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ILLOCUTIONARY AND PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS OF ENCOURAGEMENT IN SONG WOO-YEON'S INTERACTIONS WITH SPIRIT FINGERS CLUB

Dinda Tri Nurhidayah
Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
e-mail: dindatri@students.usu.ac.id

Novitri Wulandari
Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
e-mail: novitriwulandari@students.usu.ac.id

Dinda Ayuning Tyas
Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
e-mail: dindaayuning@students.usu.ac.id

Naswa Hawanu Fero
Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
e-mail: hawaaca9@students.usu.ac.id

Rahmadsyah Rangkuti
Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia
e-mail: rangkuti@usu.ac.id

Abstract
Encouragement is an other-oriented speech act whose success depends on both the speaker's intention and its impact on the listener. This study analyzes encouragement in the Korean drama Spirit Fingers (2025) using Austin's (1962/1975) illocutionary-perlocutionary framework and Searle's (1969) definition of illocutionary acts. This study aims to identify the forms of illocutionary acts of encouragement that members of the Spirit Fingers club direct at the main character, Song Woo-yeon, and to describe the perlocutionary effects these utterances produce in her. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis, the data consist of dialogue from all twelve episodes that is spoken by club members to Woo-yeon and functions as encouragement. The data were analyzed following Miles and Huberman's (1984) procedures of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show four forms of encouragement: reassurance, praise, motivation, and encouragement to take action. These are realized through three illocutionary types, namely assertives, expressives, and directives, while commissives and declaratives do not appear. Assertives challenge Woo-yeon's inaccurate self-judgment, expressives provide emotional support, and directives push her toward action. Perlocutionary consequences include behavioral (willingness to attempt and speak what she wants) and emotional (reduced fear and self-doubt, improved confidence, feeling appreciated). Behavioral effects are less common and frequently follow emotional ones. Additionally, Woo-yeon's replies change from being hesitant and unconfident to being very assertive and confident, suggesting that these encouragements build up over time.

Keywords: *Encouragement, Illocutionary act, Korean drama, Perlocutionary act, Speech act*

1. Introduction

Speech acts are more than just informational. They are verbal acts that mold social bonds and affect the participants' emotional states. Encouragement has a unique place among speech's numerous purposes since it is inherently other-oriented. It is intended to boost a listener's self-esteem,

drive, or determination, and its effectiveness depends as much on the listener's transformation as on the speaker's words. As a result, the act has two sides: the speaker's illocutionary intent and the hearer's perlocutionary effect. This pairing provides a strong framework for pragmatic inquiry, requiring an analysis of the formulation of supportive discourse and its subsequent impact on the addressee.

Due to their dialogue-driven narratives, which frequently feature recurring interpersonal speech occurrences between characters, Korean television dramas have emerged as a fruitful source for linguistic and pragmatic study. A variety of media texts, such as podcasts (Alia, 2025), movies (Andreawan, Hastuti, & Dewi, 2022; Rismayanti, Andika & Firharmawan, 2026), and discussion programs on television (Salsabila & Suprijadi, 2021), have also been subjected to speech act analysis. *Spirit Fingers* (2025) fits the study of encouragement well. Viki aired the 12-episode South Korean series from October to November 2025 (Viki, 2025), adapting Han Kyoung-chal's webtoon of the same name. Song Woo-yeon, the main character, is a reclusive high school girl who has long been ignored by her own family. She receives an invitation to join Spirit Fingers, a sketch and painting group where each member uses a color to symbolize their individuality (IDN Times, 2025). As the series goes on, Woo-yeon continues to receive verbal support from the club members, both individually and collectively, and this support seems to correspond with noticeable shifts in her self-expression, degree of confidence, and willingness to show her actual self.

In this drama, encouragement flows over an extended period of time from several speakers to a single receiver, providing researchers with a bounded dataset that happens organically. Within it, they can trace both the linguistic form of encouragement (illocution) and its observable effect on the recipient (perlocution) in a systematic way. Speech Act Theory thus suits the analysis on theoretical and empirical grounds alike. On the theoretical side, encouragement has drawn less attention than refusals, requests, or apologies, which scholars have studied far more often. On the empirical side, *Spirit Fingers* concentrates character-driven encouragement in one setting, where it works as a central narrative device and not as an incidental piece of conversation.

