

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The 1930s was a challenging period in California due to the economic crisis. During this time, people were desperate for work and would travel anywhere just to find a job. The movie “Of Mice and Men” (1939) presents a story from this era, focusing on two characters, namely George Milton and Lennie Small. Both of the characters have very different personalities. George is small and smart, while Lennie is big and has an intellectual disability, marked by a very poor memory and struggles to understand the dangers around him, which makes him completely depend on George for his safety.

In the movie, George is the most interesting character to study. George always uses many strong and sometimes harsh words when speaking to Lennie. On the surface, his words sound like he is cruel and hates Lennie. However, if we look deeper, these harsh instructions show how much George actually cares about Lennie. A psychoanalytical study of the movie categorizes George as the 'superego' who continuously holds back Lennie's dangerous urges to keep him out of trouble (Manjhi & Tiwari, 2017). It indicates that in a world that is very mean to people like Lennie, George uses his commands to protect Lennie, as Lennie cannot easily take care of himself. To analyze this, the study uses pragmatics, a study that focuses on a speaker's intended meaning in a specific context (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics helps explain why George says certain things by looking at the situation and his

relationship with Lennie.

In pragmatics, there is a concept called speech acts, which explains that when we speak, we are also doing an action (Bach and Harnish, 1979). For example, when someone says, "I promise to come," they are not only giving information but also performing the act of promising. According to Bach and Harnish (1979), in speech act theory, there are sequences that happen when someone talks: locution (the literal act of saying something), illocution (the speaker's intention), and perlocution (the effect on the listener). This study sees how the illocutionary act applies in George's utterances when talking to Lennie with harsh instructions.

This study focuses on the analysis of directive speech acts, a category of illocutionary acts that functions to make the hearer perform an action (Bach and Harnish, 1979). In the context of the movie, directive speech acts are the most prominent tool George uses to communicate with Lennie.

These harsh and aggressive manners in which George delivers these utterances are rooted in his own rough and short-tempered character (Heavilin, 2004). However, while these harsh directives pragmatically function as a form of protection, they also significantly impact how the audience perceives George, who is rude. Therefore, this study not only investigates the pragmatic function of George's directive speech acts in demonstrating care but also examines how the harsh nature of these utterances constructs his characterization as a harsh and short-tempered figure. By bridging pragmatics and characterization, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of George's complex character.

1.3 Research Questions

To achieve its purposes, this study focuses on two research questions, as follows:

1. How do George Milton's directive speech acts show his caring attitude toward Lennie Small in the movie *Of Mice and Men* (1939)?
2. How do the directive speech acts employed by George to demonstrate his care reflect his harsh and short-tempered characterization?

1.4 Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the study include:

1. To analyze how George's harsh directive speech acts demonstrate his care for Lennie in the movie *Of Mice and Men* (1939).
2. To analyze how these directive speech acts construct George's characterization as a harsh and short-tempered figure in the movie *Of Mice and Men* (1939).

1.5 Previous Studies

This section reviews several previous studies related to the *Of Mice and Men* (1939) movie, speech act theory, and theory of characterization. By comparing these studies, this section aims to find a study gap and show its own focus.

Several studies have analyzed "Of Mice and Men" from various perspectives outside of pragmatics. In the field of literary criticism, Modi (2024)

analyzed the main themes of the movie, such as dreams, loneliness, and fate. From a linguistic side, Nisak (2018) conducted a sociolinguistic study on the word “ain’t” as a marker of solidarity among workers, using Guth’s theory along with Fought and Holmes’ theories.

Even though Nisak’s study and this current study both discuss linguistic aspects, they differ in focus because this study focuses on directive speech acts rather than just the use of slang. Furthermore, Marpaung & Deliana (2024) analyzed the object from a syntactic viewpoint by analyzing the structure and frequency of adjective clauses. In terms of methodology, this study shares the same descriptive qualitative approach as their study.

Many researchers have used speech act theory to analyze directive acts in different types of media. In terms of research on novels, Pertiwi (2021) identified six types of directive acts using the theory by Bach and Harnish (1979). This is the same theory applied in the current study, even though the object being analyzed is different. Other studies, employed by Fitriyah (2022) and Dahlan et al. (2024), discovered that questions were the most prevalent kind. However, unlike the approach used in the current study, these studies used Searle's theory to analyze the types of speech acts instead of using Bach and Harnish’s theory.

In movie studies, Dewi (2023) analyzed directive speech acts using Searle and Vanderveken’s model (1985), which differs from the current study as it utilizes Bach and Harnish (1979) to classify the types of the directive speech acts. In terms of the focus analysis, their study discusses social relations like power and solidarity, while the current study focuses on how directive speech acts reflect caring attitudes.

On the other hand, the study by Insyra and Supri (2024) is more similar to the current study. Using the same theory and method, they also found that requests were the most common type of directive. Sarwoko (2022) and Widianingsih et al. (2024), however, focused on counting how often each directive type appeared, finding that questions and commands were the most dominant types.

Many studies examine how a character is built through their words and actions in movies. For example, Risma et al. (2022) also studied how a character's words and behavior reveal who they really are. Regarding George Milton specifically, several studies have noted that he is a harsh and short-tempered character. Meyer (2009) explains that George uses aggressive language because of the pressure in his life, while Bloom (2006) suggests that his quick temper is a way for him to defend himself while taking care of Lennie. However, most of these studies do not look at how George's specific way of speaking actually shows his character. Therefore, this study fills that gap by connecting George's quick-tempered nature with his caring side, showing that his harsh words are actually a way to protect Lennie.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the pragmatic (speech acts) and characterization analysis of George Milton's utterances in the *Of Mice and Men* (1939) movie. The data is limited to George's harsh directive speech acts spoken to Lennie Small. that demonstrate George's caring attitude; interactions with other characters are excluded because the unique paradox of using harsh directives as a form of caring exclusively exists within George and Lennie's relationship, which is the central

focus of this study.

To classify the types of directive speech acts and to describe how they function to demonstrate care, this study applies the speech act theory, specifically focusing on illocutionary acts by Bach and Harnish (1979) because their theory divides directive speech acts in more detail into six types using two main indicators: the speaker's intention and the hearer's response in understanding the utterance. This detailed division helps the study to accurately categorize George's instructions and explain that his true goal is to show his caring attitude. Furthermore, to analyze how these harsh utterances construct George's characterization as a rough and short-tempered figure, this study applies the film characterization theory of Pickering and Hoepfer (1981), specifically limiting the analysis to the dialogue element.