

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Not only a tool for delivering information, but language is also used by people to perform actions, build relationships, and negotiate meaning in social interaction. These phenomena are known as speech acts, which are central to pragmatic and communication studies. Austin (1962) argued that someone also uses utterances to perform actions, influence others, and achieve specific outcomes. Searle (1969) later classifies speech acts into five illocutionary acts based on their communicative functions. Similarly, Yule (1996) emphasizes that the utterances' meaning and force can be properly understood in the context of their use. A simple question like "Can you speak English, please?" does not simply ask about someone's ability to speak English; it may also function as a request to speak English. Other examples, namely apologizing, congratulating, promising, and thanking, can convey meanings more than their literal forms (Austin, 1962:94-98; Searle, 1969:22-23; Yule, 1996:3).

This development expanded linguistic studies, initially focused only on analyzing language structure, to include the study of language use in context. Within this development, literary pragmatics emerged as an approach that applies pragmatic theory to the study of literary texts. Literary pragmatics assumes that, despite the artistic style, literary works reflect real-life communication and social interaction patterns. Therefore, pragmatic (speech act) theories can be applied to

literary works to see dimensions of meaning that are sometimes overlooked when only literary approaches are used. By analyzing characters' utterances, researchers can gain insights into characterization, interpersonal relationships, and thematic development in literature.

One literary work that provides great material for this kind of analysis is John Grisham's *The Pelican Brief* (1992). The novel tells a story of Darby Shaw, a law student who falls into a dangerous political conspiracy after she wrote a legal brief implicating important figures in the assassination of two Supreme Court justices. In the novel, Darby often involves herself in tense interactions with FBI agents, journalists, and antagonists. Unlike many protagonists in legal thriller fiction, who typically rely on physical action, Darby often demonstrates courage through her words by asserting, persuading, confronting, and resisting, even under pressure and threat. Therefore, her dialogues provide significant material for speech act analysis.

Although there has been research applying speech act theory to novels, previous studies have largely focused on social relations, power relations, or general personality traits. The few studies focusing on *The Pelican Brief* typically examine Darby's bravery solely through feminist, sociological, psychological, or behavioral perspectives. Little attention has been given to how her bravery is linguistically constructed through the illocutionary acts of her dialogue. Therefore, it can be argued that the relationship between speech acts and the construction of bravery in literary characterization remains underexplored.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the illocutionary acts performed by Darby Shaw in John Grisham's "*The Pelican Brief*" (1992) to analyze how her speech acts contribute to her portrayal as a brave character. By focusing on Darby Shaw's dialogues, this study's objective is to show how pragmatic analysis can contribute to the study of character portrayal in literary works.

1.2. Research Problems

Based on the background of the study and the identified research gap, this thesis formulated the following three research questions:

1. What types of illocutionary acts are performed by Darby Shaw in her dialogues in *The Pelican Brief* novel?
2. How do Darby Shaw's illocutionary acts function within their narrative context?
3. Why do Darby Shaw's illocutionary acts contribute to her characterization as a brave person?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

In line with the research questions above, this study's objectives are as follows:

1. To identify the types of illocutionary acts performed by Darby Shaw in *The Pelican Brief*.
2. To describe the functions of Darby Shaw's illocutionary acts within their narrative contexts.
3. To explain how Darby Shaw's illocutionary acts reflect and contribute to her characterization as a brave character.

1.4. Previous Studies

This section reviews several previous studies of speech acts in literary works, the analysis of John Grisham's *The Pelican Brief*, and Darby Shaw's characterization. These studies provide theoretical and analytical foundations for the present research and highlight the research gap addressed.

1. Novel-based Studies: Speech act in literary fiction

Studies applying speech act theory to literary works, especially novels, have increased in recent years. One of them is Nurhayati and Yuwartik (2016), who analyze illocutionary and perlocutionary acts across multiple characters in *The Black Cat* using Searle's and Austin's theories. Although their analysis pinpoints various categories of speech acts and their effects, it concentrates on classifying them and does not relate these speech-act patterns to characterization.

