

Speech Acts and the Development of Characters and Theme in Moana 2: A Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines how the distribution of illocutionary acts reflects character development and themes in the 2024 animated film *Moana 2*. Previous speech act research on the *Moana* franchise has generally provided only aggregate profiles for specific films or characters, failing to track shifts across narrative phases or compare distributions against an independent narrative baseline; furthermore, in the case of *Moana 2*, only directive acts have been previously investigated. To address these gaps, this study employs a qualitative descriptive design supplemented by simple frequency counts. Verbal utterances from nine main characters were extracted from the film's script (excluding songs) and coded according to their locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions. Illocutionary acts were classified into Searle's five categories and evaluated against his felicity conditions. The resulting distributions were interpreted through "Pragmatic Significance" – an analytical construct formulated for this study – and compared against a narrative baseline established prior to coding. The dataset comprises 698 illocutionary acts: assertives (40.1%), directives (34.8%), expressives (21.8%), commissives (3.0%), and declaratives (0.3%). Nearly all speech acts met their respective felicity conditions (98.9%). The proportion of directives used by Moana increased from 23.8% in the exposition to 51.3% in the climax, while the proportion of expressives used by Maui rose from 15.4% to 36.8% across the four narrative phases. Of the twelve comparisons made against the baseline, eight showed convergence, while four showed partial convergence – the latter being linked to specific key utterances or nonverbal actions rather than the aggregate distribution. This study concludes that the distribution of illocutionary acts serves as a meaningful, albeit partial, indicator of character development and thematic progression. The novelty of the research lies in the integration of a phase-by-phase temporal analysis with an independent narrative baseline and the construct of Pragmatic Significance.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Illocutionary Acts, Pragmatic Significance, Character Development, Moana 2.

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INTRODUCTION

Film dialogue is language in action. Austin (1962) argues that an utterance performs a locutionary act, an illocutionary act, and a perlocutionary act, and that the success of an act depends on felicity conditions; Searle (1969, 1979) formalizes these conditions and classifies illocutionary acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, each with a distinct illocutionary point. Scripted dialogue is written to serve narrative functions (Kozloff, 2000), and impressions of a character are built from textual cues that the audience interprets in context (Culpeper,

2001). Because film dialogue is composed to construct character and narrative (Kozloff, 2000; Culpeper, 2001), the choice of illocutionary acts is a productive site for studying characterization and the construction of a story's central message. The animated film *Moana 2* (2024) is a suitable case. The present study selects *Moana 2* (Derrick et al., 2024) because its protagonist is a wayfinder who must lead a crew of unlike companions, a demigod whose attitude to partnership changes, and a quest to reconnect the peoples of the ocean; these narrative conditions make both character change and recurring themes observable in the film's verbal action.

Studies of speech acts in the *Moana* franchise have described the acts in individual films. Wiliastini et al. (2021) identified 127 speech acts in *Moana* (2016) showing the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions, and Talahaturuson et al. (2025) analyzed 108 utterances in the same film and found four illocutionary categories. Cahyanti et al. (2025) analyzed Moana's own utterances in the first film and reported assertives (56.82%), directives (25.76%), expressives (10.61%), and commissives (6.82%), with no declarations, and interpreted this profile as indicating a strong, assertive, and leading character. For the sequel, Putra and Ardiantari (2025) examined directive acts only and found that commands were the most dominant of five sub-types, which they related to Moana's role as a decisive leader.

Beyond the franchise, similar descriptions exist for other films. Dewi and Jannah (2022) found representatives dominant (55.2%) among the 58 utterances of Merida in *Brave*; Jayanto and Milal (2025) found directives (35.8%) and assertives (32.6%) dominant in *She's the Man* and noted that the less frequent categories were pivotal at turning points; Ariasih and Candra (2025) reported assertives as predominant in *Nimona*; Sianipar et al. (2025) reported directives and expressives as the most frequent types in *Inside Out 2*; and Bagis et al. (2025) found a balance of assertives (36.18%) and directives (36.64%) in *Stranger Things: Season 3*, with a leader such as Hopper relying on directives and an analytical character such as Dustin on assertives. Related work outside film shows that distributions of illocutionary acts can be read against context, for example in the cultural values of a Sasak ceremony (Hijriati, 2021) and in the strategic choices of teachers (Anhar & Yusra, 2023).

