# Commissive Illocutionary Acts Found in Na'ima Robert's *She Wore Red Trainers*

**Doa'a Ali Mohammed Farhan Al-Sharabi*[1], Abdusalam Mohammed Ghaleb Al-Ghrafy[1]**

[1] Faculty of Languages | Sana'a University | Yemen

**Abstract:** This study aims to find out the commissive illocutionary acts which are implied by the characters in the novel *She Wore Red Trainers* (2014) by Na'ima Robert. It aims to identify the types of commissive illocutionary acts found in the selected novel. This study uses a descriptive- qualitative method to examine the collected data. The data are utterances collected from the text of the selected novel. These utterances are classified on the basis of  on the speech act theories of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), into three types of commissive illocutionary acts: offering, promising and refusing acts. The results of this study revealed that there are 10  utterances in *She Wore Red Trainers* novel: 5 offering utterances, 4 promising utterances and 1 refusing utterance. Since this study observes the commissive illocutionary acts in the novel to reveal their implied meanings, it is recommended that similar studies be conducted to examine commissive illocutionary acts in other fictions.

**Keywords**: speech acts, illocutionary acts, commissive illocutionary acts, *She Wore Red Trainers*

## أفعال الالتزام الموجودة في رواية نعيمة روبرت "ارتدت حذاءً رياضيًا أحمراً"

**دعاء علي محمد فرحان الشرعبي*[1] , عبد السلام محمد غالب الغرافي[1]**

[1] كلية اللغات | جامعة صنعاء | اليمن

**المستخلص:** تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على أفعال الالتزام التي استخدمتها الشخصيات في رواية " ارتدت حذاءً رياضيًا أحمراً". حيث تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على أنواع أفعال الالتزام الموجودة في الرواية المختارة. اتخذت هذه الدراسة المنهج النوعي الوصفي. البيانات عبارة عن ألفاظ تم جمعها من نص الرواية المختارة. ومن ثم تم تصنيف هذه الألفاظ بناءً على نظريتي الفعل الكلامي لأوستن (1962) وسيريل (1969) إلى ثلاثة أنواع من الأفعال الإلزامية: العرض والوعد والرفض. حيث أظهرت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن هناك 10 من هذه الألفاظ وجدت في رواية "ارتدت حذاءً رياضياً أحمراً" 5 ألفاظ في العرض، 4 ألفاظ واعدة، و1 لفظ رفض. ونظرًا لأن هذه الدراسة تهتم بالكشف عن المعاني الضمنية لأفعال الالتزام في رواية "ارتدت حذاءً رياضيًا أحمراً"، فهي توصي بإجراء دراسات مماثله لدراسة أفعال الالتزام في أعمال أدبية أخرى.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** أفعال الكلام، أفعال الخطاب، أفعال الالتزام، ارتدت حذاءً رياضياً أحمراً.

## 1. Introduction

Language is a vital tool that allows people to express their experiences, feelings and share thoughts with one another. In other words, people can grasp one another's intentions through sharing messages (feelings, experiences, and ideas), which are presented in either spoken or written forms of communication (Istiningdias, et al. 2014). This implies that communication is a two-way process in which the speaker and the listener each have a positive and specific function to perform (Annury, 2013). Thus, the success of communication depends on how well both the speaker and the listener comprehend what is being said.

Pragmatics is the study of language meaning that is related to context. Thus, pragmatics is defined as the study of language use in context (Briner, 2013). According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is the study concerning the meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). Similarly the study of pragmatics involves the interpretation of what people mean in a context and how the context influences what is said (Yule, 1996). Cook believes that discourse analysis studies the relationship between language and context in which it is used (1989:6-7). Brown and Yule also claim that to analyze discourse means to analyze action (1983:1). Cutting argues that the two fields focus on the relevance of words that have been used in communication and how the speakers communicate more than words they used; moreover, both fields are concentrated on function (2002:2). Speakers do things with their utterances when they speak, because language is used not only to express meanings, but also to perform actions which are intended to have functions and effects on the listener. Thus, in communication, the speakers do not only produce utterances, but they also perform actions through the utterances Those actions that are performed via utterances called speech acts (Yule, 1996: 47).