Another relevant study that analyzes speech acts in a novel is a study by Pertiwi, Candria, and Wulandari (2021). They applied Bach and Harnish's speech act theory to examine Aisha Saeed's directive speech acts in *Amal Unbound*. Their findings show that social status, age, and power relations influence the character's speech act choices. Although the study demonstrates the relationship between speech and social identity, it is more sociological than characterological, and it doesn't use Searle's taxonomy but a different framework.

Within the same year, Fardani and Nirmala (2021) also analyzed speech acts in the novel's narrative by analyzing directive speech acts used by Theodore Finch, the protagonist in Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places*. Using Searle's theory, IFIDs, and felicity conditions, they conclude that Theodore is characterized as

caring, adventurous, and brave. This study is closely related to the present research because it connects speech acts with characterization. Nevertheless, its analysis is limited to directive acts and excludes other illocutionary acts, thus narrowing the characterization's interpretation.

Similarly, Ji Ming-ming (2025) analyzes how dialogue contributes to characterization and plot development in *Flipped*. By applying Austin's and Searle's framework, Ji argues that speech acts contribute to personality traits and narrative progression. However, Ji's study examines multiple characters' personalities rather than one protagonist's trait, as is this paper's objective.

Another research study, which is Chandra and Sani (2025), analyzes speech acts in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novels to examine identity construction through language. They argue that illocutionary acts strengthen the characterization and reflect the novel's social structures. Although the study reinforces the idea that speech acts are connected to identity and characterization, it is oriented toward sociolinguistics rather than characterization.

The studies reviewed above demonstrate that although studies of speech act theory have been widely applied in novels, they either focus on certain types of speech acts or analyze broad characterization or personality traits across multiple novel characters. Few studies specifically examine how various illocutionary acts contribute to the construction of a character trait such as bravery.

2. Studies on *The Pelican Brief*

Several studies have analyzed John Grisham's *The Pelican Brief* from literary, sociological, and psychological perspectives, focusing on various aspects of the novel. For example, Vasiu (2018), using feminist literary criticism, analyzes female representation from several of Grisham's novels, including *The Pelican Brief*. The study concludes that Darby Shaw is described as an intelligent, analytical, courageous, and independent woman, but is still framed as a victim in a patriarchal legal system using close textual reading. This study discusses Darby's characterization in wider gender and power themes. However, its limitation lies in its ideological focus, which focuses on how Grisham narratively constructs Darby rather than analyzing her characterization through language.

Still with the same novel, Singh (2023) examines it using ecocriticism, green criminology, and risk-society theory. He argues that the portrayal of Darby Shaw as a modern detective figure who risks her safety in pursuit of justice explicitly characterizes her as brave, selfless, and devoted. Although the study explicitly associates Darby with bravery, the analysis remains thematic rather than linguistic. Darby's bravery is not interpreted through her speech but through her actions and narrative role.

Similarly, Susilowati (2010) examines the novel's intrinsic and extrinsic elements through sociological and journalistic perspectives. Using descriptive qualitative methods, the study examines investigative journalism practices as reflected in the work of Darby Shaw and Gray Grantham. The findings show that both characters are performing investigative activities such as evidence tracing and ethical information gathering. Compared with Vasiu's feminist approach and

Singh's ecocritical framework, Susilowati's study is more socio-practical because it focuses on investigative processes and journalistic techniques within narrative. The contribution of Susilowati's study lies in establishing the novel's socio-political context and demonstrating that Darby's actions are closely connected to investigative practices and truth-seeking behavior. However, as in previous studies, it does not analyze Darby's linguistic behavior. Darby is treated mainly as an investigative actor within a sociological framework rather than as a literary character whose identity is revealed through dialogue. As a result, the study provides contextual background but does not directly address the present study's focus on speech acts and characterization.

