tactical reliance on directive, assertive, and expressive speech acts regulate subordinate behavior and enforces hierarchy, ultimately producing perlocutionary effects such as instant compliance, urgency, and fear.

Although *The Devil Wears Prada* has been examined in prior linguistic research, existing studies have primarily focused on gendered language features or politeness strategies rather than the structural relationship between speech acts and power. For instance, Oktapiani et al. (2017), in Women's Language Features Found in Female Character's Utterance in *The Devil Wears Prada* Movie, identified nine women's language features based on Jakobson's theory, with intensifiers as the most dominant feature. Meanwhile, Probosini (2020), in Politeness Strategies in the Main Characters of *"The Devil Wears Prada"* Movie, found that positive politeness was the dominant strategy but did not examine how speech acts function as a means of exercising power. Extending to broader movie analysis, Permatasari (2023), examined directive speech acts in *The Lion King* (2019), demonstrating how directives reflect characters' social positions, but without explicitly investigating the underlying dimension of power. Consequently, a distinct empirical gap remains: no previous research has systematically integrated Searle's Speech Act Theory with Fairclough's concept of power to analyze Miranda Priestly's language as a mechanism of workplace domination.

To address this gap, the present study aims to identify the specific types of speech acts employed by Miranda Priestly and analyze how these speech acts construct and maintain her authority within the workplace. By combining Speech Act Theory with Fairclough's framework of power, this research seeks to demonstrate that language in hierarchical professional settings functions not merely as a medium of communication, but as a strategic instrument for legitimizing and sustaining power.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics examines how language operates within specific contexts to perform social actions and convey meaning beyond literal utterances. In institutional and professional settings, context is not merely a situational background; it is fundamentally shaped by social hierarchies, institutional roles, and power relations. Rather than treating pragmatics solely as a framework for general conversational principles, a critically grounded approach focuses on how contextual power governs language choice and shapes interactional

outcomes. In workplace discourse—and its depiction in cinematic dialogue—utterances are constrained and empowered by the speaker's position within an institutional structure. Therefore, this study adopts a pragmatic perspective aligned with Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013), treating pragmatic choices as strategic manifestations of authority, control, and institutional domination.

2.2 Speech Acts

Speech Act Theory, pioneered by Austin (1962) and systematically codified by Searle (1969, 1975), establishes that language does not merely describe reality, but actively performs social actions through utterances. While Austin distinguished utterances into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary levels, Searle (1975) refined this framework by categorizing illocutionary acts based on their pragmatic intentions and directional fit between words and the world. In hierarchical workplace discourse, these illocutionary acts do not operate in a neutral communicative vacuum; rather, they function as strategic linguistic mechanisms through which speakers enact, negotiate, and enforce institutional authority.

To operationalize Searle's (1975) taxonomy within a critical framework of power, the five illocutionary categories are conceptualized in this study not merely as descriptive linguistic labels, but as specific instruments of institutional control:

a. Assertive

Utterances that commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition (e.g., stating, evaluating, claiming). Beyond conveying information, assertive spoken by a dominant institutional figure function to construct organizational reality, define professional standards, and invalidate subordinate perspectives without inviting debate.

b. Directive

Utterances aimed at compelling the listener to perform a future action (e.g., commands, orders, demands). In professional hierarchies, directives serve as the most explicit mechanism of behavioral regulation, establishing non-negotiable compliance, controlling time, and dictating organizational agendas

c. Commissive

Utterances that commit the speaker to a future course of action (e.g., promising, threatening, offering). Within power dynamics, commissive function to manipulate subordinate behavior by establishing implicit professional consequences, rewards, or institutional sanctions.

d. Expressive

Utterances that convey the speaker's psychological state or emotional stance (e.g., criticizing, approving, expressing disappointment). In asymmetrical workplace relationships, expressive are weaponized to exert psychological pressure, enforce discipline, and induce compliance through moral or professional intimidation.

e. Declaratives

Utterances that immediately alter an institutional status or social reality by virtue of being spoken (e.g., dismissing, appointing, declaring). These acts rely strictly on the speaker's legitimate institutional position to enact immediate structural changes.

