

## RECOGNIZING ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN AMY TAN'S BONESETTER DAUGHTER NOVEL THROUGH SOCIO-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

Language is a powerful tool for expressing identity, navigating relationships, and addressing cultural complexities, particularly in literary works that explore intricate social dynamics. This study investigates the interplay between language, cultural context, and communication within Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, emphasizing how speech acts reflect and navigate complex social relationships. Through a socio-pragmatic framework, the research examines dialogues and interactions in the novel to identify illocutionary speech acts and their socio-cultural implications. Utilizing text and content analysis methods, data were collected using the AntConc tool to identify keywords associated with various speech acts, followed by a detailed analysis of the characters' utterances. The findings reveal 499 instances of illocutionary speech acts, categorized into assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative types as outlined by Searle's theory. These acts illustrate the characters' efforts to navigate cultural conflicts, identity struggles, and generational tensions, particularly within the mother-daughter dynamic between Ruth and LuLing. The study underscores the role of language in mediating relationships, resolving conflicts, and expressing cultural identity. By providing insights into how speech acts operate within specific social and cultural contexts, this research contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics and literary studies. It highlights the practical application of socio-pragmatic analysis in understanding the relationship between language, culture, and identity in literature.

**Keywords:** *Illocutionary speech acts, AntConc, Social Interaction, Socio-Pragmatics, The Bonesetter's Daughter*

### INTRODUCTION

Analyzing novels with rich dialogues provides an excellent opportunity to study both literal and implied meanings in language, making them valuable tools for exploring speech acts (Makram, 2018). Novels, with their detailed and realistic conversations, create a rich context for teaching and understanding pragmatics, as they showcase how dialogue drives plot and reveals character traits (Nurgiyantoro, 2015). This study focuses on the speech acts and social interactions within Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, adopting a socio-pragmatic lens (Oloo et al., 2019).

Unlike poetry or drama, novels captivate readers with their engaging plots and realistic depictions of life (Tantra et al., 2021). *The Bonesetter's Daughter* stands out by exploring the lives of Chinese Americans, delving into cultural values and traditions through character interactions and conflicts (Makodamayanti & Wulandari, 2019). Examining the speech acts within this novel sheds light on how language operates within specific social contexts (Pertiwi et al., 2021).

The novel primarily highlights cultural identity and intergenerational conflicts, particularly through the dynamic relationship between Ruth and her mother, LuLing. Grounded in Chinese traditions and speaking Mandarin, LuLing contrasts with Ruth's Westernized outlook. Their dialogues vividly expose cultural tensions, with LuLing's directive speech acts clashing with Ruth's expressive responses, effectively reflecting their differing communication styles.

Additionally, social interactions in the novel reveal power dynamics and control within relationships. Ruth's conflicts with her mother are laden with tension and ambiguity, where implied meanings carry emotional complexity. Furthermore, the novel's themes of memory and history are brought to life through LuLing's recollections, which ultimately help Ruth reconnect with her cultural heritage and personal identity (Tan, 2001).

This study employs Austin and Searle's speech act theory to examine how spoken words perform social actions in the novel. For example, LuLing's narratives about her past not only communicate information but also reinforce cultural identity, shaping Ruth's perception of herself and her family (Austin, n.d.). In both real life and fiction, speech acts serve as fundamental tools for conveying information, building relationships, and expressing cultural values (Makram, 2018). Within *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, characters use speech acts to navigate relationships and reflect the societal norms of Chinese-American life (Tantra et al., 2021).

What sets this study apart from previous research is the methodological integration of AntConc, a corpus analysis tool, to systematically examine the speech acts in the novel. While previous studies on speech acts in literature often relied on manual annotation or subjective interpretation of dialogues, this research leverages AntConc to identify and analyze speech acts with greater precision and objectivity. This innovative approach enables the identification of keywords and patterns within the novel's dialogue, offering deeper insights into illocutionary acts.

To date, no studies have employed AntConc in the analysis of speech acts within novels, particularly through a socio-pragmatic framework. By introducing this computational tool, the study bridges the gap between traditional qualitative methods and modern computational approaches, enhancing the methodological rigor and reliability of the findings. This integration allows for a nuanced exploration of how speech acts shape cultural conflicts, identity struggles, and mother-daughter dynamics in the novel.