Two questions guide this study: (1) Which forms or strategies of illocutionary acts of encouragement do the surrounding characters use toward the main character, and (2) Which perlocutionary effects, as responses or impacts, appear in the main character as a result of those utterances?. Accordingly, the study aims to identify the types of encouraging illocutionary acts the characters use in *Spirit Fingers* and to describe the perlocutionary effects these utterances produce in Song Woo-yeon.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech Act Theory

The foundation of this research is Speech Act Theory, which was developed by Austin (1962/1975) and later improved by Searle (1969). According to Austin, an utterance simultaneously carries out acts on three levels. The simple creation of a meaningful statement is known as the locutionary act. The communicative power the speaker aims to use, whether it

be encouraging, cautionary, or promising, is known as the illocutionary act. The perlocutionary act is the effect the utterance actually has on the hearer's thoughts, feelings, or behavior. This three-part difference serves as the foundation for the current study, since it allows encouragement to be analyzed as both an interactional event that leaves the addressee with visible repercussions and as a category of intended meaning.

Building on Austin's paradigm, Searle (1976) developed a taxonomy that divides illocutionary acts into five groups: assertives, which commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition; directives, which try to get the hearer to do something; commissives, which commit the speaker to a future course of action; expressives, which convey the speaker's psychological state; and declaratives, which change reality through the utterance itself. Encouragement has no category of its own here. Speakers realize it through several categories, mostly directives and expressives. This study therefore takes Searle's five categories as a tool for classifying the illocutionary strategies the members of *Spirit Fingers* use to encourage, and it takes Austin's perlocutionary act as the basis for analyzing the effects on Woo-yeon.

2.2 Previous Studies

Three earlier studies shape where this research sits; each supplies one piece of the picture and leaves particular gaps open. Zaki (2025) looked at encouraging illocutionary acts in the lyrics of *The Greatest Showman* and applied Searle's (1976) five categories to identify the forms encouragement takes in the songs. Although the categorization is helpful, the study never achieves perlocutionary effects since song lyrics are not participatory conversation. As a result, the data has no constant receiver whose replies a researcher might follow.

Rismayanti et al. (2021) covered all three Austinian dimensions (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary) in the dialogue between Stella and Will, the two central characters of *Five Feet Apart*, using Yule's (1996) framework. It incorporates all three levels, although it is broad in scope and does not focus on motivation. Additionally, it cannot depict what occurs when several speakers target comparable speech acts at a single recipient and the effect builds up because there are only two characters conversing.

Ahangar, Mojahedi Rezaeian, and Esfandiarpour (2022) examined how addressee power and gender shape the politeness strategies speakers choose in Persian encouragement, drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework and on data from Discourse Completion Tasks and role-play. The study shows well that encouragement responds to power and gender. But the data was elicited, not naturally occurring or drawn from media, and the framework is politeness instead of illocution and perlocution, which limits how far it applies to narrative or performed settings like television drama.

2.3 Research Gap and Novelty

When compared side by side, these studies have a number of gaps that the current study can fill. Firstly, none specifically integrates illocutionary and perlocutionary analysis for motivation: Ahangar et al. (2022) employ a politeness framework instead of an Austinian one, Zaki (2025) exclusively addresses illocution, while Rismayanti et al. (2021) address both aspects without emphasizing encouragement. Second, none shows support for a single primary

character from several speakers. In contrast to the general or one-directional data in the three previous experiments, this many-to-one arrangement allows one to observe the cumulative effect of repeated encouragement on one character's development. Third, neither Zaki nor Rismayanti attempted to comprehensively map the relationship between certain illocutionary methods (directive vs expressive, for example) and the perlocutionary outcomes they create. Last, nobody has examined the phenomenon in a Korean coming-of-age, team-based drama, a setting that differs from Zaki's Western musical, Rismayanti's romantic-medical drama, and Ahangar et al.'s elicited Persian data.

Based on this, the novelty of this study runs as follows. Other research examined locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary behaviors in general without focusing on encouragement (Rismayanti et al., 2021). Prior studies addressed encouragement through civility strategies (Ahangar et al., 2022) or from an illocutionary approach (Zaki, 2025). In an integrated illocutionary–perlocutionary paradigm, no study has yet examined how supportive statements from several characters impact a single main character. This study fills that gap by examining how different types of encouraging illocutionary acts relate to the perlocutionary effects they produce on the main character of the Korean drama *Spirit Fingers*.