Conventional applications of Speech Act Theory in film and workplace discourse frequently suffer from a major analytical limitation: they treat speech acts mechanically, focusing almost exclusively on explicit directive speech acts as the sole indicator of power. This

traditional approach creates a significant research gap, as it fails to capture how power is subtly constructed and sustained through non-directive utterances. In high-pressure organizational environments, institutional control is often exercised covertly through weaponized assertive and expressive utterances that define reality and pressure subordinates without requiring direct orders. By integrating Searle's taxonomy with Fairclough's (2013) critical concept of power, this study addresses this gap, shifting the theoretical perspective from simple speech act classification to a critical examination of how diverse illocutionary forces systematically reproduce workplace domination.

2.3 Speech Acts & Power

Language and power are two concepts that cannot be separated in sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies. From a pragmatic perspective, power is not merely embedded in social structures but also realized through everyday language use, particularly through speech acts. According to Fairclough (2013), language serves as the primary medium in the practice of power, where language is used to maintain, negotiate, and challenge power structures in society.

The fundamental correlation between speech acts and power lies in the concept of *"illocutionary force",* the intended pressure behind an utterance. In a power-balanced relationship, a directive might function as a mere request; however, when backed by institutional authority, that same directive transforms into a command that necessitates compliance. Power in language is the ability of a speaker to direct or alter the behavior of others through linguistic means, either directly or indirectly (Chiang, 2015).

The relationship between speech acts and power can be understood through two dimensions proposed by Fairclough (2013): power in discourse and power behind discourse.

a. Power in Discourse

Power in discourse refers to the way power is exercised during interaction. According to Fairclough (2013), discourse is not a neutral exchange of information but a site where unequal social relationships are negotiated. Speakers in dominant positions exercise interactional control through linguistic choices, including speech acts.

This control can be realized through mechanisms such as agenda setting, topic control, turn allocation, interruption, question control, and conversational closure. Speech acts contribute to these mechanisms in different ways. Directive speech acts are commonly used to assign tasks and control actions, assertive speech acts allow speakers to evaluate people or situations from a position of authority, and expressive speech acts may reinforce dominance by conveying approval, criticism, or dissatisfaction. Thus, power in discourse is reflected in how speech acts are strategically employed to manage interaction and influence others.

b. Power Behind Discourse

While power in discourse concerns interaction itself, power behind discourse refers to the institutional and social structures that give discourse its authority. Fairclough (2013) argues that the effectiveness of an utterance depends not only on its linguistic form but also on the speaker's social position.

This idea aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital, which explains that speech acts gain authority through the legitimacy of the speaker. For example, a directive may function merely as a suggestion

when spoken by an ordinary employee but becomes an order when delivered by a supervisor. Likewise, declarative speech acts are effective only when performed by individuals with institutional authority. Drewski (2024) further argues that language reinforces social hierarchy by allowing those in higher positions to determine acceptable forms of communication and behavior. Consequently, institutional authority provides the legitimacy that enables speech acts to generate compliance and achieve their intended effects.

In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Miranda Priestly's speech illustrates both dimensions of power. As the Editor-in-Chief of *Runway* magazine, her institutional authority legitimizes her utterances, while her frequent use of directive and assertive speech acts enables her to control workplace interactions. The effectiveness of her speech lies not only in its linguistic form but also in her position of power, which compels subordinates to comply and demonstrates how language functions as a mechanism of dominance in workplace discourse.

3. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to investigate the utilization of speech acts as a tool of power by Miranda Priestly in the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006). Qualitative research was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of language use, meanings, and social interactions within a particular context. According to Creswell & Creswell (2023), the qualitative approach is to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon or object of study, typically through the collection of descriptive or narrative data. Similarly, Waruwu (2024) states that qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry process aimed at obtaining a deeper understanding of social phenomena in their natural context. Through this approach, the researcher was able to examine how Miranda Priestly's utterances function not only as acts of communication but also as instruments for constructing and maintaining power relations in the workplace.

The primary data of this research consisted of Miranda Priestly's utterances collected from The Devil Wears Prada, while secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and previous studies related to speech act theory and language & power. The data were collected by repeatedly watching the movie, transcribing Miranda's utterances, identifying and classifying them into speech act categories, and analyzing their functions within the interactional context of the movie. The analysis followed the qualitative data analysis procedures proposed by Miles et al. (2014), namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Furthermore, Fairclough's (2013) theory of language and power was employed as the analytical framework to interpret how speech acts were used to represent and reinforce power relations. The findings were presented descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between language use and power in workplace communication as portrayed in the movie.

