

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Novels are literary works that provide entertainment for the public. One of the most popular is a psychological thriller. It differs from other genres by its distinctive blend of suspense and spiritual depth, as well as its detailed descriptions of the characters' inner worlds (Samandarova, 2024). 'The Silent Patient,' a psychological thriller, is the 2019 debut novel from British-Cypriot novelist Alex Michaelides. The novel follows the main character, Theo Faber, who treats Alicia Berenson, a successful painter who stops talking after apparently killing her husband at their home in northwest London.

Theo Faber is a forensic psychotherapist who chose to study psychology to heal himself from his childhood trauma. During his study and healing period, Theo Faber was interested in the case of a woman who killed her husband with several shots, named Alicia Berenson.

Alicia Berenson is a well-known painter in London and her name started to come up after news of the brutal murder of her husband. After the murder, Alicia chose to keep her mouth shut, not speak a word, and be silent. Until finally, Theo Faber, who was very interested in Alicia's story, tried to work under the psychiatric unit, the Grove, where Alicia was. Theo Faber was used to working with some of the most damaged and vulnerable members of society and something about Alicia's story resonated with him personally as he felt deep empathy for her right from the

start. Alternating between Theo's narrative in the present that leads up to the murder, the novel explores the relationship between therapist and patient.

In this instance, language serves as a tool for communication, so the speaker must take into consideration who he/she is speaking to and in what situation. When we talk to others, we are performing an utterance. A speech act is an action that makes an utterance. The speaker usually expects the hearer to know the meaning of the intended utterance (Yule, 1996: 47).

Speech acts can occur with an understanding between the speaker and the hearer. For a behavior to change in accordance with the speaker's wishes, the hearer must understand the speaker's intention. In this case, the speech act can be a tool to find out the intention of the speaker for the meaning of the intended utterance for the listener to understand.

Yule (1996) classified speech acts into three. First, there is the act of locution, which is the act of saying something with meaningful verbal elements. The second is the illocutionary act, which is the purpose or intended action of the utterance. Lastly, there is the perlocutionary act, which includes the speaker's assumption that the intended meaning will be understood, with the appropriate effect on the hearer. With that, the author takes the illocutionary act as a speech act used to examine Theo Faber's character, where Searle (1976) revealed a list of illocutionary acts: *declarative*, *representative*, *expressive*, *directive*, and *commissive*. One of the interesting illocutionary acts is a directive. Directives are sentences from the speaker as an attempt to get the hearer to do something. An example of a sentence that shows a directive speech act is, "Don't touch that." (Yule, 1996: 54).

By combining communication strategies to support Theo's efforts to get Alicia to talk, as seen in directive speech theory, we will see how Theo's words influence Alicia's desire to talk again. Theo Faber's persistence in getting Alicia to speak again was a difficult journey. Eventually, Theo was able to get Alicia to speak and express what she was feeling.

He uses short utterances quite often to the people around him, but uses longer utterances when talking to his patient, Alicia. This phenomenon is interesting to study because of how the character Theo Faber uses directive speech acts to try to get his patient, Alicia, to speak again by combining communication strategies as a supporter. This analysis will only discuss direct and indirect speech acts to investigate how Theo Faber employs directive speech acts to elicit Alicia Berenson's speech.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on the background, the researcher found a gap regarding the factors that influenced Theo Faber to persuade Alicia to speak again. This led the researcher to write three research questions.

1. What kinds of directive speech acts does Theo Faber use, and which ones produce responses?
2. How do directive speech acts by Theo Faber show as communication accommodation in persuading Alicia to speak?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

According to the research question, researchers will attempt to provide solutions to the problems presented by answering them through these objectives.

1. To identify types of directive speech acts used by Theo Faber and determine which of them produce responses from Alicia Berenson.
2. To describe the function of directive speech acts as a communication accommodation employed by The Faber to persuade Alicia Berenson to speak.