These studies share a limit. They classify utterances and report frequencies, usually as a single profile for a film or a character, and they do not trace how the profile changes across the phases of a narrative or compare it with an independent account of a character's arc and a film's themes. For *Moana 2*, only directive acts have been examined. This study addresses this gap by (1) analyzing all five categories of illocutionary acts, (2) treating the locutionary and perlocutionary dimensions as supporting evidence, (3) reading the distribution phase by phase against a narrative baseline fixed before coding, and (4) formulating Pragmatic Significance as an explicit interpretive construct; the novelty therefore lies in the temporal, phase-by-phase reading and in the use of an independent baseline, which have not been combined in previous studies of the franchise.

The study uses Pragmatic Significance as its interpretive lens. Pragmatic Significance is not an established theory attributed to a single scholar; it is an analytical construct formulated here by synthesizing concepts from Austin (1962), Levinson (1983), Thomas (1995), and Yule (1996) and indicators used in earlier studies. It rests on three assumptions: that illocutionary force is tied to the speaker's communicative

intention (Searle, 1979; Thomas, 1995), that the meaning of an act depends on context (Austin, 1962; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996), and that reading a distribution as evidence of development is a matter of plausible interpretation and not of causal proof. The construct is justified as a heuristic because no single pragmatic theory explains how frequency, function, narrative position, and social meaning operate together; its four components are therefore selected to move from description to interpretation. Distributional Weight quantifies the share of each category in a unit (Sianipar et al., 2025; Bagis et al., 2025). Functional Dominance explains the communicative role performed by the dominant category, grounded in Searle's (1979) illocutionary point and Yule's (1996) speaker meaning. Narrative Salience connects clusters or shifts of categories to structural priorities of the narrative, following Austin (1962), Levinson (1983), and the use of narrative nodes by Fitriani et al. (2020). Social and Cultural Reflection interprets what the patterns suggest about roles and values, following Levinson (1983), Yule (1996), and Hijriati (2021). The components are interrelated: Distributional Weight provides the descriptive basis; Functional Dominance explains why a category matters; Narrative Salience locates the shift in the story; and Social and Cultural Reflection offers the broader interpretive meaning. This ordering prevents frequency from being treated as meaning by itself.

Character development is understood as the revealing or transformation of a character's traits, values, and relationships over a narrative (Chatman, 1978; Forster, 1927), and theme development as the gradual construction of a narrative's central message through recurrence (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). In this study the former is operationalized as the shift in a focal character's illocutionary profile across narrative phases, and the latter as the clustering of a category across main characters within a shared phase, each compared with an independently established baseline.

The study answers two questions: (1) What speech acts are performed by the main characters of *Moana 2* in terms of their locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions? (2) How does the distribution of the illocutionary acts reflect the development of the characters and the theme in the film?

METHOD

Research design

The study used a descriptive qualitative design supported by simple frequency counts. Frequencies were used to organize the data and to give the interpretation a transparent starting point; no inferential statistics were applied (Creswell, 2014). The core of the analysis was the interpretation of the distribution of illocutionary acts, which was compared with a narrative baseline that was written before any act was coded.

Data and data source

The data were the verbal utterances of the main characters of *Moana 2* (2024), directed by David G. Derrick Jr., Jason Hand, and Dana Ledoux Miller. The working transcript was based on the official English screenplay of *Moana 2* (Derrick et al., 2024) used for awards consideration; the screenplay was checked against the film to verify speaker turns, addressee changes, and the exclusion of sung lyrics. No independent transcription was used for the main dialogue, and any differences between the

screenplay and the final film were recorded in the audit trail. The screenplay of the film, which contains 640 speaker turns, served as the working transcript. Nine characters were treated as main characters: Moana, Maui (including his transformed forms), Chief Tui, Sina, Simea, Moni, Loto, Kele, and Matangi, whose 505 turns formed the dataset. Utterances of supporting characters were used only as interactional context. The songs were excluded, because sung lyrics follow poetic and musical conventions and lack the turn-taking on which the felicity and perlocutionary analysis depends; this exclusion is acknowledged as a limitation. Sung turns were identified by the screenplay's convention of printing lyrics in capital letters inside the song sequences. The film was divided into four narrative phases using the sequence numbers of the screenplay: Exposition (SEQ 101–127), Rising action (SEQ 153–421), Climax (SEQ 518–542), and Resolution (SEQ 550–555); the post-credit tag was excluded.