Specifically, the findings are reported using timestamped interactional extracts and verbatim dialogue segments. Each extract is presented through a structured two-tiered narrative: first, decoding Miranda's sequential utterances using Searle's (1975) Speech Act Theory to identify their illocutionary forces, and second, applying Fairclough's (2013) framework to critically analyze how these speech acts function as mechanisms of workplace

power, such as through topic control, interruptions, and the enforcement of conversational asymmetry.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

In this section, the researcher presents the data obtained from the movie *The Devil Wears Prada."* The findings are categorized based on the types of speech acts proposed by Searle (1975) and the dimensions of power by Fairclough (2013).

Extract 1: (0:06:29-0:06:37)

> *Miranda:* ***I don't understand why it's so difficult to confirm appointments.***
> *Emily: I'm so sorry, Miranda. I actually did confirm last night, but—*
> *Miranda:* ***The details of your incompetence do not interest me.***

In this extract, Miranda Priestly addresses an unconfirmed appointment upon arriving at the Runway magazine office by stating, *"I don't understand why it's so difficult to confirm appointments,"* before interrupting Emily's explanation with, *"The details of your incompetence do not interest me."* According to Searle (1975), these sequential utterances represent two distinct speech acts. The first is an expressive speech act, as it conveys Miranda's psychological state of frustration and dissatisfaction with her subordinate's performance. The second statement is an assertive speech act, where Miranda evaluates Emily's capability by explicitly characterizing her as incompetent, presenting her subjective judgment as an absolute fact.

Beyond expressing discontent and evaluation, these speech acts function as a mechanism for exercising power within the workplace. From Fairclough's perspective, the interaction demonstrates power in discourse, particularly through interruption and topic control. Through her initial expressive act, Miranda frames a routine task as simple, immediately putting Emily on the defensive. When Emily attempts to respond, Miranda interrupts her mid-sentence, restricting her opportunity to participate in the interaction. She then uses the assertive act to unilaterally close the topic, deeming further explanation unnecessary. Consequently, these combined speech acts enforce conversational asymmetry, reinforce the rigid hierarchy between superior and subordinate, and maintain Miranda's institutional authority within the workplace.

Extract 2: (0:06:46-0:07:06)

> *Miranda:* ***RSVP yes to the Michael Kors party. I want the driver to drop me off at 9:30 and pick me up at 9:45 sharp. Then call Natalie ….. I want tortes filled …. Call my ex and remind him…Then call my husband and ask him to ……***
> *Emily: Right.*

In the extract above, Miranda delivers a series of instructions while Emily follows closely, taking notes without offering any response. The sequence of utterances above is classified as directive speech acts. According to Searle (1975) directives are a type of speech act used by the speaker to prompt the hearer to perform a particular action. Through the use of imperative expressions such as *"RSVP yes", "Call Natalie"*, and *"Call my ex,"* as well as the statement of intention *"I want"*, Miranda issues direct instructions that must be followed by Emily.

The directive speech acts in this extract function as a tool of power by enabling Miranda to control Emily's actions and regulate the interaction. The mechanism of power evident in this interaction is power in discourse, which is realized through agenda control and turn control. By issuing a continuous sequence of directives, Miranda determines the tasks that Emily must perform and controls the agenda of the interaction. Furthermore. Miranda's position as Editor-in-Chief legitimizes

her authority to assign tasks and expect immediate compliance. Consequently, these directive speech acts function not only to give instruction but also to regulate Emily's actions, secure obedience, and reinforce the hierarchical relationship between superior and subordinate.

Extract 3: (0:08:54-0:09:04)

> *Miranda:* ***And you have no style or sense of fashion.***
> *Andy: Well, umm I think that depends on what you're—*
> *Miranda: No, no.* ***That wasn't a question.***

The extract above occurs after Miranda asks Andy to come in and initiates the job interview between them. During the exchange, Miranda delivers a harsh and unequivocal critique of Andy's appearance. Both of Miranda's statements, *"you have no style"* and *"That wasn't a question,"* are also classified as assertive, as it presents a claim she treats as an objective fact and assert that the act of her prior statement also directs the interlocutor's behavior by implicitly requiring Andy to stop speaking and accept the judgment without objection.