1.4. Previous Study

To establish the context for this research, several previous studies on *The Silent Patient* were examined and can be categorized into several approaches. The first approach is from a psychological perspective. A significant portion of the literature focuses on Freudian and Lacanian theories. Researchers have analyzed Theo Faber's personality structure, specifically examining the fluctuations of his Id and Ego as he navigates impulsive urges and rational decisions (Shoukat et al., 2021). Alicia Berenson's silence is frequently interpreted as a defense mechanism against repressed childhood trauma (Arrifa, 2025; Larik et al., 2025; Naqvi et al., 2025). Furthermore, the concepts of containment and holding environments, as theorized by Bion and Winnicott, have been applied to Alicia's relationships with her father and husband to explain her ultimate psychological collapse (Hossain, 2021).

Another approach used to study this novel is the Trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Many researchers have discussed PTSD symptoms in the two main characters. Alicia is often analyzed and described to have complex PTSD. Her trauma appears through her flashbacks, her ways in avoiding people, and also self-harm behavior (Larik et al., 2025; Mohammed & Al Areqi, 2026; Shoaib & Ali, 2025). Meanwhile, Theo Faber is also analyzed with anxiety and abandonment

problems due to the abuse from his father during his childhood (Akhter, 2025; Zahid et al., 2023). These studies observe childhood trauma that shapes adult actions and relationships later in life.

Moreover, other researchers examine the feminism in the characters. They observe Alicia's silence as trauma and as a form of resistance toward the patriarchal control suppressing women's voices in the story (Mohammed & Al Areqi, 2026; Naqvi et al., 2025). Using Simone de Beauvoir's idea of The Other, Alicia is observed and defined as a woman that is pushed aside by her husband, the mental health institution, and by Theo himself who tries to control her story. Moreover, the theory of Ambivalent Sexism Theory is also used in several studies, and it explains the sexist attitudes received by Alicia and Kathy, the ones who are hostile and benevolent, and the ones supporting male power (Alebrahim, 2024). The novel is also discussed in psychotherapy studies regarding ethics. Researchers discuss the unequal power relations and countertransference when Theo becomes too personally involved and breaks any professional boundaries (Akhter, 2025; Suryawanshi, 2025). In contrast, the framework of Narrative Medicine explores how storytelling, empathetic listening, and art therapy facilitate emotional breakthroughs in otherwise resistant patients (Mohammed & Al Areqi, 2026; Rana & Khan, 2023).

Linguistic analyses have investigated semantic deviation, identifying how the intentional use of metaphors, similes, and personification illustrates the symptoms of PTSD and the intensity of psychological suffering (Shoaib & Ali, 2025). Other stylistic studies focus on phonological and syntactic levels, such as alliteration and

parallelism, to show how the author strategically constructs a narrative of psychological intrigue and mystery (Faheem & Fayyaz, 2025).

Additional psychological frameworks that have been studied include an analysis of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which finds that while Theo achieves self-actualization through his roles as a healer, Alicia fails to meet her basic psychological needs due to her illness (Utami et al., 2023). Jungian archetypal analysis identifies the shadow as the dominant archetype in Alicia's personality (Safitri et al., 2023). Finally, studies on trust and intrapersonal rationality highlight how Theo's criminal behavior stems from a lack of self-trust and rational self-control (Reshmi, 2025).

To fill a significant gap in the diverse literature, this study analyzes the linguistic mechanics of directive speech acts, focusing on the transition of a patient from silence to speaking. This research aims to determine the different types of directives work, that are used as persuasive tools to create communication breakthroughs.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The study specifically examined the conversations uttered by Theo Faber and Alicia Berenson in the psychiatric institution called the Grove. The discussion is limited to directive speech acts only for the analysis to be clear and specific, and the types, functions, and effectiveness of Theo's speech can be determined clearly.

The direct and indirect speech acts were analyzed in order to find out the way Theo uses language when communicating with a patient who refuses to speak. This is in line with the aim of the study, which is to identify the directive types, as well as to find the effective forms in encouraging verbal responses from Alicia.

Furthermore, this study would also determine the power relation between the therapist and patient, as the power dynamics can affect whether the communication succeeds or fails. Moreover, the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) was also applied to examine the way the directive speech acts become part of wider communication strategies. The data for this research are restricted to the utterances spoken by Theo Faber to Alicia Berenson as presented in the 2019 novel *The Silent Patient*.