The unit of analysis was the utterance, defined as a stretch of speech by one character that is bounded by a change of speaker, a change of addressee, or a pause marking a new communicative move, and that performs one identifiable illocutionary act. Sentence-level segmentation of the 505 turns produced 800 segments, of which 43 (non-lexical vocalizations and unfinished fragments) were not coded and 59 continuations of the same move were merged with the preceding segment. The final dataset consisted of 698 coded illocutionary acts.

Procedure

The analysis followed a preliminary stage and five steps. In the preliminary stage, before any act was coded, the narrative baseline was written from the film's narrative: the four phases, the arcs of the two focal characters (Moana and Maui), and five themes (connection versus isolation, collective effort, leadership and responsibility, courage and embracing uncertainty, and sacrifice and love). In Step 1, each utterance was coded in successive rounds for locutionary content, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary effect, the last being taken from the responses of interlocutors in the following turns. In Step 2, the frequency and percentage of the five illocutionary categories were tabulated for the whole film, for each character, and for each focal character and the ensemble by phase. In Step 3, each illocutionary act was evaluated against Searle's (1969) four felicity conditions and classified as felicitous, misfire (a failed preparatory condition), or abuse (a failed sincerity condition). In Step 4, the distribution was read through the four components of Pragmatic Significance and compared with the baseline, and each comparison was labeled convergent, partly convergent, or divergent. In Step 5, the findings were synthesized.

To reduce subjectivity in a single-coder design, the researcher kept a reflexive memo for every ambiguous classification, discussed uncertain cases with the supervisor, and carried out a code-recode procedure after two weeks; disagreements between the first and second coding were resolved by returning to the film and the screenplay. The audit trail recorded the definition used, the utterance context, and the reason for the final decision. This procedure does not remove subjectivity, but it makes the interpretive path traceable and open to scrutiny.

The alignment labels were operationalized as follows. A comparison was labeled convergent when the direction of the phase distribution and the dominant category matched the baseline, and when key utterances in the phase supported the same reading. A comparison was labeled partly convergent when the aggregate distribution matched only one dimension of the baseline or when the expected development was carried by a few key utterances or by non-verbal action rather than by the aggregate profile. A comparison was labeled divergent when neither the distribution nor the key utterances supported the baseline. The label “tentative” was added when a phase contained fewer than 15 coded acts or when the ensemble comparison rested on the smallest phase.

Three coding rules affect the distributions and are stated explicitly. Interrogatives that seek information were coded as directives (Searle, 1979). Interjections that name a state (for example, “Whoa!”) were coded as expressives, whereas cries without lexical content were not coded. Statements of obligation (“it’s my job to...”) were coded as assertives unless the speaker committed to the hearer.

Trustworthiness

Credibility was supported by repeated viewing, by checking the transcript against the film, and by discussing ambiguous classifications with the supervisor; dependability by a code-recode procedure with an audit trail of every coding decision; and confirmability by reporting divergences from the baseline instead of setting them aside (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, the coding sheet recorded all excluded turns, and the final table was rechecked against the coded dataset so that the percentages reported in Tables 1–3 and Figure 1 remain consistent with the 698 coded acts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Speech acts performed by the main characters

All five of Searle’s categories occurred, but unevenly (Table 1). Assertives were the most frequent (280 acts, 40.1%), followed by directives (243, 34.8%) and expressives (152, 21.8%); commissives (21, 3.0%) and declarations (2, 0.3%) were rare. Within the directives, questions (79 acts) and commands (58) were the most frequent, followed by summons (40) and suggestions (38). The two declarations were Chief Tui’s bestowal of the Tautai title on Moana (“to bestow this title” (screenplay p. 19)) and Moana’s ritual incantation that opens the portal (“Huakina” (screenplay p. 65)), which may alternatively be read as a command.