Miranda employs assertive speech acts as a tool of power by first evaluating her subordinate and then controlling her response. The dimension of power evident in this interaction is power in discourse, realized through mechanisms of evaluation and turn control. Through her initial assertive act, Miranda establishes her supreme authority as an arbiter of fashion, immediately putting Andy on the defensive and destabilizing her confidence during the job interview. When Andy attempts to defend herself, Miranda executes strict turn control by interrupting her mid-sentence, thereby stripping her interlocutor of her conversational rights. As Fairclough (2013) argues, power in discourse is exercised through the control of interactional practices, including turn-taking and the ability to define what can be said within a conversation. Through these assertive speech acts, Miranda not only expresses her judgments but also reinforces the hierarchical relationship between superior and subordinate, maintaining her authority and establishing her evaluations as final and unquestionable.

Extract 4: (0:09:08-0:09:20)

> *Andy: I was Editor-in-Chief of the Daily Northwestern****.*** *I also won a national competition for college journalists with my series on the janitor's union, which exposed exploitation of—*
> *Miranda:* ***That's all.***

Andy attempts to demonstrate her intellectual qualification as a competent journalist by referring to her educational background and achievements. Miranda's utterance, *"That's all,"* is classified as a directive. According to Searle (1975), directive speech acts are defined by the speaker's intent to influence the listener to perform a specific action. At the surface level, it suggests that no further information needed; however, at the illocutionary level, it serves as a command for Andy to stop talking and leave the room.

The directive speech acts here function as a mechanism of conversational closure. Fairclough (2013) notes that the ability to initiate and terminate an interaction is a key indicator of power. By unilaterally terminating Andy's explanation, Miranda demonstrates her authority to determine when an interaction begins and ends.

Extract 5: (0:16:15-0:16:42)

> *Miranda:* ***I need ten or fifteen skirts from Calvin Klein.***
> *Andy: Okay. What kind of skirts do you—*
> *Miranda:* ***Please bore someone else with your questions.*** *And make sure we have Pier 59 at 8 a.m. tomorrow. Remind Jocelyn I need to see those satchels that Marc is doing in the pony. And then tell Simone I'll take Jackie if Maggie isn't available tomorrow. Did Demarchelier confirm?*

Andy: Did Demarcheli—
Miranda: Demarchelier. Did he… ***Get him on the phone.***
Andy: O-okay

In this extract, Miranda gives Andy a series of instructions that are both extremely concise and complex. Miranda's utterances in this sequence are dominated by directives. The statement *"I need..."* functions as an indirect command for Andy to get the skirt. The utterance *"Please bore someone else with your questions"* is classified as a directive that orders Andy to stop asking questions. And lastly, the command *"Get him on the phone"* is a direct directive compelling Andy to act immediately, even though she does not yet fully understand who *"Demarchelier"* is.

The directives speech acts in this extract function to maintain Miranda's

authority through both power in discourse and power behind discourse by Fairclough's power theory. Directives such as "Please bore someone else with your questions" and "Get him on the phone" exercised interactional control and agenda control, establishing a one-way pattern of communication pattern in which compliance while silencing clarification. Furthermore, Miranda's use of specialized fashion terminology draws upon the institutional norms and exclusive knowledge of the fashion industry, expecting Andy to demonstrate instant competence without prior instruction. Consequently, these directives restrict subordinate participation, enforce conversational asymmetry, and solidify Miranda's dominant workplace authority.

Extract 6: (0:29:48-0:30:10)

Andy: Hello? Miranda, hi. I'm trying to get a flight, but no one is flying out, because of the weather.
Miranda: Please. ***It's just, I don't know, drizzling.*** *Well, someone must be getting out.* ***Call Donatella and get her jet. Call everybody else that we know that has a jet. Call every….*** *This is your response….* ***This is your job. Get me home.***
(Miranda hangs up.)
Andy: OMG, she's going to murder me

In the extract above, Andy reports that no flights are permitted due to extreme weather conditions, Miranda responds rejecting that reality. Miranda's statements here combine assertive and directive speech acts. Her initial statement, *"It's just... drizzling,"* is an assertive act as she minimizes the intensity of the weather condition to discredit Andy's excuse. Then follows a series of directive acts, such as *"Call Donatella," "Call everybody,"* and *"Get me home"*, which imply action regardless of the obvious difficulty involved. Finally, the statement *"This is your job"* functions as an assertive act that redefines Andy's professional duties under pressure, framing the fulfillment of these demands as her primary obligation.

