

Dominant and Submissive: Speech Act during BDSM Intimate in Fifty Shades of Grey (2015)

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Abstract: *Fifty Shades of Grey (2015) is a movie depicting the romantic relationship between Christian Grey, a billionaire, and Anastasia Steele, a literature student. Grey, who has a sexual disorder, spiced up the movie with many BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, Sadism, Masochism) scenes between him and Anastasia. This movie had shocked the public because of these scenes which were wrapped in an epic romance story. In this scene, the conversation between Grey and Anastasia, both when inviting and when performing BDSM, can be studied with Yule's (1996) speech act theory. By applying his theory, this descriptive qualitative research aims to reveal and classify the types of speech acts which appear in the dialog of the two main characters. The data taken from the movie is presented in textual form. The results revealed that Christian Grey, the Dominant, tends to perform directive speech acts, while Anastasia Steele, the submissive, tends to perform expressive speech acts. Thus, it signifies, how in a BDSM intimate, the dominant will satisfy his desires by acting bossy as he was being intimate with his sex slave. Contrary to the dominant, the submissive feels her desire is satisfied when someone acts aggressively towards her during sexual intimacy. These findings could help bridge the gap to research on the BDSM phenomenon, as well as be a reference for film script writers.*

Keywords: *Fifty Shades of Grey, speech act, BDSM*

Abstrak: *Fifty Shades of Grey (2015) adalah film yang menceritakan romansa hubungan antara Christian Grey seorang miliarder dan Anastasia Steele seorang mahasiswi sastra. Grey yang mempunyai kelainan seksual membumbui film ini dengan banyak adegan BDSM (Bondage, Discipline, Dominance, Submission, Sadism, Masochism) antara dia dan Anastasia. Film ini sempat menggemparkan dunia maya karena adanya adegan-adegan tersebut yang dibungkus kisah romansa yang epik. Pada adegan ini, pembicaraan antara Grey dan Anastasia baik ketika mengajak ataupun ketika sedang melakukan BDSM, dapat diteliti dengan teori tindak tutur dari Yule (1996). Dengan mengaplikasi teorinya, penelitian bermodel kualitatif deskriptif ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap dan mengklasifikasikan jenis tindak tutur yang muncul pada dialog dari kedua tokoh utama. Data yang ditemukan dalam film tersebut, disajikan dengan bentuk tekstual. Hasil yang ditemukan menyatakan bahwa Christian Grey, si Dominan, cenderung melakukan tindak tutur direktif dan Anastasia Steele, si Submisif, cenderung melakukan tindak tutur ekspresif. Hal ini menandakan bahwa dalam sebuah hubungan BDSM, sang dominan akan memuaskan hasratnya dengan berlagak bossy dan seakan-akan sedang berhubungan badan dengan budak seksnya. Berlawanan dengan sang dominan, si Submisif malah merasa hasratnya dipuaskan ketika seseorang bertindak agresif terhadapnya ketika berhubungan seksual. Temuan ini dapat membantu menjembatani kesenjangan dalam penelitian tentang fenomena BDSM, serta menjadi referensi bagi para penulis naskah film.*

Kata kunci: *Fifty Shades of Grey, tindak tutur, BDSM*

1. INTRODUCTION

Fifty Shades of Grey (2015) has been a remarkable movie once it's officially released in public. The film itself has become Universal Pictures' highest-grossing R-rated international release with \$338.4 billion made (Lang, 2015). However, the movie became a worldwide phenomenon after being banned from theaters in most Asian countries and Russia's North Caucasian region. Similar to the harlequin romance genre in general, the heroine of the movie, Anastasia Steele, portrayed as a white, young and beautiful woman, yet views herself as an unattractive ugly duckling until she encounters Christian Grey. The male lead, depicted as an exaggeratedly dominant figure, wealthy, incredibly attractive and controlling, yet hesitant about commitment. Adapted from the novel of the same title by E. L. James, the story tells about Anastasia Steele's romance with a billionaire who is reluctant to have a romantic relationship except for BDSM-Contract relationships. As a virgin, she is forced to explore eroticism by becoming Grey's submissive on her BDSM relationship. The BDSM highlighted in this movie is the essence of the conflict as well as the primary plot throughout the entire movie.