Table 1. Distribution of Illocutionary Acts in the Whole Film

Category	f	%	Most frequent act types (f)
Assertive	280	40.1%	informing (132), claiming (56), explaining (30), evaluating (28)
Directive	243	34.8%	questioning (79), commanding (58), summoning (40), suggesting (38)
Commissive	21	3.0%	resolving (7), promising (6), threatening (4), offering (4)
Expressive	152	21.8%	expressing feeling (82), praising (20), greeting (18), complaining (15)

Declaration	2	0.3%	declaring (2)
Total	698	100.0%	

The distribution differed by character (Table 2). Moana was the only character whose most frequent category was directives (107 of 271 acts, 39.5%), ahead of assertives (36.2%). Maui produced slightly more assertives (39.5%) than directives (34.9%). Loto (54.1%), Matangi (48.8%), and Kele (46.5%) relied most on assertives, and Simea performed expressives in half of her acts (50.0%). Chief Tui (n = 17) and Sina (n = 6) produced too few acts for their proportions to be interpreted.

Table 2. Distribution of Illocutionary Acts by Character, f (%)

Character	N	Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Declaration
Moana	271	98 (36.2%)	107 (39.5%)	9 (3.3%)	56 (20.7%)	1 (0.4%)
Maui	172	68 (39.5%)	60 (34.9%)	5 (2.9%)	39 (22.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Moni	57	25 (43.9%)	14 (24.6%)	1 (1.8%)	17 (29.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Loto	61	33 (54.1%)	20 (32.8%)	1 (1.6%)	7 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)
Kele	43	20 (46.5%)	13 (30.2%)	1 (2.3%)	9 (20.9%)	0 (0.0%)
Matangi	43	21 (48.8%)	13 (30.2%)	2 (4.7%)	7 (16.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Simea	28	4 (14.3%)	8 (28.6%)	2 (7.1%)	14 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Chief Tui	17	7 (41.2%)	6 (35.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)
Sina	6	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	698	280 (40.1%)	243 (34.8%)	21 (3.0%)	152 (21.8%)	

The locutionary content centered on four domains: voyaging and wayfinding, the curse and the quest for Motufetu, the coordination of action on the canoe, and relationships. Perlocutionary effects, identified from the verbal responses in the screenplay, formed four patterns: Moana's directives and plans were usually followed by compliance or adaptation (after her plan to draw the storm, Loto answers that he needs to chop the mast, screenplay p. 87); some directives were resisted or ignored (Kele's "I don't do sing-a-longs!", screenplay p. 37); expressives were typically reciprocated, as in the exchange of greetings between Moana and Simea at the reunion (screenplay p. 102); and expressions of support elicited disclosure, as when Maui's "I believe in you" (screenplay p. 74) is followed by Moana's admission of doubt (screenplay p. 74).

Of the 698 acts, 690 (98.9%) were felicitous, 5 (0.7%) were abuses, and 3 (0.4%) were misfires. The abuses were failures of sincerity, such as Maui's denial that he and Moana were a team ("We weren't a team." (screenplay p. 16)) and Moana's feigned confidence ("I'm sure this happened for a reason" (screenplay p. 42)). The misfires were failures of the preparatory condition: Moana, restrained, has no standing to command the Kakamora ("Listen to me!" (screenplay p. 45)), and Maui has no authority over his tattoo ("listen to me!" (screenplay p. 54)).

Distribution and the development of characters and theme

Table 3 shows the distribution for Moana, Maui, and the ensemble in each phase, with the alignment found in Step 4. Moana's directive share rose from 23.8% in the Exposition to 44.3% in the Rising action and 51.3% in the Climax, then fell to 18.2%; her assertive share moved in the opposite direction (50.8% → 30.4% → 33.3% →

45.5%). Maui's expressive share rose steadily (15.4% → 18.9% → 29.4% → 36.8%), while his directive share was highest in the Rising action (39.6%) and lowest in the last two phases (Figure 1).