These speech acts function to maintain Miranda's authority through reality control and agenda control. By defining an extreme weather event as only a drizzle, Miranda imposes her own version of reality onto the situation. By giving commands, Miranda shifts all responsibility for the task onto Andy, while with the phrase, *"This is your job,"* she changes the definition of Andy's role in such a way that she must obey without question.

Extract 7: (0:30:34-0:31:37)

Andy: Miranda, I'm so sorry.
Miranda: Do you know why I hired you? I always hire the same girl — stylish, slender, of course, worships the magazine. But, so often they turn out to be, I don't know, disappointing and stupid. So, you, with that impressive resume and your big speech about your so-called work ethic — I thought you would be different. I said to myself, 'go ahead, take a chance, hire the smart, fat girl.' ***I had hope. My God, I live on it. Anyway, you ended up disappointing me more than any of the other silly girls.***

Andy: Umm… I really did everything I could think of—
Miranda: That's all.

This scene occurs when Miranda reprimands Andy in her office after concluding that Andy has failed to fulfil her expectations as an assistant. Miranda's utterance, *"I had hope. My God, I live on it. Anyway, you ended up disappointing me more than any of the other silly girls."* is categorized as expressive, particularly in the form of deploring, which refers to the expression of strong dissatisfaction or disappointment toward another person. This is evident in the phrase *"disappointing me",* through which Miranda explicitly conveys her dissatisfaction while positioning Andy as the individual responsible for that disappointment.

The speech acts in this extract function to maintain Miranda's authority through evaluative control and psychological pressure. The expressive speech acts communicate strong disappointment and negative evaluation, portraying Andy as someone who has failed to meet Miranda's expectations. By defining the standards of competence and professionalism while simultaneously judging Andy against those standards, Miranda reinforces her authority and maintains the hierarchical relationship between superior and subordinate.

Extract 8: (0:43:37-0:43:54)

Miranda: Emily!
(Andy walks into Miranda's office.)
Miranda (cont'd): ***Call James Holt's office. Tell them I want to move the preview to today at 12:30. And tell everyone else. Be ready to leave in half an hour.***

In the extract above, Miranda issues a sudden order to move forward with the schedule of a meeting with the renowned designer, James Holt. Miranda employs imperative forms such as *("Call...", "Tell...", "Be ready..."),* all of which demand immediate action and are classified as directives speech acts. According to Searle (1975), these directives possess strong illocutionary force because they are grounded in the assumption that the speaker has full authority to regulate other people's schedules and activities.

The directive speech acts function to maintain Miranda's authority through agenda control and time control. According to Fairclough's theory (2013), this form of power originates from an individual's position within broader social and institutional structures. Her ability to reschedule a meeting with James Holt (a highly influential fashion designer) through a single phone call demonstrates that Miranda's power extends beyond the internal environment of Runway and influences the wider fashion industry. Furthermore, Miranda's ability to alter professional schedules at short notice reflects the institutional authority attached to her position as Editor-in-Chief. Through these directive speech act, Miranda reinforces her authority and demonstrates control over both workplace activities and the individuals responsible for carrying them out.

Extract 9: (0:50:00-0:50:10)

Miranda: My girls leave for their grandmothers at 4. ***So, the book better be here by 3.***
Andy: Of course.
Miranda: ***I'd like my steak here in fifteen minutes.***
Andy: No problem.

In this extract, Miranda imposes extremely strict deadlines for every task she assigns. Both of Miranda's utterances in the extract are classified as directives. The phrase *"the book better be here"* contains an implicit threat, which, according to Searle (1975) directive functions as an attempt by the speaker to compel the hearer to act under pressure.

Similarly, the command to prepare a steak within such a limited time frame demonstrates Miranda's dominance over her assistant's time and priorities.

The function of speech acts evident in this extract demonstrates power in discourse, manifested through the control of urgency and time. Based on Fairclough's theory (2013), the ability to dictate an interlocutor's schedule constitutes a concrete form of ideological and structural power. By utilizing directive speech acts that specify strict, highly constrained deadlines, she constructs a working environment in which her assistant remains in a constant state of urgency, thereby creating psychological pressure that makes the subordinates easier to control and less likely to question the legitimacy or reasonableness of the order being imposed.