According to Austin (1962), a speaker can perform three acts simultaneously in producing an utterance. These acts are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is an act of using words to form sentences. This wording makes sense in a language with correct grammar and pronunciation. Besides, the speaker also has certain function in mind by saying the utterance. The type of function that the speaker intends to accomplish in saying the utterance is called an illocutionary act. Additionally, the speaker says the utterance with a function that is intended to have an effect on the listener. The act that may have an effect or consequence on the hearer is a perlocutionary act. Later, Searle (1976) classified Austin's illocutionary acts into five types: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative.

Speech-act theory is one of the advantageous and effective tools in interpreting the literary discourse, fiction in particular. It is true that when novelists write novels, they tend to use appropriate language for their characters. However, studying the utterances of the characters in light of speech act theory is an advantageous way to discover new meanings and ultimately arrive at authentic interpretations.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the commissive illocutionary acts found in the She Wore Red Trainers novel to show how the characters commit themselves to some future actions. To achieve this objective, the current study attempts to answer the following questions:

1- What are the commissive illocutionary speech acts that are used by the characters in the selected novel?

2- What are the types of commissive illocutionary speech acts used by the characters?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Speech Acts

Speech acts are one of the fundamental topics that are studied by pragmatics. Along with our physical and mental activities, we also perform 'linguistic activities', such as asking, ordering, stating, requesting, promising etc. These linguistic activities are called by Austin (1962) 'Speech acts'. Searle asserts that speech acts are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication (1976:16). The production of speech acts presumes that the intentions of human agents (producer and receiver of an utterance) are indispensable and relevant to the correct understanding and description of their utterances. Searle argues that "speaking a language is performing speech acts, as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so on..." (1969:16). Yule also states that a speech act is an action performed via utterances, which have more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise or request (1996: 47). These terms apply to the speaker's communicative intention by producing an utterance. The speaker in a communication situation hopes that the listener can understand what they are saying. As a result, the encounter can go smoothly because the hearer receives the message. The theory of speech act aims to do justice to the fact that words, phrases and sentences encode information. When people convey information, they often transfer more than what their words encode. The focus of speech act theory has been on utterances, especially those made in conversational and other face-to-face situations. Later, Austin reconsidered the concept of " ...saying something is to do something", and eventually came up with the idea that in producing an utterance a speaker may perform one or all of the three acts mentioned earlier simultaneously. It may be locutionary (the physical act of uttering the words), illocutionary (the action being performed by the speaker via utterance) and/or perlocutionary (the effect on the hearer) (1962: 103).

According to Searle, there are five types of speech acts: assertive (the act in which the speaker asserts a proposition to is be true), directive (the act in which the speaker tries to make the listener do something), commissive (the act in which the speaker commits himself/herself to a future course of action), expressive (the act in which the speaker expresses an attitude to or about a state of affairs) and declarative (the act in which the speaker aims to change the world via his/her utterances) (Searle, 1976).

### 2.2 Commissive Illocutionary Acts

Commissive illocutionary acts are defined by Rustono as "... are speech acts that bind the speaker to carry out what is stated in his speech" (1999: 40).The types of commissive speech acts are promise, offer, refusal, vow, threat and pledge. By using comissive acts, the speaker commits him/herself to some future actions. He/she expresses their intention by promising, offering, refusing, vowing, threatening and pledging. In addition, the speaker undertakes to make the world fit the words via the speaker (Yule, 1996: 54) This study focuses on commissive illocutionary acts that are performed by the characters in Na'ima Robert's novel *She Wore Red Trainer*.

### 2. 3 Previous studies

Four previous related studies are briefly examined in the following in terms of their focus, significance and findings.

Maulidah (2017) conducted a study entitled "An analysis of Donald Trump's commissive speech acts in *USS Yorktown on December 7th, 2015*" which was published in Jakarta. The researcher focused on the analysis of the commissive speech acts of Donald Trump's speech about the campaign in the state of USS, Yorktown. The study used a qualitative method. It was found that the types of the commissive speech act that were used by Donald were promising, threatening, refusing, assuring, guaranteeing, and betting.

