



## Control Strategies and Power Relations: Directive Speech Acts in *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*

Elisabeth Dwi Clara<sup>1</sup>, Juni Sari Sianturi<sup>2</sup>, Aulia Monica Tambunan<sup>3</sup>,  
Partohap Saut Raja Sihombing<sup>4</sup>

Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar<sup>1234</sup>

Email: [abethdamanik1906@gmail.com](mailto:abethdamanik1906@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Most research on directive speech acts and power relations focuses on institutional hierarchies, such as teacher–student or employer–employee interactions. However, attention to how power is constructed in the context of informational asymmetry—specifically where no legitimate social authority exists—remains relatively limited. This study fills this gap by analyzing the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* (2025), which presents a unique pragmatic situation where a stranger establishes dominance based solely on future knowledge. Using a descriptive qualitative design, this research integrates Searle Speech Act Theory and Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings indicate that directive speech acts are the most dominant linguistic feature, used to regulate the interlocutor's bodily habits. The analysis demonstrates that the protagonist applies specific constraints on content to negate or override the interlocutor's agency. The study concludes that, in the absence of formal social status, authority is discursively constructed through epistemic advantage (knowledge superiority), where linguistic coercion gains legitimacy through the urgency of survival. Thus, this research contributes to the pragmatic understanding of power dynamics in high-stakes, non-institutional conflicts.

**Keywords:** *Directives, Power, Discourse, Epistemics, Film*

**Abstrak:** Sebagian besar penelitian mengenai tindak tutur direktif dan relasi kekuasaan berfokus pada hierarki institusional, seperti interaksi guru–murid atau atasan–bawahan. Namun, perhatian terhadap bagaimana kekuasaan dikonstruksi dalam konteks *informational asymmetry*, yakni ketika tidak terdapat otoritas sosial yang sah, masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini mengisi celah tersebut dengan menganalisis film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* (2025), yang menghadirkan situasi pragmatik unik ketika seorang asing membangun dominasi semata-mata berdasarkan pengetahuan tentang masa depan. Menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengintegrasikan Teori Tindak Tutur Searle dan Analisis Wacana Kritis Fairclough. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tindak tutur direktif merupakan fitur linguistik yang paling dominan dan digunakan untuk mengatur kebiasaan-kebiasaan tubuh mitra tutur. Analisis ini memperlihatkan bahwa tokoh utama menerapkan batasan-batasan tertentu terhadap isi tuturan (*constraints on content*) guna meniadakan atau melampaui agensi mitra tutur. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa, dalam ketiadaan status sosial formal, otoritas dibangun secara diskursif melalui *epistemic advantage*, yaitu keunggulan pengetahuan, di mana pemaksaan linguistik memperoleh legitimasi melalui urgensi untuk bertahan hidup. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman pragmatik mengenai dinamika kekuasaan dalam konflik non-institusional yang bersifat berisiko tinggi.

**Kata Kunci:** *Direktif, Kekuasaan, Wacana, Epistemik, Film*



## INTRODUCTION

In the realm of contemporary linguistic scholarship, language is no longer understood merely as a neutral medium for conveying information but is increasingly recognized as a form of social action through which reality is negotiated. Within the framework of Speech Act Theory, (Searle, 1979) argues that producing an utterance simultaneously entails performing an action, such as commanding, requesting, or warning. Among the various categories of speech acts, directives are particularly salient because they are explicitly oriented toward influencing the hearer's behavior, thus positioning language at the center of control and interpersonal regulation. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, (Fairclough, 2001) further contends that language functions as a primary site where power is enacted, maintained, and legitimized. Consequently, everyday communicative interactions are rarely neutral; rather, they operate as discursive arenas in which social hierarchies are continuously negotiated.