By applying this unique methodological approach, the study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics and literary analysis, demonstrating how language reflects and constructs social realities. The findings illuminate the ways cultural and personal histories influence communication patterns, offering educators and researchers a valuable framework for examining language use in diverse cultural contexts. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of computational tools like AntConc in advancing linguistic and literary research, paving the way for more robust and reproducible analyses in the future.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research design with a socio-pragmatic approach to analyze the illocutionary speech acts and social interactions in Amy Tan's novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. The study focuses on understanding how speech acts are used within the context of cultural and generational dynamics, as well as how they reflect broader socio-cultural themes.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data source is the novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* by Amy Tan. To ensure comprehensive analysis, dialogues involving key characters, particularly Ruth and LuLing, were extracted. These dialogues were chosen for their relevance to the study's objectives, specifically their representation of cultural conflict, generational tensions, and interpersonal dynamics.

The selection criteria for dialogues included:

1. Interactions that involve clear instances of speech acts (e.g., requests, complaints, apologies).
2. Dialogues reflecting cultural or generational conflict, particularly between Ruth and her mother, LuLing.
3. Exchanges that highlight social relationships or hierarchical dynamics.

The software AntConc was utilized for linguistic analysis. It was employed to identify keywords and patterns in the dialogues, aiding in the categorization of speech acts.

### **Data Analysis**

The study adopts Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1975) speech act theories to classify and interpret illocutionary speech acts. Following this framework, the data were categorized into five primary types of speech acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Each type was further analyzed to uncover its function and significance within the context of the narrative.

The analysis process involved the following steps:

1. Reading and Annotation: The entire text of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* was read thoroughly, and dialogues containing potential speech acts were annotated.
2. Categorization: Annotated dialogues were categorized into the five speech act types. Keywords and phrases were identified using AntConc to support accurate classification.
3. Contextual Interpretation: Each speech act was interpreted in light of its socio-cultural and interpersonal context. This step involved considering the speaker's intentions, the relationships between characters, and the broader cultural implications of the dialogue.
4. Thematic Analysis: Speech acts were further analyzed to identify recurring themes, such as cultural identity, power dynamics, and emotional conflicts.

*The Bonesetter's Daughter* was chosen as the subject of this study due to its rich portrayal of immigrant family dynamics and intergenerational communication. The novel offers a wealth of material for socio-pragmatic analysis, particularly in exploring how speech acts convey cultural values, emotional tensions, and relational complexities.

## RESULTS

The study identified 499 instances of illocutionary speech acts in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, classified into five categories: assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. The distribution of these speech acts is summarized in Table 1, highlighting their frequencies and specific subcategories.

**Table 1.** Frequency of Illocutionary Speech Acts in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*

Type	Subcategory	Frequency
Assertive	Explain	79
	Complain	12
Directive	Request	12
	Instruction	153
	Suggest	49
Expressive	Grateful	32
	Apologize	40
	Blame	28
	Praise	6
Commissive	Promises/Commitments	16
	Offering	20
Declarative	Giving Up/Despairing	7
	Allowing	19
Total		499

## 1. Assertive Speech Acts

Assertive speech acts, comprising 91 instances, were primarily used to convey information, express opinions, or confirm truths. Two subcategories were prominent:

- a. Explaining (79 instances): Characters used statements to share observations or clarify situations.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"Ruth!" Art said in a warning tone. "The girls are going to be late."*
  - 2) Context: Art informs Ruth that the children are behind schedule.
  - 3) Implication: Art hopes Ruth will act promptly to avoid further delays.
- a. Complaining (12 instances): Characters voiced dissatisfaction to highlight unmet expectations or relational tensions.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"Too busy for mother," LuLing complained. "Never too busy go see the movie, go away, go see a friend."* (p. 12)
- 2) Context: LuLing feels neglected by Ruth.
- 3) Implication: LuLing expresses frustration about Ruth prioritizing other **activities over spending time with her.**

## 2. Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts accounted for 312 instances, making this the most frequently used category. These acts include instructions, requests, and suggestions, reflecting the dynamic interactions and power hierarchies between characters.

- a. Instruction (153 instances): Commands were often given to assert authority or direct behavior.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"Dory! Fia! Let's hustle!"* (p. 14)
  - 2) Context: Ruth urges her sisters to hurry.
  - 3) Implication: Ruth expects immediate compliance to avoid delays.
- b. Suggestions (49 instances): Suggestions were employed to propose solutions or offer advice.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"This line is like a beam of light. Look, can you see it or not?"* (p. 44)
- 2) Context: A character points out a feature for confirmation.

- 3) Implication: The speaker seeks agreement to validate their observation.

### **3. Expressive Speech Acts**

Expressive speech acts, with 106 instances, highlighted emotional nuances in the narrative, emphasizing gratitude, apologies, and blame.

- a. Apologizing (40 instances): Characters used apologies to acknowledge mistakes or express regret.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"I'm sorry, Wendy. I have to take the girls to ice-skating school—"* (p. 15)
- 2) Context: Ruth explains her unavailability to Wendy.
- 3) Implication: Ruth conveys regret while justifying her inability to meet Wendy's expectations.

