

# Exploring Themes, Narrative Progression And Character Development In Hoover's *It Ends With Us*: A Pragmatic Analysis

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## Abstract

*This study examines the impact of speech acts on character development, plot development, and thematic exploration in Hoover's novel It Ends with Us. The research examines how these speech acts shape the narrative and deepen readers' understanding of the characters' internal and external conflicts by utilizing John Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Commissives highlight promises and commitments central to character motivations, expressives reveal emotional depth, and declarations mark pivotal moments that alter the story's reality. Assertive speech acts reveal characters' beliefs; directives propel the plot through influencing actions. The study emphasizes the significance of expressive speech acts in reinforcing themes of love, resilience, and personal development and revealing the emotions of characters. This study contributes to literary linguistics by <sup>1</sup> demonstrating how speech acts function as essential tools for storytelling and meaning-making in contemporary literature by analyzing the nuanced interactions between language use and narrative construction. The results shed more light on how Hoover's thematic exploration, narrative progression, and character dynamics are influenced by language.*

**Keywords:** Speech Acts, Illocutionary Acts, Plot, Character, Theme.

## 1. Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for expressing thoughts, feelings, and ideas, and it is essential to human interaction and comprehension. Beyond just communication, its pervasive influence shapes perceptions and reflects societal values (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022). In his "Course in General Linguistics" (1916) analogy, Ferdinand de Saussure compares language to a sheet of paper, where sound and thought are inseparable and can't be changed without affecting the other. This idea emphasizes how language both reflects and constructs cultural norms, highlighting the intricate connection between social meaning and language form (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023). This perspective is further developed by Halliday (1975), who views language as a socially embedded, dynamic symbolic system rather than a static set of rules. According to Halliday, language enables communities to generate and share social meanings that adapt to a variety of cultural and situational contexts. As a result, it can be used to express

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one's identity, create social hierarchies, and build relationships with other people (Ramzan et al., 2020). Language takes on additional meanings in literature when authors use speech acts to investigate intricate human relationships and behaviors (Ramzan et al., 2023). This research intends to highlight the use of speech acts in the novel *It Ends with Us* by Hoover to drive character development, advancement in the plot, and important themes. The novel, which came out in 2016, has been praised for its moving depiction of love, perseverance, and personal development, particularly through the journey of the protagonist Lily Bloom and her relationship with neurosurgeon Ryle Kincaid. Using John Searle's theory of illocutionary acts as a foundation, this study conducts a pragmatic analysis of speech acts in *It Ends with Us*. Searle divides speech acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, each of which has its own distinct role in communication. This study aims to bring forth the significance of these speech acts in shaping character dynamics, advancing narrative progression, and enriching thematic exploration by examining how they occur throughout the novel. By elucidating how expressive speech acts influence character development, plot advancement, and thematic resonance in Hoover's work, the study contributes to literary linguistics. This study provides deeper insights into how language functions as a tool for storytelling and meaning-making in contemporary literature by revealing the nuanced interactions between the use of language and the construction of narratives. In a nutshell, this introduction sets the stage for a more in-depth look at how speech acts in *It Ends with Us* play a role in showing the inner worlds and relationships of characters, moving the story along, and engaging with the novel's thematic complexities. This study aims to improve literary analysis and our overall comprehension of the role that language plays in narrative construction by examining these linguistic elements through a pragmatic lens.

### **Statement of Problem**

Hoover's novel *It Ends with Us* is a richly detailed story that weaves together many different speech acts. To analyze and comprehend the relevance of these speech acts in influencing the characters' interactions, relationships, and the overall plot, a thorough pragmatic analysis is necessary. By examining how various speech acts affect the characters' motivations, conflicts, and emotional dynamics, this research hopes to shed light on the role language plays in the development of the narrative and thematic investigation.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is based on its theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the relevance of the study emphasizes the value of looking into speech acts in literature, especially in Hoover's books. Understanding speech acts provides insights into character development, plot advancement and emotional intensity of the story. This study contributes in understanding of speech acts' role in shaping literary works, enhancing the appreciation of literature's delicacy. Language learners can practically profit from this subject by developing their ability to analyze speech acts. It offers useful insights into the ways in which language is employed to carry out different functions and communicate information. Understanding speech acts, particularly illocutionary acts, can help students improve their ability to express their ideas clearly and effectively through language (Ramzan et al., 2021). This information can be used in a variety of situations, including language learning and genuine conversation scenarios.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are given below:

1. To analyze the types of speech acts employed by characters in *It Ends with Us* and examine how these speech acts reflect their emotional states and intentions throughout the narrative.
2. To explore the role of speech acts in plot advancement and thematic exploration reflecting themes such as love, strength, and resilience in Hoover's novel *It Ends with Us*.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are given below:

- Q.1 What types of speech acts have been employed by the characters in *It Ends with Us* and how do they reflect their external and internal conflicts throughout the narrative?
- Q.2 What is the role of speech acts in thematic exploration and narrative progression portraying love, strength, and resilience in *It Ends with Us*?