3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative methodology because it aims to describe and analyze language use in context rather than test hypotheses or provide numerical generalizations. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research aims to comprehend how occurrences develop by paying careful attention to context and meaning. This study's descriptive qualitative methodology allows for an analysis of how encouragement is expressed verbally and manifests in the character's reactions and behaviors. The study is organized as a content analysis, which is a technique appropriate for closely examining repeated language in a fixed text or audiovisual content.

The drama Spirit Fingers (2025), a 12-episode series that follows shy high school girl Song Woo-yeon as she joins a close-knit art club whose members frequently provide her verbal encouragement, serves as the data source. The data is dialog from the series that is restricted by two criteria: (1) only words or phrases that serve as encouragement are included; and (2) only statements made by Spirit Fingers members that are addressed to Song Woo-yeon are preserved. By using these criteria, the dataset is guarantyd to represent the encouraging many-to-one pattern rather than the whole dialog of the drama.

Data were collected by viewing every episode and transcribing each utterance that satisfied the two criteria. Each utterance was recorded together with its context, namely the speaker, the situation, and Song Woo-yeon's subsequent verbal and nonverbal responses. This contextual information supports the interpretation of both the illocutionary force of the encouragement and its later effect.

The data were processed following Miles and Huberman's (1984) procedures of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved retaining the utterances that met the encouragement criteria. In order to analyze each speech

in its actual context, the data presentation step involved numbering and sorting the utterances according to the type of encouragement and the impact they had on Song Woo-yeon. Following the identification of patterns in the various forms of encouraging speech and the reactions they evoked, conclusions were made. These patterns were then confirmed by going back to the original utterances and the settings that surrounded them.

There were four phases in the analyzing process. First, based on its delivery style and environmental context, each preserved phrase was classified as encouraging. Second, in order to ascertain how encouragement is implemented linguistically, each encouraging statement was categorized into one of Searle's (1976) five illocutionary categories (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, or declaratives). Third, Song Woo-yeon's answer to each remark was analyzed and interpreted as a perlocutionary effect in Austin's (1962/1975) sense. This included her vocal response, conveyed emotion, and following behavior. Fourth, patterns connecting certain forms of encouragement to specific effects were found by comparing illocutionary types with the observed reactions. This final step allows the analysis to move from individual utterances to an account of how encouragement operates in the narrative and contributes to Song Woo-yeon's development.

Two criteria were used to resolve confusing circumstances since a single phrase may have many illocutionary functions. First, an utterance was categorized based on its dominant illocutionary aim, i.e., whether the speaker's main goal was to persuade the addressee to act (directive), communicate an attitude or sentiment (expressive), or commit to the truth of a proposition (assertive). Second, rather than relying just on grammatical form, this dominating point was established by the scene setting, the speaker's clear aim, and the previous and succeeding turns. Any secondary force (such as the indirect directive in Data 24) was noted in the discussion of the datum, and statements that fall between directives and assertives such as "If you keep practicing, your skill will probably improve quickly," which implies a course of action but primarily asserts a prediction were categorized under their dominant point.only grammatical form. Perlocutionary effects were categorized as observable character reactions since the data came from a theatrical series rather than reports from real hearers. Song Woo-yeon's vocal reaction, the emotion she expressed by her tone and expression on screen, and any action that followed each encouraging statement were all captured inside the same scene or the sequence that followed. Each response was then classified as either a behavioral impact (e.g., readiness to attempt or to speak what she wants) or an emotional consequence (e.g., decreased fear or self-doubt, improved confidence, or feeling appreciated). A reaction was attributed to an utterance only when it followed closely and was evidently responsive to it; changes visible only across later episodes were treated as cumulative effects rather than as the result of a single utterance.

4. Result And Discussion

4.1 RESULT

4.1.1 Forms of Encouragement

A. Reassurance

Four types of Encouragement, Reassurance (Data 1–9), Praise (Data 10–20), Motivation (Data 21–22), and

Encouragement to action (Data 23–25) are represented in the 25 data that were examined. The data for each form is shown below, organized by the issue they address. When the speakers try to ease Woo-yeon's worry, uncertainty, fear of failing, or humiliation, reassurance emerges.