BDSM is an acronym from bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism and masochism. This notion refers to roleplay activity where executed by physical restraint, punishment, sensory play, intense stimulation, and power dynamic between consenting partners (De Neef et al, 2019, Schuerwegen et al, 2023). During BDSM practice, the practitioners can be categorized into two general groups namely dominant and submissive (Paarnio et al, 2022). Those who want to control others are identified as the dominant, while those who want to give up control to others are identified as the submissive (Hebert and Weaver, 2014). In addition, Schuerwegen (2023) defined dominant as D-type and submissive as S-type. D-type itself consist of dominant (i.e., person who tend to be superior and receive control), rigger (i.e., person who love to practice bondage), top (person who taking a lead during kinky activities), sadist (i.e., person who feels satisfy when injuring other), and predator (i.e., person who turn into their primal headspace and „hunt“ their prey). Contrary to the previous type, S-type consist of submissive (i.e., person who gave up their control to other), rope bunny (i.e., person who love to receive rope bondage), masochist (i.e., person who enjoy humiliation either it is emotionally, physically, or mentally), prey (i.e., person who turn into their primal headspace and seeks to be hunted). BDSM activity can be seen in the field of linguistic studies, due to a speech act phenomenon during the activity.

According to Yule (1996), speech act is an action performed through utterances. Therefore, a speech act is not just the delivery of information, but also has a direct effect or a specific purpose in the context of communication. Yule's Theory of Speech Act classifies speech acts into five categories: Declarations, Representative, Expressive, Directive, and Commissive. Declaration is a speech act that declares something based on the speaker's role to change the world through speech. Representative is a speech act in the form of a statement or personal opinion of a speaker. Expressive is a speech act that expresses the speaker's psychological state, such as happiness, sickness, sadness, likes, dislikes, and so on. Directive is a speech act which can be positive or negative instructions, orders, or suggestions, that are used in conversation. Commissive is a speech act which is implied when the speaker commits himself during future action.

There are several studies that observed *Fifty Shades of Grey* as the main object. Rizqi et al., (2024) analyze the types of speech act inside sexist language in a film entitled *On the Basis of Sex* (2018). Case and Coventry (2018) doing a survey of Christian Grey behaviors in the *Fifty Shades of Grey* to the Americans specifically for those that adhere to feminism.

Srithreerawichai et al., (2022) investigated the same movie but with a linguistic approach. The research circumnavigated on the sexist language that appears on the *Fifty Shades of Grey* in which it analyzed by implying Sara mills' theory that encompasses overt sexism and indirect sexism. Ratri, W E (2018) studying about the sexual deviation inside the character of Christian Grey on the E. L. James' *Fifty Shades* Trilogy Novel. The result shows that Christian Grey has sexual sadism type of sexual deviation, which is caused by the unsuccessful completion of his psychosexual development stages. On the contrary, Pepedek, R (2018) analyzed the personality of the other character inside the *Fifty Shades* trilogy novel, namely Anastasia Steele, implying Sigmund Freud's personality elements. The findings reveal that Anastasia's strong desire to be with Christian Grey outweighs her pain, her actions reflect her commitment to proving her love, and her independence highlights her refusal to rely on his wealth.

Based on aforementioned researchers, this research intended to fill the gap. There is a question that must be answered: What Type of speech act that employed by Christian Grey and Anastasia Stelle in the *Fifty Shades of Grey* during BDSM activity. In Order to successfully answer the research questions, the researcher employed the notion from Yule (1996) theory of speech act (declarations, representative, expressive, directive, and commissive). The purpose of this research is to figure out the speech act employed by the two main characters of this film, Christian Grey and Anastasia Stelle. This research is among a select few studies that address taboo issues concerning BDSM from a linguistic point of view, with a particular emphasis on speech acts. The result of this research could contribute theoretically to circumnavigating the BDSM Phenomenon as well as linguistic phenomenon, especially on exploring speech act scope. Another point to consider is the potential practical utility of this research as a reference for film script writers who address the topic of BDSM sexual practices.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study presents a qualitative research approach. As stated by Yakin (2023: 5), qualitative research is a research that aims to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subjects descriptively in the form of words and language, in a special scientific context and by using various natural methods. Qualitative methods are appropriate for this study as the data is in the form of words rather than numbers. Yule's Theory of Speech Act is being used in this study to classify the speech acts that occurred in the movie *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015). Through the classification of speech acts conducted by Yule (1996), the utterances employed by Grey and Steele in the *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) is analyzed as a way to find data which appear on BDSM-intimate scenes. These scenes refer to when the characters involve romantic or sexual moments which contain one or more BDSM types.