Table 3. Illocutionary Acts by Narrative Phase and Alignment with the Narrative Baseline (%)

Unit	N	Assert.	Direct.	Commiss.	Express.	Declar.	Alignment
Moana, Exposition	63	50.8%	23.8%	1.6%	23.8%	0.0%	Convergent
Moana, Rising action	158	30.4%	44.3%	5.1%	19.6%	0.6%	Partly convergent
Moana, Climax	39	33.3%	51.3%	0.0%	15.4%	0.0%	Partly convergent
Moana, Resolution	11	45.5%	18.2%	0.0%	36.4%	0.0%	Convergent (tentative)
Maui, Exposition	13	53.8%	30.8%	0.0%	15.4%	0.0%	Convergent (tentative)
Maui, Rising action	106	37.7%	39.6%	3.8%	18.9%	0.0%	Partly convergent
Maui, Climax	34	41.2%	26.5%	2.9%	29.4%	0.0%	Convergent
Maui, Resolution	19	36.8%	26.3%	0.0%	36.8%	0.0%	Convergent
Ensemble, Exposition	137	46.0%	29.2%	1.5%	22.6%	0.7%	Convergent
Ensemble, Rising action	425	40.0%	36.0%	4.0%	19.8%	0.2%	Convergent
Ensemble, Climax	94	31.9%	43.6%	2.1%	22.3%	0.0%	Partly convergent
Ensemble, Resolution	42	40.5%	21.4%	0.0%	38.1%	0.0%	Convergent (tentative)

Note. N = number of coded acts. Alignment follows the criteria in Section 2.3; "tentative" marks comparisons based on fewer than 15 acts or on the smallest phase of the ensemble.

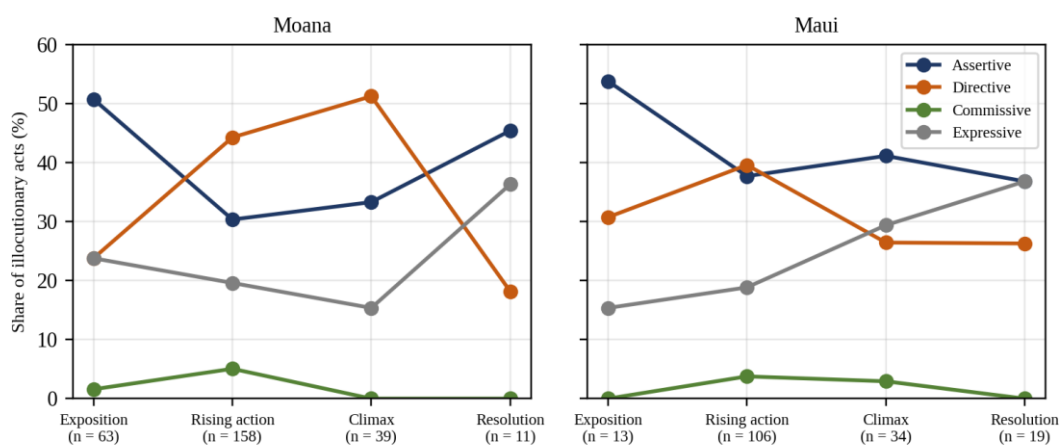


Figure 1. Shares of Illocutionary Categories by Narrative Phase for Moana and Maui

For Moana, the assertive line is highest in the Exposition and in the Resolution, whereas the directive line falls in the Exposition, rises sharply in the Rising action, peaks in the Climax, and then drops in the Resolution; the expressive line remains

moderate until the Resolution, where it rises. For Maui, the assertive line is highest in the Exposition and then declines, the directive line peaks in the Rising action and declines afterwards, and the expressive line rises steadily across the four phases. The commissive line remains low for both characters in all phases. These trends indicate that Moana's register shifts from explaining to directing and then back to a warmer register, while Maui's register shifts from guarded assertion to greater emotional openness. The figure therefore supports the phase-by-phase reading and should not be treated as a decorative illustration.