### **Literature Review**

Pragmatics, as a crucial component of language proficiency, extends beyond mere grammatical correctness and semantic precision. According to Rasekh (2005), language competence is comprised of two primary aspects: organizational and pragmatic. Organizational competence pertains to the management of linguistic elements at both the sentence and discourse levels, while pragmatic competence—often referred to as illocutionary competence—encompasses the sociolinguistic abilities required to use language appropriately across diverse contexts. Levinson (1993) positions pragmatics as the study of language in use, differentiating it from syntax and semantics, which focus more on structural and meaning aspects, respectively (Ramzan & Alahmadi, 2024). Leech (2000) further refines this distinction by emphasizing the importance of understanding meaning in speech situations, arguing that pragmatic meaning, which considers utterance context, is as crucial as sentence meaning for a comprehensive grasp of language function.

Fraser (2010) underscores the importance of pragmatic competence for accurately interpreting the intentions of others and effectively communicating nuanced messages across varied socio-cultural contexts. Despite its significance, pragmatic competence often receives insufficient attention in language education, which can hinder learners' ability to use language effectively in real-world situations (Akram et al., 2020). Finch (2000) supports this view, highlighting that pragmatics prioritizes communicative force and style within situational contexts over explicit content. Yule (1996) introduces the concept of "speech acts," which are actions performed through utterances—such as apologies, complaints, or promises—that serve specific communicative functions aligned with the speaker's intentions.

The foundational work of Austin (1962) classifies speech acts into three categories: locutionary (literal meaning), illocutionary (social function), and perlocutionary (effect on the listener). Trask (2007) expands on this by describing speech acts as attempts to perform actions solely through language, including promises, questions, orders, and commands. Searle (1975) categorizes speech acts into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, each serving distinct communicative functions that influence interactions and achieve specific communicative goals within particular contexts. This categorization is invaluable in literary and discourse analysis, offering insights into character communication, relationship development, and thematic expression. By applying pragmatic theories to literary texts, scholars can explore how speech acts shape character portrayal, narrative progression,

and thematic exploration, thus enriching literary criticism by revealing the nuanced impact of language use on narrative construction and reader interpretation.

In this study, John Searle's (1975) taxonomy of illocutionary acts serves as the theoretical framework for analyzing the speech acts in Hoover's novel *It Ends with Us*. Building on J.L. Austin's foundational speech act theory, Searle's framework categorizes speech acts into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Each category represents a distinct communicative function, offering critical insights into how language constructs meaning in both everyday interactions and literary discourse.

### **Assertives**

Assertive speech acts involve the speaker committing to the truth of a proposition. In *It Ends with Us* assertives reveal characters' beliefs and perspectives, providing insight into their motivations and internal conflicts. For example, when a character declares, "This is who I am," it serves as an assertion of identity, which is crucial for understanding the character's actions and development. These speech acts establish the characters' worldviews, grounding their interactions and decisions within the narrative.

### **Directives**

Directives are speech acts that aim to prompt the listener to take action, including commands, requests, and suggestions. In *It Ends with Us*, directives drive the plot by influencing characters' actions. For instance, when a character commands another to "leave," this directive not only impacts the immediate situation but also propels the narrative forward, creating opportunities for further character development and thematic exploration. The use of directives highlights the power dynamics at play, reflecting the urgency or significance of specific situations within the novel.

### **Commissives**

Commissive speech acts involve the speaker committing to a future course of action, such as promises or vows. In *It Ends with Us*, commissives play a critical role in reflecting the commitments and intentions of characters, which are central to the development of relationships and the plot. For example, a promise to "never hurt you again" signifies a pivotal moment in the narrative, revealing the complexities of trust and the potential for betrayal. Commissive acts are thus intricately connected to themes of loyalty, love, and personal integrity within the novel.