The interplay between directive speech acts and power relations in cinematic discourse has attracted considerable scholarly attention. Previous studies have demonstrated that fictional dialogue often reflects real-world patterns of authority. For instance, (Fitria, 2019), (Sembiring & Ambalegin, 2019), (Hutajulu & Herman, 2019), and (Della & Sembiring, 2018) highlighted the central role of speech acts in structuring character interactions. Similarly, research by (Fatma & Sundari, 2021) and (Dewi, 2024) emphasized how directives define character agency in animated narratives. Expanding on this, recent research by (Tia Sintita, Irwan Satria, 2021), (Fauziah & Herwandi, 2022), and (Yulita et al., 2023) confirmed that direct commands frequently dominate film dialogues as efficient tools for plot progression and conflict resolution. Furthermore, (Tharishsha Pramudita et al., 2025) and (Rizki et al., 2023) specifically analyzed how protagonists use directives to navigate complex emotional landscapes. In contrast, studies by (Tressyalina & Ningrum, 2025) and (Nabila & As'ad, 2023) examined directives in educational and textual contexts, showing how authority is institutionally reinforced. However, a closer examination of this body of literature reveals a notable limitation. Most existing studies focus on contexts characterized by stable and linear social hierarchies.

Relatively little attention has been paid to situations in which power emerges from "informational asymmetry" rather than from recognized social roles. In particular, contexts involving temporal disruption—where authority is claimed on the basis of future knowledge—remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the Indonesian feature film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* (2025), which presents a distinctive pragmatic anomaly. In the present timeline, the protagonist, Sore, is a stranger to Jonathan and holds no legitimate authority over him. Nevertheless, she persistently attempts to

regulate his bodily habits, such as smoking and sleeping, based solely on her epistemic knowledge of his future death.

This narrative situation raises a critical theoretical question regarding the legitimacy of power. Unlike conventional representations where directive acts are sanctioned by social position, authority in this film is grounded in epistemic advantage rather than institutional status. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on how a socially illegitimate figure constructs dominance through language. Sore's directives are not justified by her role as a wife—since that identity has not yet materialized for Jonathan—but by an urgent, life-preserving motive. As a result, she must deploy a range of linguistic strategies to secure compliance in the face of resistance.

Accordingly, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the pragmatics of conflict and survival. It seeks to answer how compliance is negotiated when the speaker's authority is repeatedly challenged. The primary objective of this research is to identify and classify the types of directive speech acts produced by Sore using Searle's taxonomy, and to analyze how these speech acts construct unequal power relations through Fairclough's framework. Through this analysis, this study offers broader insight into how language operates as a strategic resource in high-stakes communicative situations marked by ambiguity and urgency.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate linguistic practices within the narrative context of the Indonesian feature film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* (2025). To address the analytical objectives of the study, a dual-theoretical framework is applied. (Searle, 1979) Speech Act Theory functions as the primary linguistic framework for classifying the data, with particular attention to directive illocutionary acts and the conditions that underlie their use. To extend the analysis beyond formal linguistic categorization, (Fairclough, 2001) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is incorporated, specifically his concept of *power in discourse*. This combined framework enables an examination of how the protagonist's linguistic choices operate not only as communicative acts but also as discursive resources for constructing authority and exercising control within interpersonal interaction.

The data source of this research is the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*, directed by (Laurens, 2025). The film was selected due to its distinctive narrative structure, which is built around a time-loop mechanism and a condition of epistemic asymmetry, wherein the main character, Sore, possesses privileged knowledge of future events. This asymmetry allows her to intervene in and regulate Jonathan's behavior. The data consist of transcribed dialogues containing directive utterances—such as commands,

requests, and prohibitions—alongside assertive utterances that provide the epistemic grounding for those directives.

Data were collected using the observational method (*metode simak*), employing the non-participant observation technique (*Simak Bebas Libat Cakap* or SBLC) as proposed by (Mahsun, 2017). The collection process involved two stages. The first stage consisted of initial observation during theatrical viewing to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative flow and character dynamics. The second stage involved intensive observation via a streaming platform, which allowed repeated viewing to ensure accurate transcription.