3. Studies on Darby Shaw's Characterization

In several studies, Darby Shaw's characterization became the main focus, and they examined her psychological, philosophical, and behavioral qualities. One of them is Rudianto (2016). He analyzes Darby Shaw's character using Maslow's hierarchy of needs by employing descriptive qualitative methods. His study examines the film adaptation and concludes that Darby demonstrates self-actualization characteristics through independence, creativity, realistic thinking, and persistence in pursuing justice despite danger. Although the study contributes to seeing Darby's psychological maturity, its focus on the film adaptation is limiting its relevance to linguistic analysis, as characterization is shaped not only by dialogue but also by visual performance and cinematography. In addition, Maslow's framework explains motivation and personal fulfillment rather than communicative behavior.

Consequently, the study does not examine how Darby's language reflects her character.

More directly related to the present study is Ratnasari's (2018) thesis, which examined women's bravery reflected in *The Pelican Brief*. The study employs descriptive qualitative methods and uses Simone de Beauvoir's existentialism and Paul Findley's concept of bravery to analyze Darby's freedom, responsibility, and decision-making as a form of existential courage. The study identifies several bravery types, such as heroic, personal, quiet, and frightened bravery, and argues that Darby's courage emerges from her willingness to face danger and accept responsibility for her actions. Similarly, Novitasari (2018) examines Darby's bravery using Watson's theory of behaviorism. Using descriptive qualitative methods, the study explains the emotions that serve as evidence of emotional reactions supporting bravery and categorizes her bravery as situational, heroic, and factor-influenced bravery. Novitasari concludes that Darby's courage is reflected through her behavioral responses to fear, threats, and dangerous situations following Thomas Callahan's murder.

Although Ratnasari and Novitasari both focus on bravery in the same novel, both studies share a similar limitation: they analyze bravery primarily through actions, decisions, and psychological conditions rather than through language. Dialogue functions only as supporting evidence, not as the main analytical object. As a result, neither study explains how bravery is pragmatically performed in communication.

Based on the studies above, it can be concluded that previous research has discussed Darby Shaw's bravery from feminist, sociological, psychological, and behavioral perspectives. However, limited attention has been given to how her bravery is linguistically constructed through illocutionary acts in dialogue. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this gap by analyzing Darby Shaw's speech acts as a means of characterization.

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the analysis of illocutionary acts of Darby Shaw, the heroine in John Grisham's *The Pelican Brief*. The primary data are Darby Shaw's direct dialogues in the novel, while her interlocutors' dialogues and their surrounding narrative context are included as supporting evidence for data validation and interpretation. The analysis focuses on identifying the types and identifiable illocutionary force of Darby Shaw's utterances in light of Searle's (1969, 1979) classification of illocutionary acts, and it examines how these speech acts contribute to the construction of her characterization. The study does not include the speech acts of other unrelated characters, nor does it address narrative descriptions, internal monologues, authorial commentary, or speech act categories outside the illocutionary type, such as locutionary or perlocutionary acts. The analysis is also limited to the language use of Darby Shaw. In the present study, bravery is conceptualized as communicative behaviors, including verbal resistance, firmness, truth assertion under pressure, confrontation of intimidation, and principle maintenance in threatening situations. These indicators are used to reduce subjective interpretation when analyzing characterization.

1.6. Writing Organization

This thesis consists of four chapters:

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Provides the foundation of the study. It also situates the study in the broader context of pragmatics and literary analysis. It establishes the rationale for examining Darby Shaw's illocutionary acts in the novel *The Pelican Brief*.

CHAPTER II: THEORY AND METHOD

Discusses this study's theoretical framework and methodology. It explains pragmatics as the linguistic field that encompasses speech act theory, including the illocutionary act types and their selected theories, the characterization theory, and the bravery concept. It also describes the research design, the collecting method, data analysis, the data, and their sources.

CHAPTER III: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presents the study's findings and is organized around the three previously explained research questions. It identifies and classifies the types of illocutionary acts found in Darby Shaw's utterances, explains the functions these acts serve within the narrative context, and analyzes how they contribute to the construction of her brave characterization.

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS

Summarizes the study's findings drawn from the analysis, presents the conclusions, and provides suggestions for future research in related areas.