- b. Blaming (28 instances): Characters expressed blame to assign responsibility or vent frustration.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"I'm sorry this happened."* (p. 42)
- 2) Context: The speaker acknowledges an undesirable outcome.
- 3) Implication: The apology reflects empathy and accountability.

### **4. Commissive Speech Acts**

Commissive acts, with 36 instances, demonstrated characters' commitments to future actions, often reflecting relational negotiations.

- a. Promises (16 instances): Commitments were made to assure action or provide security.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"Promise me first you won't tell anyone."* (p. 15)
- 2) Context: The speaker requests a promise to ensure confidentiality.
- 3) Implication: This act establishes trust before sharing sensitive information.

- b. Offering (20 instances): Offers highlighted characters' willingness to assist.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"Need some help? I can hold on to your ankles until you get balanced."* (p. 21)
- 2) Context: The speaker offers physical support.
- 3) Implication: The act conveys helpfulness and care.

## 5. Declarative Speech Acts

Declarative speech acts were the least frequent, with 26 instances (5.2%), showcasing moments where characters articulated decisive statements.

- a. Giving Up/Despairing (7 instances): These acts reflected frustration or emotional surrender.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"Why do you have to make everything so difficult? I just thought if it were possible, if you had time— Aw, forget it."* (p. 17)
- 2) Context: A character gives up on a request after facing resistance.
- 3) Implication: The dialogue conveys emotional exhaustion and resignation.

- b. Allowing (19 instances): Characters used permission to affirm or approve actions.

Example:

- 1) Dialogue: *"You wish I dead? You wish no mother tell you what to do? Okay, maybe I die soon!"* (p. 41)
- 2) Context: LuLing expresses despair in response to perceived rejection.
- 3) Implication: The act conveys emotional turmoil and a sense of abandonment.

The results underscore the prominence of directive speech acts, reflecting the central role of power and influence in the characters' interactions. Assertive and expressive acts further reveal the emotional depth and interpersonal dynamics within the narrative, while commissive and declarative acts highlight commitments and moments of emotional intensity.

## DISCUSSION

The findings from the socio-pragmatic analysis of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* reveal a nuanced interplay of speech acts that reflect the complexity of human interactions within the context of cultural identity, family dynamics, and emotional conflict. This section interprets the results in light of existing literature and their implications for understanding communication in multicultural and relational contexts.

### 1. Speech Acts and Their Social Functions

#### a) Assertive Speech Acts: Truth-telling and Relational Dynamics

The analysis revealed that assertive speech acts, such as explaining and complaining, often functioned to establish truths or express dissatisfaction. For instance, characters used explanatory acts to clarify misunderstandings, while complaints conveyed emotional tension in relationships.

Example: LuLing's complaint, *"Too busy for mother. Never too busy go see the movie, go away, go see a friend"* (p. 12), illustrates her feelings of neglect, reflecting the unmet expectations that strain her relationship with Ruth.

These acts highlight how assertive speech contributes to relational dynamics by providing insight into characters' internal states and their expectations of others.

#### **b) Directive Speech Acts: Power and Influence**

Directive acts, comprising the largest category, underscore the pervasive influence of authority and power in the novel's interpersonal relationships. Commands and suggestions were frequently used by characters to exert control or offer guidance.

Example: Ruth's instruction, *"Dory! Fia! Let's hustle!"* (p. 14), emphasizes her authority in managing the family's time-sensitive activities.

These acts illustrate how directives serve to navigate hierarchical roles within family structures, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between autonomy and compliance.

#### **c) Expressive Speech Acts: Emotional Expressions and Relationship Management**

Expressive acts, such as apologies and expressions of gratitude, reveal the emotional fabric of interactions. These acts often functioned as tools for managing conflict and fostering reconciliation.

Example: Ruth's apology, *"I'm sorry, Wendy. I have to take the girls to ice-skating school—"* (p. 15), reflects her attempt to balance her responsibilities while mitigating potential relational strain.

Such acts demonstrate the importance of emotional intelligence in maintaining relationships, particularly in navigating the challenges of familial and social expectations.

#### **d) Commissive Speech Acts: Building Trust and Assurance**

Commissive acts, such as promises and offers, were used to build trust and assure future actions. These acts often carried significant emotional weight in affirming commitments.

Example: The dialogue, *"Promise me first you won't tell anyone"* (p. 15), underscores the speaker's reliance on confidentiality to foster trust before sharing sensitive information. This finding aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of commitments in strengthening relational bonds (Searle, 1979).

#### **e) Declarative Speech Acts: Emotional Climax and Resolution**

Although less frequent, declarative acts such as surrender and despair were pivotal in conveying emotional turning points.