The collected data were analyzed using the Interactive Analysis Model developed by (Miles et al., 2013), adapted to align with the theoretical frameworks employed in this study. The first stage, data condensation, involved selecting utterances that carry directive illocutionary force, as well as assertive acts that function as epistemic justification or preparatory conditions for those directives. Utterances not relevant to the research focus were excluded. In the data display stage, the condensed data were organized into a classification table presented in the Results section, mapping each utterance according to Searle's taxonomy to identify recurring linguistic patterns. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the findings were interpreted through Fairclough's perspective on power relations, explaining how these speech acts function as discursive mechanisms for establishing authority and imposing forms of bodily regulation despite the absence of conventional social legitimacy.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the research findings concerning the use of directive speech acts and the representation of power relations in the film *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* (2025). The data consist of utterances produced by the character Sore, which are examined through the framework of Speech Act Theory. This study adopts speech act theory (Searle, 1979) in conjunction with a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective on power (Fairclough, 2001). In total, twenty utterances were identified as reflecting Sore's discursive strategies in intervening in and regulating Jonathan's behavior.

### **Speech Acts Classification and Power Relations**

This section presents the empirical findings on the linguistic strategies employed by the character Sore. Based on the analysis using (Searle, 1979) Speech Act framework, Directive Speech Acts are identified as the most dominant category in the dataset. This dominance is theoretically relevant, as directives are characterized by a *world-to-words* direction of fit, in which language functions to bring about changes in reality rather than merely describe it. Within the narrative of the film, Sore consistently employs

directives to regulate Jonathan’s lifestyle and bodily conduct, directing his actions to conform to her utterances. This pattern indicates that her interactions are predominantly structured around linguistic constraint, positioning speech as a primary means of exercising authority over the interlocutor.

All utterances were classified strictly in accordance with Searle’s taxonomy of illocutionary acts to ensure analytical consistency. The findings can be grouped into three main categories. First, directive acts—such as commanding, prohibiting, and requesting—constitute the core mechanism of control in the narrative. These utterances reflect Searle’s notion of attempting to get the hearer to do something and are realized in direct regulation of Jonathan’s physical actions. Second, assertive acts, including stating and predicting, function as supportive elements by establishing the preparatory conditions for Sore’s authority. Her assertions concerning future events, particularly those related to Jonathan’s fate, serve as epistemic justification that legitimizes her directives. Third, commissive and declarative acts appear in instances where Sore negotiates obligations or directly alters the narrative reality, most notably through the resetting of the time loop, highlighting the extent and decisiveness of her power.

From the overall corpus, twenty (20) utterances were identified as critical data due to their relevance to the construction of power relations. As summarized in Table 1, each utterance is systematically categorized according to Searle’s specific sub-categories. This classification clarifies the relationship between linguistic form and discursive function, demonstrating how speech acts operate as mechanisms through which authority is enacted and maintained within the narrative.

**Table 1.** Classification of Speech Acts based on Searle (1979) and Analysis of Power Relations

No	Data Excerpt (Utterance)	Illocutionary Category (Searle, 1979)	Discourse & Power Analysis
1	“Hai, aku Sore, istri kamu dari masa depan” (“Hi, I’m Sore, your wife from the future”)	Assertive (Stating/Identifying)	<u>Legitimation:</u> Sore establishes symbolic authority by claiming marital identity, granting her immediate discursive legitimacy despite being a stranger.
2	“Hati-hati, jalannya jangan cepat-cepat”	Directive (Prohibiting)	<u>Bodily Control:</u> The first instance of restricting Jonathan’s physical movement, exercised based on her superior medical knowledge.