Pambudi (2017) conducted a study entitled "An analysis of commissive speech act used in *the Vow*". The researcher analyzed the types of the commissive illocutionary acts that are found in *The Vow* movie. In addition, the researcher identified the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary with commissive speech acts that are found in the movie. The study used a descriptive-qualitative method to explain the data. The results showed that there are four types of commissive speech acts used in the selected movie, namely threat, refusal, promise, and warning.

Ramadhan (2018) studied the commissive illocutionary speech acts in the main character's utterances in the movie *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*. The researcher aimed to classify the different forms of the commissive speech acts that are used by the main character in the movie. This research used a descriptive-qualitative method in the process of the analysis. The researcher used a documentation technique in the process of data collection, and a classification method to analyze the collected data. The results showed that the commissive speech acts that are used by the main character are promise, refusal, pledge, threat and offer. Furthermore, it was found that the type of the commissive illocutionary act most often used by the main character in the movie is refusal.

Devi and Degaf (2021) studied the types and the functions of the commissive speech acts used by the characters in the *Knives Out* movie in light of the theory of Searle. The researchers used a qualitative descriptive method to conduct the analysis. The study results showed that the commissive speech acts used by the characters are promise, guarantee, refusal, threat, volunteering and offer. Furthermore, they reveal that the refusing commissive speech act is the most type used by the characters in the selected movie.

## 3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative method to investigate the commissive illocutionary speech acts in the novel *She Wore Red Trainers*. The data collected are in the forms of words, phrases and sentences from the text of the selected novel. In addition, the study focuses on pointing out the types and functions of such commissive speech acts using Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) theories. It focuses on analyzing the collected data, using a descriptive method. The collected data included all related words, phrases and sentences found in the selected novel *She Wore Red Trainers* regarding commissive illocutionary speech acts.

For the purpose of data analysis, first the data containing commissive illocutionary acts occurring in the utterances of the characters in the selected novel are presented. Then, the context of each act is described to establish the background of each data. Finally, a conclusion concerning the analyzed utterances is presented.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

This study results show that there are 10 utterances of commissive illocutionary speech acts in the selected novel. These include instances of offering, promising and refusing. 5 of these acts are acts of offering, 4 are acts of promising and 1 is an act of refusing. The summary of the collected data is shown in Table 1 below.

Table (1) Commissive illocutionary speech acts found in the novel She Wore Red Trainers.

| Type | Commissive Illocutionary Speech Acts | Page | Total |
|------|--------------------------------------|------|-------|
| Offer | "I'll introduce you to the brothers." | 15 | 5 |
| | "We're at your service." | 36 | |
| | "Let me know if you want to borrow it, yeah." | 162 | |
| | "Let me take the donation to the hall tomorrow." | 148 | |
| | "I thought you might like some help with your hair." | 164 | |
| Promise | "I'll make you pancake today." | 47 | 4 |
| | "And I'll make you my trademark brownies, too." | 143 | |
| | "I won't ever give up on you, OK? I promise." | 165 | |
| | "He'll never set foot in this house again, Amirah. I swear." | 252 | |
| Refusal | "It's not gonna happen, bro. No way." | 225 | 1 |
| Total | | | 10 |

The data shown in the table above can be discussed in the following.

### 4.1 Offer

Offering is to show willingness to do or give something. To offer something to somebody means to present something to be either accepted or refused.

Utterance (1)

Usamah: "**I'll introduce you to the brothers.** It will make settling in easier".

When Ali's family are at the mosque for Friday prayer, they meet Usamah. The family move to a new house, so they do not know anyone. Usamah, who is the speaker, offers to introduce them to the people who are in the same neighborhood to make their settling easier. Usamah commits himself to a future action by offering to introduce Ali's family to the other people as a promise if they will accept.

Utterance (2)

Usamah: "**We're at your service**."

This utterance, by Usamah, is an act of offering. As Usamah and his friend, Yusuf, come to visit Ali's family in their new house, Usamah tries to help them in organizing their new house. He shows his willingness to help them any time and tries to make them accept his offer. Usamah performs commissive illocutionary act since he commits himself to future action.

Utterance (3)

Ali: "I have got a new Quran CD. Totally relaxes me. **Let me know if you want to borrow it, yeah**?"