The data is taken by watching and examining the Speech act phenomena that appear in this movie directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson. The researchers watched the movie through Netflix and collected the data which are in the form of utterances. The utterances spoken by the actors of the film, Grey and Steele, when doing BDSM, that imply speech acts, are categorized as data. Thus, the data in this research are presented in the textual form of a dialogue transcription. Furthermore, the analysis technique from Spradley (1980) was applied in this study. Four analysis phases were taken to complete the analysis, namely domain, taxonomy, componential, and finding cultural themes.

Domain is a step to obtain a general and comprehensive picture of the object of research or

the social situation under study (Sugiyono, 2014). In this phase, researchers employ Yule's speech act theory to ascertain the distinction between data and non-data. The second phase is the establishment of a taxonomy phase. Spradley (1979, 1997) cited in Onwuegbuzie, et al (2012) defines a taxonomy as a classification system that inventories the domains into a flowchart or other pictorial representation to help the researcher understand the relationships among the domains. In the taxonomy phase, the researchers constructed a taxonomy table for the purpose of differentiating the data into two distinct categories: Christian Grey data and Anastasia Steele data. The subsequent phase is the componential phase, in which the researcher inputs the domainized data into the taxonomy table. The data are then subjected to a search for cultural themes, which represents the final phase of the process of assigning meaning to the data obtained.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. Findings

This section is divided into two subsections, namely results and discussion. The result shows that there are 114 speech act data implied by Grey and Anastasia. Grey conveyed 78 speech acts while Anastasia conveyed 36 utterances which contained speech acts. Given below is the data table;

Table 1. Christian Grey Data Table

Classification of Speech Act	Christian Grey's Utterance	
	Frequency	%
Declaration	13	17%
Representative	13	17%
Expressive	10	13%
Directive	32	41%
Commissive	10	13%
	78	100%

From Table 1, the most dominant data is in Directive speech acts with 32 data. In the second dominant stance, there are Declarative and Representative speech acts with both counts of 13 data. The third or the last dominant data is on Expressive and Commissive speech acts amounting to 10 data.

Table 2. Anastasia Steele Data Table

Classification of Speech Act	Anastasia Steele's Utterance	
	Frequency	%
Declaration	4	11%
Representative	9	25%
Expressive	13	36%
Directive	10	28%
Commissive	0	0%
	36	100%

From Table 2, the most dominant data is in the form of expressive speech acts with a total of 13. The second dominant is Directive speech acts with a total of 10 occurrences. The third dominant is the representative speech act with 9 occurrences. The fourth dominant is the Declarative speech act with a

total of 4 occurrences. And the last null data is the Commissive Speech Act with the number of occurrences of zero.

i. *Christian Grey as The Dominant*

Christian Grey, portrayed as the dominant character in the *Fifty Shades of Grey* movie, is described as a wealthy and charismatic businessman with sexual disorder who enjoys BDSM. Grey's character is known for his confidence, intensity, and a troubled past. His dominant role in the relationship with Anastasia Steele involves control, negotiation, and the exploration of various aspects in BDSM.

In his relationship with Anastasia Steel, Grey is the one who most often performs Directive speech acts compared to other speech acts. This is related to his role as the Dominant, or the one who sexually humiliates the Submissive during the BDSM activities. When he wants to express his lust, he often tells his partner, Anastasia, roughly and firmly which makes Anastasia inevitably have to obey his wishes. The example is in the data below;

(1:03:36), Grey: "Don't make a sound!"

In this scene, Grey tells Anastasia not to make a sound whilst he bangs her. As a response to these utterances, Anastasia as a submissive obeys his instruction. Within this particular sex act, Grey also frequently gives numerous instructions to Anastasia during intimate moments. It is proof that Grey is such a Bossy man.

The other hand, Grey also second dominantly employs other speech acts namely Declaration and Representative with both 13 occurrences. Declaration is occurred when Grey declares himself to Anastasia, with the following example in scene,

(56:30), Grey: "I've never taking anyone with helicopter. I've never sex in my home bed. I've never slept next with anyone. Ever. Only you."

Grey declares that he has never taken a girl by helicopter, never had sex in his own room, never slept with anyone else, except Anastasia. If we look further, Grey performs this Declaration of Speech Act with the aim of seducing Anastasia to soften his heart, so that he can have sexual contact. In addition, Grey also often performs Representative of Speech Act when intimating with Anastasia. By example in this scene below,

(1:26:50), Grey: "Most of your fear is in your head."