Extract 10: (0:51:41-0:51:55)

> *Miranda: What is that? I don't want that. (Andy looks confused.)*
> *Miranda (cont'd): I'm having lunch with Irv. I'll be back at 3. I'd like my Starbucks waiting.* ***Oh, and if you don't have that Harry Potter book by then, don't even bother coming back.***

In this scene, Miranda implicitly threatens to fire Andy if her wishes are not fulfilled. The statement *"don't even bother coming back"* is classified as a commissive in the form of a threat. Although the utterance is structured as an imperative, its primary illocutionary force lies in Miranda's commitment to a future action, namely, terminating Andy's employment if the assigned task is not completed successfully. According to Searle (1975), commissive speech acts commit the speaker to a future course of action. In this context, Miranda implicitly threatens to end Andy's professional position, thereby using the possibility of dismissal as a means of coercion and control.

The commissive speech act functions to maintain Miranda's authority through coercive control and institutional authority. By stating *"don't even bother coming back,"* Miranda implicitly threatens Andy with the possibility of losing her position if she fails to complete the assigned task. Rather than merely expressing dissatisfaction, the utterance creates a condition in which compliance becomes necessary to avoid negative consequences. This threat is strengthened by Miranda's institutional authority as Editor-in-Chief, which gives her the power to influence Andy's employment statu.

Extract 11: (1:07:34 – 1:08:25)

> *Miranda: Paris is the most important week of my entire year. I need the best possible team with me. That no longer includes Emily.*
> *Andy: Wait, you… You want me to….? No. Miranda, I… Emily would die. Her whole life is about Paris. She hasn't eaten in weeks. I can't do that, Miranda. I can't.*
> *Miranda:* ***If you don't go, I'll assume you're not serious about your future. At Runway or any other publication. The decision is yours.***
> *Andy: But—*
> *Miranda: That's all.*

The extract above is classified as a commissive because Miranda implies a commitment to a future action that could negatively affect Andy. In the statement, *"I'll assume that you're not serious about your future at Runway or any other publication,"* the use of the modal "will" indicate Miranda's readiness to adopt position that may jeopardize Andy's professional future if she refuses the assignment. According to Searle (1975), commissive speech acts commit the speaker to a future course of action, and in this context, Miranda's utterance implicitly commits her to potentially damaging consequences for Andy's career.

The speech acts in this extract function to maintain Miranda's authority through coercive control and institutional authority. The commissive utterance *"If you don't go, I'll assume you're not serious about your future"* implicitly threatens Andy with professional consequences if she refuses the assignment. Miranda exploits her considerable influence within the publishing industry to compel Andy's obedience. This interaction demonstrates that Miranda's authority extends far beyond the internal environment of Runway. Consequently, Andy's career opportunities become dependent upon compliance with Miranda's expectations, reinforcing the asymmetrical power relationship between them.

Extract 12: (1:37:29-1:37:57)

> *Andy: I couldn't do what you did to Nigel, Miranda. I couldn't do something like that.*
> *(Pause. Andy can barely believe she said it. Instead of exploding, Miranda smiles.)*
> *Miranda: Hmmm.* ***You already did. To Emily.***
> *(Andy reels.)*
> *Andy: That's not what I…. No, no, that was different. I didn't have a choice.*
> *Miranda: No, no, you choose.* ***You chose to get ahead. You want this life; those choices are necessary.***

Miranda and Andy are in a limousine on their way back to Paris. Andy begins to question Miranda's decision to betray Nigel. Miranda's utterances in this extract are predominantly classified as assertive. Through statements such as *"You already did"* and *"You chose to get ahead,"* Miranda interprets Andy's actions and presents her interpretation as an objective reality. The function of these assertive speech acts is not merely descriptive, but also justificatory, as she uses to legitimize her own behavior while simultaneously dismantling Andy's moral defense. By framing Andy's actions as evidence of her transformation, Miranda attempts to weaken Andy's ability to position herself as morally different or superior.