### **Expressives**

Expressives are speech acts that convey the speaker's emotional state, including apologies, congratulations, and expressions of gratitude. In *It Ends with Us*, expressives illuminate the emotional depth of characters and reinforce the novel's thematic elements, such as love, resilience, and personal growth. When a character expresses sorrow or joy, it not only reveals their internal state but also deepens the reader's connection to the story. Expressives humanize the characters, making their struggles and triumphs more relatable and engaging.

### **Declarations**

Declarations are speech acts that enact changes in the world through their utterance, such as pronouncing someone married or declaring a meeting adjourned. In *It Ends with Us*, declarations often mark significant narrative turning points, where characters make decisions that alter their realities. For instance, a character declaring the end of a relationship can symbolize the culmination of personal growth and the beginning of a new chapter. Declarations

serve as powerful narrative tools, signifying moments of resolution or transformation within the story.

By applying Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts, this study examines the dialogues and interactions in *It Ends with Us* to understand how these speech acts contribute to character development, plot progression, and thematic exploration. Analyzing the speech acts used by characters reveals how Hoover uses language to shape the narrative and convey deeper meanings. For example, commissive speech acts highlight characters' commitments and the tension that arises when these commitments are challenged. Similarly, expressive acts reveal the emotional complexities of characters, allowing readers to experience their pain, joy, and struggles. Through this analytical lens, the study underscores the significance of speech acts in literature, contributing to the broader field of literary pragmatics by demonstrating how language functions as a tool for storytelling and meaning-making in contemporary fiction.

In conclusion, Searle's framework provides a robust structure for analyzing the speech acts in *It Ends with Us*, offering deeper insights into how language influences character dynamics, narrative development, and thematic resonance. This theoretical approach facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the novel's linguistic features and their impact on reader engagement with the text.

### **Previous Studies**

In 2020, Yunia conducts a descriptive analysis that aimed to reveal direct and indirect speeches in the story of princess Hase-Hime based on the theory of Yule (1996). This study is based on the utterances of the characters in the story, with the aim of identifying different types and functions of speech and distinguishing between direct and indirect forms. With 32 direct speech acts and 15 indirect speech acts, it shows that both classes have more declarative, imperative and interrogative. Direct speech acts include statements, questions, commands/requests, while indirect speech acts are mainly used as statements. Of all Princess Hase-Hime's utterances, 68% were recorded as direct speech. This research highlights the importance of teaching pragmatics through stories.

Della and Sembiring in 2018 explain different types of directive speeches, using descriptive quantitative methods. The analysis used Searle's directive theory of speech acts, while the data extracted from the film script was the basis for its conclusions. Command, prohibition, request and permission were the most frequent command as the most common category.

In 2011, Adindas conducts an extensive study which focuses on the classification of speech acts in the novel. Through the data analysis, the author found various types of non-verbal activities such as comments, instructions, offers, comments and stories. Second, a speaker's speech can be classified according to the type of speech act. Claim, decision, request, promise, threat, letter, apology, invitation, blessing, dismissal, and marriage.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

In order to investigate the significance of illocutionary acts in Hoover's *It Ends with Us*, this study employs a qualitative approach. Using John Searle's illocutionary act theory, which divides speech acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, the approach examines the novel's dialogue and speech acts in depth. The selection of key passages in which these speech acts are prominently featured is the first step. Following Searle's framework, each speech act has been grouped according to how it affects character growth, plot development, and thematic elements. The analysis aims to look at how assertiveness, directiveness, and commissiveness influence character portrayal and development. The study intends to focus on how directives and commissives affect plot dynamics and propel the

narrative in terms of plot progression. In addition, the role that expressive speech acts play in revealing character emotions and deepening thematic content have been examined. Thematic coding has been used to look at the data to find patterns and figure out what these speech acts mean in context.

Illocutionary actions have a significant impact on character growth, plot development, and thematic exploration in *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover. These speech acts are conveyed through the characters' dialogue and interactions, which shape the narrative and help readers comprehend the characters' internal and external struggles. In the novel, the characters' assertive speech acts reveal their beliefs, which are crucial to comprehending their motivations and identities. For instance, when Lily Bloom asserts, "There are no bad people." Her assertion that "We're all just people who sometimes do bad things" demonstrates her belief in the complexity of human nature. Not only does it show readers how forgiving she is, but it also sets up her internal struggle with her relationship with Ryle Kincaid. Another example comes from Lily's reflection, which reads, "Cycles exist because they are excruciating to break." To break out of a routine takes a tremendous amount of courage and pain. This assertion highlights her resilience and determination in light of the difficulties she faces in breaking free from the abuse cycle.