Grey says this when he tortures Anastasia in the BDSM portion. He says that the pain Anastasia feels from being lashed is only in her own mind. This is evidence that Grey uses the Representative of Speech Act during the BDSM sex sequence in order to manipulate Anastasia's mental state.

Among the three speech acts frequently used by Grey above, it can be assessed that Grey is a dominator who is arbitrary, bossy, and manipulative. He often likes having dominance especially when he is in a relationship. He also commonly manipulates others in order to achieve his own goal, which is to do his abnormal sex behavior.

ii. *Anastasia Steele as The Submissive*

Anastasia Steele, portrayed as the submissive character in the *Fifty Shades of Grey* movie, is initially described as somewhat reserved and non-experienced in sex. As the story advances, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery, willingly entering into a BDSM relationship with Christian Grey. Anastasia's submissive role involves her navigating the challenges of surrendering control, exploring her own desires, and establishing boundaries within the dynamic. Her character evolves, demonstrating strength and vulnerability as she engages in the complex and intimate aspects of the relationship.

Based on her utterance and act, Anastasia is someone who frequently expresses her feelings on her speech act during the intimate scene. In example at this scene bellow,

(1:05:33), Anastasia: "That was really nice."

Anastasia expressed her satisfaction after having her first BDSM relationship with Christian Grey. She admitted to him that she is enjoying their sex. This proves that Anastasia is an emotional person. Her actions are mainly affected by her psychological state.

Moreover, Anastasia also employs the Declarative of Speech Act during intimate relationships with Grey as her second dominant data. As a submissive role, in the beginning Anastasia is just a nerdy person who does not have the bravery to express her emotions to others, especially Grey. She is always dominated by Grey when she is intimate with him. Yet as the story progresses, Anastasia becomes tougher than she was. As an example in scene

(1:55:48), Anastasia: "Is this gives you pleasure? Don't. Don't you dare come here with me!"

In this scene, Anastasia has begun to courageously stand up to her dominant partner, Grey. She is gradually tired from following the demands of his sexual deviant (BDSM). She emphasizes that she is no longer willing to engage in and follow Grey's BDSM games.

Based on the two dominants that appear in Anastasia's character, it can be hypothesized that Anastasia is a character who progressively changes through the story. Initially, she was just an innocent woman who later changed because of her relationship with a young and wealthy businessman named Christian Grey.

Therefore, one may conclude that Anastasia Steele is adaptable towards her circumstance.

b. Discussion

The difference in social status between Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele results in clear character differences when the two of them meet. Christian Grey as a financial freedom person at the age of single, as well as his charisma in leading his own business, makes him have a mindset that tends to underestimate others. Anastasia Steele, who is only a literature student with an ordinary life, has a tendency to admire and fall in love with Christian Grey's charisma.

According to this circumstance, when the two characters intimate each other, Christian Grey becomes dominant compared to Anastasia Steele. He frequently exercises his power to perform Directive Speech Act freely in bossing Anastasia around. While Anastasia is unable to oppose him and can only follow his orders.

The figure of Anastasia who lacks affection from her parents, which is a broken home, makes her an emotional person in action. She regularly expresses her feelings in the Expression of Speech Act when conversing with Grey. As time passes, this makes Grey fall in love with Anastasia and makes him tone down his idealism in intimating.

4. CONCLUSION

Fifty Shade of Grey is an erotic romance movie that depicts the love story of a billionaire businessman with a sexual disorder named Christian Grey and a literature student with an ordinary girl named Anastasia Steele. The movie explores romance with BDSM, which is considered taboo in society. In this study, Yule's Theory of Speech Act is used to examine the speech act classification employed by Grey and Anastasia. 114 data were found, which consist of 78 data from Grey utterance and 36 data from Anastasia. The dominance of data shows that Grey tends to employ Directive Speech Act while Anastasia on the other hand tends to employ Expression Speech Act. This is due to the different social conditions between Grey and Anastasia which formed two opposite personalities.

For further study, this study opens the gate for another researcher in order to research speech acts, specifically on sexual context. Despite the fact that many people still view this topic as a taboo, there are many sexual phenomena that have not been studied yet from a linguistic approach. The researchers advise future researchers in this field to utilize more precise theories, such as sex language, in order to

unveil more specifically. Hopefully in the future, more researchers will initiate studies on sexual context with the aim of eradicating the taboo view in society towards it. Indeed, sex is one of the inseparable human natures.

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