Reassurance about artistic ability

The first cluster concerns Woo-yeon's doubts about her drawing ability and her nervousness before performing. Data 1 (*"You got this!"*) expresses confidence in her capacity to handle her upcoming presentation without giving specific instructions, which eases her nervousness and provides emotional support. Seon Ho's utterances in Data 2 (*"Liking it is enough."*) and Data 3 (*"It doesn't matter if you're good or bad."*) address her doubts about whether she is talented enough by redefining the standard of success: enjoyment, rather than proficiency, becomes sufficient, which relieves the pressure she places on her own performance. A similar logic underlies Data 5 (*"Confidence matters more than skill."*), which shifts her attention from technical ability to confidence as what matters for participating in the activity, and away from what she currently cannot do. When Woo-yeon gets angry over her painting, Data 4 (*"It's okay. It's okay"*) reacts to a more immediate moment of anguish; its repetition highlights the speaker's supportive attitude and conveys that her error is not anything to worry about excessively.

Reassurance about personal change and self-expression

The second cluster addresses Woo-yeon's struggle to express what she wants. In Data 6 (*"If it were the old you, you'd just give up, but now you've changed, haven't you?"*), Woo-yeon is inclined to give up rather than voice her wishes, and the speaker draws a contrast between her past and present selves, prompting her to notice a change she may not have consciously recognized. Rather than pressuring her toward a specific action, the utterance reassures her that she has already grown. Data 7 (*"That shameless honesty is attractive."*) follows directly and reframes being direct about what she wants, which could feel embarrassing, as a positive and attractive quality, thereby removing the shame she associates with honesty about her own feelings.

Reassurance about personal worth

The third cluster, voiced by Gi Jeong, affirms Woo-yeon's worth beyond any particular skill. While Woo-yeon is going through something painful at home, Data 8 (*"I'm sharing my energy with you. Energy to become amazing."*) offers emotional support framed as "giving" her energy, a comforting way of conveying that she can get through the situation. Instead of immediately addressing the issue or providing guidance, the statement serves as consolation rather than an assessment of any particular skill, and it suggests a continuous commitment to assist her rather than a single comment. Data 9: *"You are super duper extra special to me."* follows Woo-yeon's admission that she doesn't yet have a hope for the future. Gi Jeong tells her that this is okay and confirms her worth as a person regardless of whether she has a clear route, which allays her fear of being aimless rather than putting pressure on her to provide a solution.

B. Praise

Praise is used when the speakers explicitly identify Woo-yeon's positive

qualities, abilities, appearance, or progress.

Praise for drawing skill

Praise for Woo-yeon's drawing is characterized by specificity. In Data 10 (*"But last time, you drew really well."*), Seon Ho uses a successful drawing from the past as proof that she can do well, rather than just a general praise. Data 11 ("*Your lines are strong*") and Data 12 (*"The sense of proportion is good"*) both highlight specific aspects of her work, offering specific criticism rather than a general assessment and demonstrating her true drawing talent. sketching faces is specifically mentioned as one of her talents in Data 13 (*"You're really good at drawing faces"*), a favorable assessment that might boost her self-perception.

Praise for progress and finished work

Two more statements acknowledge growth and outcomes rather than fixed aptitude. Data 14: *"You've made significant progress. That means you've got talent."* makes the connection between her progress and talent, focusing her attention on her past insecurity rather than her present growth. Data 15 (*"That one you drew looks fun."*) does not directly evaluate technical ability; the speaker responds positively to the result of her drawing and communicates appreciation for what she made.

Praise for appearance

Praise also targets Woo-yeon's appearance, responding to her insecurity about her outfit. Seon Ho's remarks in Data 16 (*"Woo-yeon, you dressed up like a cute wizard today."*) and Data 17 (*"You were worried, but red looks great on you."*) both give positive evaluations of how she looks. The same response occurs collectively in Data 18 (*"It suits you perfectly."*), Data 19 (*"Check these sewing lines, so cute."*), and Data 20 (*"Adorable! It fits perfectly."*), where several members respond positively and almost simultaneously to her horror-themed costume, jointly reinforcing a favorable evaluation of her appearance.

C. Motivation

Motivation is evident when the speaker highlights Woo-yeon's potential or exhorts her to persevere despite present challenges.