The novel's directives have an impact on the actions and relationships of the characters, advancing the plot. During a heated argument, Ryle's command, "Don't walk away from me, Lily," reflects their relationship's power dynamics and urgency. In addition to propelling the narrative by eliciting immediate responses, this directive reveals Ryle's desperate need for control. Another illustration of this is when Lily's mother tells her to "Leave." Now." Lily decides to take action for her safety and well-being as a result of this directive, which highlights the seriousness of the situation and sets the stage for a significant plot point. The novel's character development and the dynamics of the plot are heavily reliant on compliant speech acts like promises. "I will never hurt you again," Ryle's promise to Lily, demonstrates his remorse and commitment, influencing Lily's choices and the development of their relationship. However, this promise's breaking becomes a crucial plot point.

The declaration that Lily will "not be like my mother" to herself is another significant commiseration. This vow emphasizes themes of personal development and empowerment and demonstrates her determination to break the cycle of abuse by influencing her actions and choices throughout the book. Speech acts that are expressive enhance the story's thematic depth and reveal the characters' emotions. For instance, Lily's sincere apology, "I'm sorry for everything," provides readers with insight into her emotional state by expressing her deep remorse and vulnerability. In a similar vein, when Ryle cries out, "I'm so sorry, Lily." I didn't mean to hurt you" reveals his regret and the emotional turmoil he goes through, making him and their relationship more complex. Because of these expressives, readers are able to comprehend the characters' emotional difficulties and form deeper bonds with them. The novel's declarations frequently signal crucial junctures that alter the story's reality. When Lily says, "I am ending this cycle," she is not only making a decision but also putting into action a change that will have big repercussions for the rest of her life. This declaration encapsulates the novel's overarching themes of resilience and the pursuit of a better life, demonstrating her empowerment and determination to break free from the abusive cycle. When Lily declares, "I'm not going to be like my mother," it's a powerful statement. Finally, I am free. Reinforcing the novel's message of strength and self-respect, this moment represents her breaking away from the past and taking charge of her destiny. Illocutionary acts in "It Ends With Us" are more than just a reflection of the intentions of the characters. They are also essential to moving the story forward, shaping character arcs, and deepening the thematic exploration of complex topics like abuse, resilience, and empowerment.

## **Role of Expressive Speech Acts in Revealing Character Emotions and Themes**

Expressive speech acts in *It Ends with Us* are pivotal in revealing characters' emotions and reinforcing the novel's themes. These acts allow characters to express their feelings directly, providing readers with insights into their emotional and psychological landscapes.

**Emotional Complexity:** In *It Ends with Us*, expressive speech acts play a crucial role in revealing the characters' emotional complexities, deepening the narrative and engaging the audience. These actions give us a better understanding of the characters' motivations and struggles because they give us a direct look at their mental states and emotional journeys. It is a profound moment that encapsulates Lily's internal conflict and emotional turmoil when she says, "I love you, but I can't do this anymore." This statement demonstrates not only her sincere love for Ryle but also her growing awareness of the need to place a higher priority on her own safety and well-being. As she navigates the difficult terrain of loving someone who has hurt her, the complexity of her emotions is evident. This expressive act demonstrates the difficult choices she must make while balancing her desire to safeguard herself from further harm and her feelings for Ryle. Reclaiming her power and standing up for her own mental and physical health are at the heart of this moment, not just ending a relationship.

Hoover emphasizes the emotional development that comes with such a significant decision through Lily's words, making her character's experiences deeply relatable to readers who may have faced similar dilemmas. When Lily's mother tells her, "I'm so proud of you, Lily," it is another moving example of expressive speech. You are acting appropriately." Because it conveys her mother's pride and unwavering support, this statement carries a lot of emotional weight. This expression's context is important because it comes at a time when Lily is vulnerable and making decisions. Her mother's words emphasize the importance of breaking free of harmful patterns and reflect the generational effects of abusive relationships. In addition to strengthening the bond between Lily and her mother, this moment of emotional honesty also serves as an affirmation of Lily's bravery. It emphasizes Lily's support network, which is essential for her to make difficult decisions. This act of speech expression demonstrates how emotional expressions can act as pillars of strength in the face of adversity, supporting the theme of family support and resilience.