Example: LuLing's exclamation, "*You wish I dead? You wish no mother tell you what to do? Okay, maybe I die soon!*" (p. 41), reflects her profound feelings of rejection and despair.

These acts often signaled moments of emotional climax, offering insight into the characters' psychological struggles and the relational dynamics at play.

## **2. Cultural and Generational Dynamics**

The novel vividly illustrates the challenges of navigating cultural and generational differences within an immigrant family. LuLing's adherence to traditional Chinese values often conflicted with Ruth's Americanized worldview, leading to misunderstandings and emotional conflict.

Example: The cultural clash is evident in Gaoling's skepticism of modern medical diagnoses: "*The doctor said none of those things will help—Doctor! I don't believe this diagnosis, Alzheimer's*" (p. 88).

This tension reflects broader themes of cultural negotiation, where traditional beliefs intersect with contemporary realities.

The findings emphasize how speech acts are shaped by cultural contexts, with characters leveraging language to assert their identities, maintain traditions, or adapt to new environments. For instance, Ruth's directive acts often reflect her attempts to bridge the gap between her mother's expectations and her own lifestyle.

## **3. Emotional Depth and Conflict Resolution**

The emotional depth of the characters is a defining feature of the novel, as evidenced by the use of expressive and commissive acts in resolving conflicts. The mother-daughter dynamic between LuLing and Ruth showcases how speech acts mediate their relational struggles.

Example: Ruth's care for her mother with Alzheimer's is reflected in moments of emotional support: "*Every time LuLing finished a drawing, Ruth praised it, took it away, then suggested a new animal to draw*" (p. 243).

Such acts illustrate the transformative potential of language in fostering reconciliation and healing, despite deep-seated tensions.

This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the role of pragmatic strategies in conflict resolution (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Speech acts such as apologies, gratitude, and promises are instrumental in bridging relational gaps, fostering empathy, and creating opportunities for mutual understanding.

#### **4. Implications for Communication Studies and Literature**

The results of this study underscore the relevance of socio-pragmatic analysis in understanding complex human interactions, particularly within multicultural and familial contexts. The findings illustrate that: first, language serves as a tool for navigating relational power dynamics, emotional expression, and cultural identity. Second, Speech acts are pivotal in highlighting the nuances of immigrant experiences, where individuals negotiate belonging, tradition, and adaptation.

This analysis contributes to broader discussions in communication studies by providing a framework for exploring how language reflects and shapes interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the findings hold pedagogical value for literature and language educators, offering insights into teaching cultural sensitivity through pragmatic analysis.

The interplay of speech acts in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* reveals the intricacies of human communication shaped by cultural heritage, generational gaps, and relational expectations. This discussion highlights the pivotal role of language in portraying emotional depth, resolving conflicts, and navigating cultural transitions, enriching our understanding of socio-pragmatic dynamics in literary contexts.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The socio-pragmatic analysis of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* demonstrates the intricate role of speech acts in shaping interpersonal dynamics, highlighting their function in conveying emotions, asserting identity, and navigating cultural and generational conflicts. Through its varied use of assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative acts, the novel offers a profound exploration of human interaction within the context of an immigrant family's struggle to reconcile cultural heritage with modern realities.

The findings reveal that: 1) Assertive Acts convey truths, opinions, and emotional responses that deepen relational dynamics. 2) Directive Acts reflect authority and guidance, emphasizing power hierarchies and roles. 3) Expressive Acts capture the emotional landscape of characters, fostering empathy and reconciliation. 4) Commissive Acts build trust and relational commitment through promises and assurances. 5) Declarative Acts signify emotional climaxes, providing resolution or escalation in interactions.

This study underscores the impact of cultural and generational differences on communication. LuLing and Ruth's mother-daughter relationship exemplifies the tensions

and resolutions that arise from contrasting cultural values, as seen in their use of speech acts to bridge emotional and relational gaps.

From a broader perspective, the socio-pragmatic approach enriches the understanding of how language operates as a vehicle for cultural negotiation, emotional expression, and identity construction in literary contexts. The findings hold practical implications for education, particularly in fostering cultural sensitivity and communication skills through the analysis of literature.

Recommendations for Future Research. Further research should:

1. Investigate the role of speech acts in other literary works that explore multicultural or intergenerational themes.
2. Examine the intersection of socio-pragmatics and emotional intelligence in understanding character interactions and conflicts.
3. Explore practical applications of speech act theory in enhancing communication skills in diverse educational and cultural settings.

By delving deeper into the interplay between language, culture, and identity, future studies can expand on the insights provided by this analysis, contributing to both literary scholarship and the broader field of communication studies.

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