Seon Ho's statement in Data 21 (*"If you keep practicing, your skill will probably improve quickly."*) motivates Woo-yeon to keep practicing despite her present limits by portraying progress as a potential future outcome. Data 22: *"You're going to be great."* also inspires her by expressing faith in her potential rather than focusing just on her present abilities. The motivating factor in both statements is envisioning a positive future rather than evaluating current achievement.

D. Encouragement to Take Action

Some encouragement does not primarily reassure or praise Woo-yeon, but instead attempts to make her take a particular action.

Data 23: *"When you want something, say it."* is a behavioral push rather than a compliment or a reassuring statement that encourages Woo-yeon to voice her desires instead of giving up or keeping them to herself. The self-praise game, where pressure to behave is applied in two ways, provides the remaining data. I'll pretend to be Baeblu in Data 24. Gi Jeong sets an example for Woo-yeon by saying, *"I'm Baeblu Finger, I'm cute, charming, and smart."*

Despite talking about himself, his actions show how she can contribute. In Data 25 (*"But if someone covers for you, you'll need to withdraw your membership. If you can't handle it, we'll process your withdrawal."*), rather of providing encouragement, Black Finger puts pressure on her to complete the assignment by highlighting the repercussions of not participating. Woo-yeon's response, *"I'll try again!"*, shows an observable behavioral effect: she moves from stating that she has nothing to boast about to expressing willingness to try.

4.1.2 Illocutionary Acts Used in Encouragement

The analysis shows encouragement is not realized through a single type of illocutionary act. Based on Searle's (1976) classification, the data contain only three types of illocutionary act, namely assertives, expressives, and directives.

"Liking it is enough," "It doesn't matter if you're good or bad," "Your lines are strong," "If you keep practicing, your skill will probably improve quickly," are examples of assertive statements. *"The sense of proportion is good," "You're going to be great," "You're really good at drawing faces,"* as well as *"If it were the old you, you'd just give up, but now you've changed, haven't you?"* In these, the speakers make a commitment to the topic of their remarks, assessing Woo-yeon's aptitude or voicing opinions on her capacity for growth.

Expressives occur when speakers express attitudes, feelings, or evaluations toward Woo-yeon: "You got this!" "It's okay. It's okay," "You dressed up like a cute wizard today," "Red looks great on you," "Adorable! It fits perfectly," "That shameless honesty is attractive," "I'm sharing my energy with you. Energy to become amazing," and "You are super duper extra special to me." These communicate supportive or positive attitudes, with the encouraging function coming from the emotional support contained in the speakers' positive evaluations.

Directives appear when speakers attempt to get Woo-yeon to perform an action. "When you want something, say it," when the speaker tries to directly affect her behavior, is the most obvious example. Directive encouragement is also included in the self-praise scene: Black Finger puts pressure on Woo-yeon to do the task herself (a direct instruction), while Gi Jeong exemplifies the anticipated conduct (an indirect directive).her capacity for growth and transformation.

4.1.3 Perlocutionary Effects of Encouragement

The findings indicate that encouragement produces both emotional and behavioral effects.

Emotional effects are the most common: reducing anxiety, reducing self-doubt, increasing confidence, providing reassurance, making Woo-yeon feel valued, and providing emotional comfort. Compliments about her drawing help her recognize abilities she tends to overlook; compliments about her appearance respond to her insecurity and provide positive reinforcement. Gi Jeong's comment that Woo-yeon is "super-duper extra special" to him in Episode 9 reassures her that having a clear plan is not a prerequisite for her value. In a similar vein, his earlier statement about sharing energy soothes her in a moment of sadness rather than motivating her to take any particular action.

Behavioral effects are less common but do appear. The clearest example is the self-praise game: Woo-yeon initially says she has nothing to boast about, but after Gi Jeong models self-praise and Black Finger pressures her, she responds "I'll try again!", a shift from refusal to participation. The Episode 5 sequence (Data 6, 7, and 23) shows a similar pattern, where reassurance about her growth and the removal of shame around honesty appear to work alongside the direct push ("say it") to move her toward actually voicing what she wants, which suggests that in this drama, behavioral change tends to follow, and depend on, emotional reassurance rather than occurring on its own.