After Ali's father loses his business, his sons become annoyed and sad. Therefore, Ali decides to pray to be relaxed. After he finishes praying, he goes to Umar's room to check on him. He finds him lying on his bed listening to music through his headphones. Therefore, he feels that he has to do something for Umar to make him relaxed, too. Ali expresses his willingness and intention by offering Umar a new Quran CD. The utterance of the speaker, Ali, is a commissive illocutionary act since he commits himself to future action which has a function of offering.

Utterance (4)

Ali: "Listen, Yusuf, **let me take the donation to the hall tomorrow.** It's really close to where I live and I don't mind at all."

This utterance of offering is produced by Ali, the speaker. When Ali and his friend, Yusuf, are in the café, Yusuf, remembers that he has to send the donation to sister Azra for her fundraiser. In addition, it is the time of praying. Therefore, Ali offers to take the donation to the hall which is close to his house. It means that he shows his readiness to take the donation and commits himself to future action. For this reason, Ali's utterance is commissive illocutionary act.

Utterance (5)

Mum: "**I thought you might like some help with your hair**."

When Amirah is at her bedroom getting ready for the party at her friend's home, her mother enters the room to see her. The mother wants to help her to get ready for the party, so she presents her

willingness to help Amirah if she agrees. Therefore, the utterance of the mother contains commisive illocutionary act since she commits herself to future action. Moreover, it has a function of offering.

**4.2 Promise**

Promising is one of the commissives speech acts since the speaker commits himself to some future actions. It is an utterance used by the speaker to do or not to do something in the future.

Utterance (1)

Ali: " **I'll make you pancakes today**."

Ali's little brother, Jamal, wakes up to pray with him. He has a dream about pancakes, so he asks Ali to make pancakes for him. Therefore, Ali accepts and promises him to make them for him by uttering "*I'll make you pancakes today*" for making Jamal happy. The word "will" as a modal verb is used to show that someone is willing or ready to do something. Since Ali produces an utterance which commits him to future action, he performs commissive act.

Utterance (2)

Amirah: "**And I'll make you my trademark brownies, too**."

When Amirah comes to the compound, she sees Ali with his brother, Jamal, standing at the entrance because the code of the gate has been changed. She helps them to open it and then, she invites Jamal to play with her brother at her house. In addition, she promises him to make brownies for him. The modal verb "will" shows that this utterance has the function of promising.

Utterance (3)

Ali: "I'm right here with you. **I won't ever give up on you, OK? I promise**."

Ali's brother, Umar, runs away to his grandmother's house, so Ali goes to see him there. They sit in the garden and start talking with each other. Ali promises Umar that he will always be beside him and will not leave him. Ali's utterance classifies into commissive since he commits himself to future action by using the negative modal verb "will not".

Utterance (4)

Mum: "**He'll never set foot in this house again, Amirah. I swear**."

After the argument between Amirah's mother and her husband, the mother dismisses him from the house. Aimrah reveals to her mother that her step father is not a good man. Therefore, the mother promises her daughter that she will not allow him to come again. By using the modal verb "will", the speaker, Mom, commits herself to future action.

**4.3 Refusal**

Refusal is one type of the commissive illocutionary acts. It indicates that one is not willing to do, accept or give something.

Utterance (1)

Zayd:"**It's not gonna happen, bro. No way.**"

Ali has a desire to marry Amirah, so he decides to talk with her brother, Zayd. However, Zayd does not accept. By saying "*It's not gonna happen, bro. No way*". Zayd refuses Ali's proposal. The auxiliary verb "is" plus "not" show a refusal meaning which includes commissive act.

## 5. Conclusions

Commissive illocutionary acts has major and significant role in Na'ima Robert's *She Wore Red Trainers* (2014). Based on the study findings, the researcher found (10) utterances. Furthermore, these utterances are classified into three types of commissive illocutionary acts: offer (5), promise (4) and refusal (1). The characters in the selected novel use commissive illocutionary acts to commit themselves to future actions which make the words fit their words, and this helps them to express their feelings. As this study focuses on analyzing the commissive illocutionary acts in the *She Wore Red Trainers* novel, similar studies are recommended to be conducted to explore commissive illocutionary acts in other fictions.

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