The mechanism of power evident in this extract is power in discourse, which is realized through ideological control and reality construction. Fairclough (2013) stated that the most effective form of power is when individuals successfully persuade others to accept a particular worldview or way of life as natural, normal, or necessary. By asserting that Andy had betrayed Emily in favor of career advancement, Miranda misinterpreted Andy's actions based on her own worldview. Rather than defending herself directly, Miranda shifted the focus of the conversation from her own behavior to Andy's moral responsibility. Through these statements, she established her interpretation as the dominant perspective and called into question Andy's ability to remain morally superior.

4.2 Discussion

Based on the research findings, it can be interpreted that the speech acts employed by Miranda Priestly function beyond their conventional role as communicative acts. Rather than merely conveying information or expressing personal intentions, her utterances operate as discursive resources through which authority is enacted, negotiated, and maintained within workplace interactions. This finding demonstrates that language in professional settings is not a neutral medium of communication but a strategic instrument for regulating interpersonal relationships and sustaining organizational hierarchy. As Holmes & Stubbe (2015) argue, workplace power is rarely just an abstract structural reality; rather, it is "constantly enacted, co-constructed, and contested through daily communicative interactions." Such a perspective can be understood more comprehensively through the integration of John R. Searle's (1975) Speech Act Theory and Norman Fairclough's (2013)

concept of power, as both theories explain the relationship between linguistic action and institutional authority from complementary perspectives.

From the perspective of Searle's Speech Act Theory, the effectiveness of Miranda's language lies in its illocutionary force, namely the speaker's ability to perform social actions through utterances. The findings indicate that Miranda's utterances consistently function to assign responsibilities, evaluate employees, restrict participation, express dissatisfaction, and terminate interactions. These functions illustrate that speech acts are not merely linguistic forms but actions that produce tangible social consequences within institutional communication.

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that each type of speech act contributes differently to the construction of authority. Directive speech acts primarily regulate the behavior of subordinates by requiring immediate compliance with workplace instructions. Meanwhile, assertive speech acts establish Miranda's evaluations, judgments, and interpretations as legitimate standards that are rarely questioned by others. Rather than opening opportunities for discussion, these utterances position Miranda's perspective as the accepted reality within the organization. In professional hierarchies, leaders frequently employ these communicative strategies to create a 'monologue of truth,' effectively transforming subjective personal judgments into unchallengeable organizational mandates (Hasanova et al., 2026). Likewise, expressive speech acts extend beyond the expression of personal emotions, as criticism, disappointment, and sarcasm function to create psychological pressure that encourages obedience and reinforces professional discipline. Although commissive speech acts occur less frequently, they also contribute to organizational control by determining future consequences for employees who fail to meet expectations. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of speech acts depends not only on their linguistic forms but also on their capacity to regulate social relationships and organizational behavior.

Through Fairclough's concepts of power, Miranda exercises power in discourse by controlling turn-taking, determining conversational topics, interrupting explanations, and limiting opportunities for subordinates to challenge her decisions. These interactional practices position discourse as the primary site where workplace authority is enacted. At the same time, power behind discourse explains why Miranda's utterances are readily accepted. As the Editor-in-Chief of Runway magazine, she possesses institutional legitimacy that authorizes her to assign tasks, evaluate employees, and define professional standards.

The integration of Searle's Speech Act Theory and Fairclough's concept of power provides a more comprehensive understanding of how language functions as a tool of institutional authority. Searle explains how utterances perform social actions through their illocutionary force, whereas Fairclough explains why those actions become effective by relating them to institutional legitimacy and broader social structures. Accordingly, the findings indicate that authority is constructed through the interaction between linguistic action and organizational position rather than by either factor alone. Speech acts become powerful because they are supported by institutional legitimacy, while institutional authority is continuously reinforced through repeated discursive practices.

Therefore, this study extends the discussion of speech acts beyond their traditional classification by demonstrating that linguistic actions function simultaneously as communicative acts and mechanisms of institutional power. Within the workplace represented in *The Devil Wears Prada*, language becomes a strategic resource for regulating behavior, constructing professional norms, maintaining hierarchical relationships, and reproducing organizational authority. Consequently, this study highlights that power in professional discourse should be understood not merely as a consequence of formal position but as a dynamic process continuously produced through everyday communicative practices.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of Miranda Priestly's utterances in *The Devil Wears Prada*, this research concludes that language serves as a vital strategic instrument for constructing, exercising, and maintaining institutional authority within professional settings. By integrating Searle's (1975) Speech Acts Theory with Fairclough's (2013) Power Theory, the research reveals that Miranda's dominance is sustained through a combination of distinct illocutionary forces: directives exercise agenda, time, and participation control; assertives construct organizational reality and establish non-negotiable standards; expressives exert psychological pressure through strategic criticism; and commissives reinforce compliance through implicit professional consequences. Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that institutional authority is not merely a static privilege derived from a formal title, but a dynamic, asymmetrical process continuously produced and reproduced through everyday communicative practices.