4.2 DISCUSSION

Encouragement toward Woo-yeon consistently addresses a particular insecurity she is currently expressing rather than emerging at random; reassurance data cluster around instances of self-doubt, guilt, or reluctance, addressing that precise concern. Praise functions differently because it provides tangible proof of her strengths rather than merely calming her emotions ("Your lines are strong," "The sense of proportion is good"), correcting rather than merely consoling her self-perception.

Rather than being interchangeable, the illocutionary variation in the data (directive, expressive, and assertive) transfers into different encouraging roles. Directives motivate her to take action when affirmation is insufficient; expressives function via emotional support rather than argument; and assertives contradict her erroneous self-judgment by proclaiming a belief as truth. The self-praise game and the Episode 5 scene both demonstrate comfort and the elimination of shame before she really acts. In several instances, this emotional foundation is followed by observable behavioral improvement.only consoling it.

Additionally, encouragement isn't always kind. Gi Jeong's line functions by modeling rather than explicitly declaring, while Black Finger's threat in the self-praise game completely withholds comfort; both nonetheless qualify as encouragement by function as they inspire Woo-yeon to participate despite in the absence of the gentle tone of assurance or praise. Nor is encouragement solely a matter of ability: Data 8 and 9 affirm her personal worth independent of any skill or plan, mattering especially in scenes where her insecurity has nothing to do with drawing at all.

Woo-yeon's answers change throughout the course of the twelve episodes, going from tentative, self-doubting replies early on to active involvement and self-initiated assertion later on, indicating that the encouragement builds rather than acts alone. This culminates in her reflective monologue near the end: "I used to only imagine things that could happen in fantasies... but now I know that even someone like me can do something," and "I'm still timid... but I won't give up halfway, because I'm the one and only special Baeblu Finger in the world." She still considers herself as hesitant, but she has developed enough self-confidence to carry on, demonstrating that the cumulative encouragement did not eliminate her uneasiness. This signifies the conclusion of her identity development in the narrative as her confidence increased because she learnt to act in spite of her doubts rather than because she stopped having them.

5. Conclusion

Using Searle's (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts and Austin's (1962/1975) illocutionary, perlocutionary framework, this study investigated speech acts of encouragement in interactions between Song Woo-yeon and Spirit Fingers club members. Four sorts of encouragement such as reassurance, praise, incentive, and action-oriented encouragement were discovered by the investigation and are implemented through three illocutionary types. Woo-yeon's erroneous self-judgment was challenged by assertives, such as assessments of her abilities and statements that reframe her self-perception; emotional support was provided by expressives, such as compliments on her appearance and affirmations of her value; and directives, which ranged from explicit pressure to modeled behavior, encouraged her to take action.

In terms of perlocutionary outcomes, the study revealed a twin effect: behavioral changes like proactive engagement were sparked by emotional impacts, which mostly took the form of decreased anxiety and increased self-worth. Emotional benefits were more common and typically preceded behavioral effects like Woo-yeon's readiness to try again and express her desires, suggesting that emotional reassurance promotes behavioral change. These effects also included decreased self-doubt and improved confidence. Over the course of the twelve sessions, her reactions likewise changed from hesitancy to proactive, confident engagement, indicating that the benefits of encouragement build up over time.

By demonstrating that encouragement, while not being a category in Searle's taxonomy, may be broken down into expressive, assertive, and directive actions, this study theoretically advances our knowledge of speech acts. It also shows that impacts must be tracked over time and that merely examining what is stated is insufficient. The study provides a better understanding of how language affects interlocutors during subsequent interactions by looking at illocutionary acts together with their perlocutionary results.

In practical terms, the research provides a framework for examining encouragement when one person is supported by numerous others, especially in media like plays, movies, and books where character development frequently arises from repeated messages from several sources. The results have implications for language instruction as well. Teachers may use these examples to show how suggesting, reframing, and complementing can be used successfully to encourage and assist people in everyday situations.

However, there are a few restrictions to be aware of. Because the study only looks at one play and one character, it's possible that the patterns found won't apply to other genres, languages, or cultures. Therefore, future studies should examine whether the same correlations persist in different situations, such as whether directive acts still largely result in behavioral consequences or whether expressive acts continue to be primarily related with emotional impacts. It would be possible to determine if the patterns are consistent or context-dependent by looking at these issues across media, languages, and cultural backgrounds.

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