	<i>("Be careful, don't walk too fast")</i>		
3	"Mau buat hidup kamu lebih baik" <i>("I want to make your life better")</i>	Commissive (Promising)	<u>Persuasion</u> : Sore offers a "benefit" to the hearer to soften her intrusion, framing compliance as a transactional advantage.
4	"Udah percaya bahwa aku bisa ubah hidup kamu...?" <i>("Do you believe I can change your life...?")</i>	Directive (Asking/Persuading)	<u>Consent Seeking</u> : A strategy to secure Jonathan's submission before imposing stricter rules.
5	"Mulai sekarang kamu ikutin apa kata aku ya" <i>("From now on, you have to follow what I say")</i>	Directive (Commanding)	<u>Explicit Control</u> : Marks the establishment of a hierarchical regime where Sore holds absolute decision-making power.
6	"Janji?" <i>("Promise?")</i>	Directive (Requesting Confirmation)	<u>Moral Binding</u> : Extracting a commissive (promise) from Jonathan to increase the psychological cost of disobedience.
7	"Ntar kalau kamu sudah suka nyesel loh" <i>("You'll regret it later")</i>	Assertive (Warning/Predicting)	<u>Intimidation</u> : Using the prediction of future regret as a tool to manipulate present behavior.
8	"Kamu pernah bilang mau jagain aku..." <i>("You once said you would protect me...")</i>	Assertive (Reporting)	<u>Guilt Tripping</u> : Invoking a future contract to discipline present behavior, reinforcing her epistemic dominance.
9	<i>[Sore orders Jonathan to</i>	Directive (Ordering)	<u>Coercion</u> : A direct intervention on Jonathan's

	<i>throw away his cigarette]</i>		lifestyle habits, symbolizing the elimination of death risks.
10	“Sekali aja habis itu udah...” (Jonathan) <i>(“Just once, then I’ll stop”)</i>	Commissive (Negotiating/Promising)	<u>Resistance:</u> Jonathan attempts to reclaim his autonomy through bargaining.
11	“Gak bisa, Jo... aku udah pernah coba pelan-pelan” <i>(“No, Jo. I’ve tried that before. It doesn’t work”)</i>	Directive (Refusing/Prohibiting)	<u>Blocking Negotiation:</u> Sore invalidates Jonathan’s bargaining power by citing empirical evidence from the future.
12	“Setiap kali aku biarin kamu satu kali aja...” <i>(“Every time I let you do it once, it only gets worse”)</i>	Assertive (Asserting Fact)	<u>Epistemic Authority:</u> Presenting future outcomes as undeniable facts to silence opposition.
13	“Kita mulai dari awal aja” <i>(“Let’s start from the beginning”)</i>	Declaration (Resetting Reality)	<u>Ultimate Power:</u> Exercising god-like control by resetting time, erasing the consequences of Jonathan’s noncompliance.
14	“Ini bukan yang pertama, Jo” <i>(“This isn’t the first time, Jo”)</i>	Assertive (Stating)	<u>Normalization:</u> Highlighting Sore’s temporal superiority and emotional endurance compared to Jonathan’s ignorance.
15	“8 tahun dari sekarang kamu akan meninggal” <i>(“Eight years from now, you will die”)</i>	Assertive (Predicting)	<u>Basis of Authority:</u> The revelation of death serves as the fundamental preparatory condition that justifies all her controlling actions.
16	“Kalau kamu mau mati, gak	Directive (Threatening/Warning)	<u>Ultimatum:</u> An emotional threat employing fear of

	usah dengerin aku lagi!" ( <i>"If you want to die, then stop listening to me!"</i> )		death to force immediate obedience.
17	"Jangan pernah kenal aku lagi" ( <i>"Never get to know me again"</i> )	Directive (Prohibiting)	<i>Existential Threat:</i> A prohibition reflecting desperation and the high stakes of their relationship.
18	"Manusia mana yang tega ninggalin anak istri?" ( <i>"What kind of person abandons their family?"</i> )	Directive (Advising/Rhetorical Question)	<i>Moral Pressure:</i> An indirect directive used to reshape Jonathan's self-perception and trigger responsibility.
19	"Mau marah sampai kapan, Jo?" ( <i>"How long are you going to stay angry?"</i> )	Directive (Advising/Questioning)	<i>Emotional Regulation:</i> An intervention aimed at managing Jonathan's emotional state.
20	"Jangan biarin aku hilang ditelan waktu" ( <i>"Don't let me disappear into time"</i> )	Directive (Requesting/Pleading)	<i>Power Reversal:</i> Sore adopts a vulnerable position, acknowledging that Jonathan's agency is required for her existence.