Despite these insights, this study is subject to certain limitations. Because the analysis relies exclusively on scripted dialogue from a single cinematic narrative, the findings capture a stylized depiction of workplace interaction rather than unscripted, naturally occurring corporate discourse. Furthermore, the analytical scope focused primarily on the dominant speaker's verbal utterances, leaving subordinate response strategies and non-verbal cues largely unexamined. To extend this line of inquiry, future researchers are encouraged to apply this integrated Searle-Fairclough framework to empirical, real-world organizational environments, such as corporate meetings or performance evaluations. Future studies could also investigate how subordinates employ counter-discursive or mitigation strategies to navigate hierarchical control, as well as incorporate multimodal discourse analysis to account for body language, vocal tone, and silence in the negotiation of institutional power.

REFERENCES

Alsamhori, M. A. O., Seine, M. I., & Al-Zuriqat, Z. K. (2025). "Speech Acts as a Means of Influence and Social Interaction: Perspectives from Austin and Searle." *Journal of Posthumanism*, *5*(3). https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i3.771

Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.

Chiang, S. (2015). Power and Discourse. In K. Tracy, T. Sandel, & C. Ilie (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction* (1st ed., pp. 1–17). Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi149

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative,*

quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (Sixth edition). SAGE.

Drewski, D. (2024). Language and symbolic boundaries among transnational elites: A qualitative case study of European Commission officials. *Global Networks*, *24*(3), e12434. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12434

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Language and Power* (2nd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315838250

Hasanova, A. T., Mustafayeva, A. F. Q., Hashimova, R. A., & Nasibova, C. N. (2026). Directive Speech Acts, Social Hierarchy and the Syntax–pragmatics Interface: A Contrastive Study of Azerbaijani and British English Institutional Discourse in Higher Education and Workplace Settings. *Journal of Basic and Applied Research International*, *32*(1), 147–159. https://doi.org/10.56557/jobari/2026/v32i110310

Holmes, J., & Stubbe, M. (2015). *Power and Politeness in the Workplace: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Talk at Work*. Routledge.

Mammadova, G. (2025). The Power of Language in Social Contexts. *Acta Globalis Humanitatis et Linguarum*, *2*(3), 134–140. https://doi.org/10.69760/aghel.0250020019

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. SAGE.

Oktapiani, Ti., Natsir, M., & Setyowati, R. (2017). WOMEN'S LANGUAGE FEATURES FOUND IN FEMALE CHARACTER'S UTTERANCES IN THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA MOVIE. *Ilmu Budaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, Dan Budaya*, *1*(3), 220. https://doi.org/10.30872/jbssb.v1i3.672

Permatasari, T. P. (2023). *An Analysis of Directive Speech Acts Used by the Antagonist and Protagonist Characters in the Lion King Movie (2019)*. https://digilib.uns.ac.id/dokumen/107487/An-Analysis-of-Directive-Speech-Acts-Used-by-the-Antagonist-and-Protagonist-Characters-in-the-Lion-King-Movie-2019

Probosini, N. (2020). Politeness Strategies in the Main Characters of "The Devil Wears Prada" Movie. *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, *5*(1), 166. https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v5i1.516

Saifudin, A. (2019). Teori Tindak Tutur dalam Studi Linguistik Pragmatik. *LITE: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya*, *15*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.33633/lite.v15i1.2382

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. R. (1975). *A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts*. https://conservancy.umn.edu/items/2b9aa876-a427-4f47-8640-74c20f583c86

Waruwu, M. (2024). Pendekatan Penelitian Kualitatif: Konsep, Prosedur, Kelebihan dan Peran di Bidang Pendidikan. *Afeksi: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Evaluasi Pendidikan*, *5*(2), 198–211. https://doi.org/10.59698/afeksi.v5i2.236