These kinds of expressive speech acts are essential for conveying the characters' internal conflicts and healing paths. They let readers better understand the struggles of the characters by revealing layers of emotion that would otherwise remain hidden. For instance, Lily's journey is characterized by numerous instances in which her expressives reveal the duality of her emotions: her love for Ryle in contrast to the pain he causes her. Understanding her character and the novel's themes requires an understanding of this dual nature. In addition, Hoover employs a broader narrative strategy to develop her characters and investigate the themes of the book, so these emotional expressions are not isolated instances. The expressive speech acts contribute to a more emotionally engaging and immersive reading experience. They enrich the overall thematic exploration of love, resilience, and personal development by allowing readers to witness the characters' development and emotional landscapes firsthand. For instance, the emotional depth with which Lily reflects on her relationship with her mother and their shared experiences with abusive partners adds a poignancy to the narrative.

It emphasizes the need for courage and resilience to break the cycle of abuse. Lily receives the emotional stamina she needs to move forward from her mother's expressions of pride and support in this setting. In conclusion, expressive speech acts in "*It Ends With Us*" are necessary for revealing the characters' emotional complexity. They enable readers to comprehend the characters' struggles, development, and the novel's themes on a deeper level, allowing them to connect with them on a deeper level. By carefully employing these speech acts, understanding

their struggles, growth, and the themes of the novel. Through the nuanced use of these speech acts

**Thematic Exploration:** Thematic elements such as love, resilience, and personal growth are intricately explored through characters' emotional expressions. Expressive acts like Lily's declaration of love and subsequent decision to leave Ryle emphasize the theme of resilience in the face of adversity. By expressing her emotions, Lily's journey reflects the novel's broader themes of empowerment and the courage to break free from harmful patterns.

When Lily reflects, "In the future . . . if by some miracle you ever find yourself in the position to fall in love again . . . fall in love with me," she is expressing hope and the possibility of future happiness. This moment aligns with the theme of healing and moving forward despite past traumas. It shows Lily's capacity for love and her desire for a healthy, loving relationship, highlighting her emotional growth and optimism.

Additionally, Ryle's expressive speech acts, such as his tearful apology, "I'm so sorry, Lily. I didn't mean to hurt you," expose his regret and emotional turmoil. This adds complexity to his character and to their relationship, showing the destructive impact of his actions and the genuine remorse he feels. It brings to light the themes of forgiveness, accountability, and the painful process of confronting one's flaws.

### **Reinforcing Themes through Emotional Expressions:**

Expressive speech acts not only reveal individual emotions but also reinforce the novel's overarching themes. Lily's emotional declarations and reflections underscore her journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Her expressions of love, pain, hope, and resilience weave together to form a narrative that explores the depths of human emotion and the strength required to overcome adversity.

For example, when Lily says, "I am strong enough to walk away from this," it is not just a statement of intent but a profound expression of her inner strength and resolve. This moment is pivotal in reinforcing the theme of personal empowerment and the courage it takes to leave an abusive relationship.

In conclusion, the pragmatic analysis of expressive speech acts in *It Ends with Us* demonstrates their significant role in character development, plot progression, and thematic exploration. Expressive speech acts are particularly impactful in revealing character emotions and reinforcing themes. Through the nuanced use of these speech acts, Colleen Hoover crafts a compelling story that delves into the complexities of human relationships and personal growth, offering valuable insights into the power of language in literature. Expressive acts provide a window into the characters' inner worlds, making their emotional journeys palpable and relatable to readers.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis highlights the significance of language in narrative construction, character development, and thematic exploration. The study demonstrates how assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations contribute to the novel's storytelling by utilizing John Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts. Particularly important for conveying character emotions and reiterating themes of love, perseverance, and personal development are expressive speech acts. The research offers a deeper appreciation of the novel's literary significance by examining these speech acts. It reveals how Hoover's use of language shapes characters, advances the plot, and enhances thematic depth.



## Future Recommendations

Future studies on Hoover's *It Ends with Us* may consider a comparative analysis with other works to highlight unique authorial styles and thematic continuities. Incorporating a stylistic analysis could uncover how Hoover's language and literary techniques impact speech acts, while examining the interaction between speech acts and character psychology can reveal how internal states shape language use. These approaches would provide a comprehensive understanding of the novel, enriching pragmatic research by considering both external communication dynamics and the internal psychological landscape of the characters.

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