### The Discursive Formation of Power and Authority

This section interprets the findings through the integrated theoretical perspectives of (Searle, 1979) and (Fairclough, 2001). The dominance of Directive Speech Acts, as identified in the Results section, indicates that interaction in *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan* is fundamentally asymmetrical. Rather than functioning as a reciprocal exchange between equal interlocutors, the dialogue constitutes a discursive space in which control is continuously negotiated and imposed. This finding aligns with recent observations by (Fauziah & Herwandi, 2022) and (Dewi, 2024), who argue that in narrative contexts characterized by high tension, direct imperatives frequently override politeness strategies to ensure communicative efficiency.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the findings show that Sore's extensive use of directive acts reflects a systematic exploitation of the "world-to-words" direction of fit. Unlike assertive utterances that describe states of affairs, directives are designed to reshape reality by aligning the hearer's actions with the speaker's intentions. Utterances such as *"From now on, you have to follow what I say"* illustrate how Sore employs language to override Jonathan's agency and reposition him as a compliant subject. This pattern supports Searle's argument that directive speech acts are inherently action-oriented and resonates with (Tharishsha Pramudita et al., 2025) findings on how protagonists utilize directives to regulate the behavior of others. The urgency produced by the time-loop structure further intensifies this function, as Sore prioritizes illocutionary force over relational or affiliative concerns.

When examined through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the findings reveal how Sore's directives function as instruments of discursive power. Her frequent reliance on unmitigated imperatives exemplifies what Fairclough describes as "constraints on content," whereby the speaker restricts the range of actions available to the interlocutor. By regulating Jonathan's bodily practices—such as smoking, sleeping, and movement—Sore narrows his scope of agency and asserts exclusive authority over what constitutes acceptable behavior. The relative absence of politeness strategies in these interactions reflects an "unequal power encounter" in which Sore positions herself as the primary determinant of legitimate conduct, thereby normalizing her intervention in Jonathan's private sphere.

A further insight emerging from the analysis concerns the role of assertive speech acts in legitimizing directive force. Sore's repeated assertions regarding future events function as epistemic warrants that support and justify her commands. Within the framework of this study, this is understood as a strategy of legitimation in Fairclough's sense. Authority in this interaction does not derive from institutional or social hierarchy—given that the characters are initially strangers—but from informational asymmetry. Sore's privileged access to future knowledge enables her to constrain Jonathan's rational alternatives, framing compliance as the only reasonable response to an impending threat.

The findings also demonstrate a progressive escalation in Sore's linguistic strategies. Initially, she employs relatively mitigated forms of persuasion (commissives). As Jonathan's resistance intensifies, these strategies give way to more coercive directives and implicit threats. This progression culminates in the use of declarative acts that reset the time loop, effectively eliminating resistance altogether. At this point, linguistic power extends beyond influencing behavior to directly transforming narrative reality, underscoring the contingent and dynamic nature of power relations within the film.

Taken together, the analysis demonstrates that the integration of Searle's and Fairclough's frameworks accounts for the dual function of directive speech acts in the film. At the pragmatic level, these acts operate as mechanisms for securing immediate compliance, consistent with Searle's conception of illocutionary force. At the discursive level, they function as resources for constructing and sustaining authority under conditions of crisis. Rather than being grounded in institutional legitimacy, power in the narrative is discursively produced through strategic linguistic choices supported by epistemic control.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, this study draws two primary conclusions regarding the linguistic construction of power in *Sore: Istri dari Masa Depan*. First, Directive Speech Acts function as the dominant instrument for behavioral regulation, where the protagonist utilizes linguistic coercion to effectively override the interlocutor's agency. In this specific narrative context, language shifts from a neutral medium of exchange to a mechanism of control driven by urgency. Second, the study establishes that authority can be constructed without formal social legitimacy. Unlike power derived from institutional hierarchies, dominance in this film is built entirely upon "epistemic advantage." The findings prove that an individual lacking social status can successfully enforce "constraints on content" by leveraging superior knowledge to restrict another's actions. Consequently, the broader implication of this research is that power is not a static possession tied to social rank, but a dynamic process negotiated through discourse. This study suggests that in the absence of conventional authority, language becomes the sole strategic resource for legitimizing control and ensuring survival in high-stakes, non-institutional conflicts.

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