Moana. In the Exposition, assertives lead (50.8%): Moana argues that other peoples exist ("There are other people out there." (screenplay p. 11)) and defines her duty as a wayfinder, and she accepts the title with "I am honored to serve our people." (screenplay p. 19) (Social and Cultural Reflection: individual ambition placed within obligation to the community). This is convergent with the baseline of an eager explorer, although her anxiety at the call appears in only a few expressive acts. In the Rising action, directives lead (44.3%) and are carried by questioning (29), commanding, summoning, and suggesting: she recruits ("I'd like you on the crew." (screenplay p. 29)), rallies ("We've gotta come together" (screenplay p. 37)), and commands in emergencies. Eight of her nine commissives occur here. The crisis of confidence in the baseline appears in a few key expressives ("I haven't done anything right" (screenplay p. 75)) but not in the aggregate, so the reading is partly convergent. In the Climax, directives reach their highest share, mainly commands that steer the canoe ("We go over the wave!" (screenplay p. 84)), and assertives explain the strategic turn and state the credo that there is always another way ("always another way" (screenplay p. 93)). Improvisation is convergent with the baseline, but her sacrifice is enacted by a dive and not by a commissive, so the phase is partly convergent. The Resolution (n = 11) is warm and forward-looking ("This is just the beginning." (screenplay p. 103)) and convergent, tentatively.

Maui. In the Exposition (n = 13), his assertive denials are abuses of the sincerity condition (screenplay p. 16), which marks a guarded demigod who speaks against the partnership to protect a human. In the Rising action he boasts ("3000 years old" (screenplay p. 71)) and orders the crew, and his supportive turn appears in a few key utterances ("I believe in you" (screenplay p. 74); "Look, I get it." (screenplay p. 75)), so the reading is partly convergent. In the Climax, expressives (29.4%) now outnumber directives (26.5%), and the content shows dependence and grief: "a million islands" (screenplay p. 87) and the plea "Please" (screenplay p. 95). This is convergent with the baseline of a partner who is devastated by Moana's loss. The Resolution (n = 19) is celebratory and convergent.

Theme. At the ensemble level, the distribution follows the thematic emphasis of each phase. The Exposition is led by assertives (46.0%) that set the stakes, and its single declaration confers the leadership title. In the Rising action, 17 of the film's 21 commissives occur, and thematic phrases recur across speakers: the call to come together and work together is voiced by Moana and Maui, and the maxim of finding another way passes from Matangi ("always another way" (screenplay p. 60)) to Moana ("always another way" (screenplay p. 64)) and returns in the Climax. The Climax has

its highest directive share (43.6%), reflecting coordinated effort, but the theme of sacrifice is not matched by more commissives or expressives; it is carried by Maui's lament and by the dive. The Resolution has its highest expressive share (38.1%), at the reunion and the recognition of other peoples, in line with restored connection. Of the twelve comparisons, eight were convergent (three tentative) and four partly convergent; none was divergent.

The speech acts of the main characters

The predominance of assertives, directives, and expressives (96.7% of all acts) and the near balance of assertives and directives resemble the profiles reported for *Stranger Things: Season 3* (Bagis et al., 2025) and *She's the Man* (Jayanto & Milal, 2025), and the assertive lead agrees with *Nimona* (Ariasih & Candra, 2025). It differs from *Inside Out 2*, where directives and expressives led (Sianipar et al., 2025), a film centered on emotion. A plausible explanation is that a quest narrative needs both the establishment of what is true (assertives) and the coordination of what others must do (directives), in line with the illocutionary points that Searle (1979) assigns to these categories and with the context-dependence of meaning (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). The explanation is interpretive and was not tested against other genres. Table 4 summarizes the comparisons.

Table 4. Comparison of the Present Findings with Previous Studies

Study	Film	Reported pattern	Relation to present findings
Putra & Ardiantari (2025)	<i>Moana 2</i>	Directives only: 45 instances, five sub-types; commands most dominant	Convergent: commands lead the comparable sub-types (58 of 124); questions and summons add 119 directives
Cahyanti et al. (2025)	<i>Moana</i> (2016)	Assertive 56.82%, directive 25.76%, expressive 10.61%, commissive 6.82%	Differs: <i>Moana's</i> directives lead here (39.5%); more expressives (20.7%)
Dewi & Jannah (2022)	<i>Brave</i>	Representative 55.2%, directive 27.6%, expressive 8.6%, commissive 6.9%, declarative 1.7%	Similar rarity of commissives and declarations; assertives less dominant (40.1%)
Bagis et al. (2025)	<i>Stranger Things S3</i>	Assertive 36.18%, directive 36.64%; role-linked patterns	Similar balance (40.1% and 34.8%); role-linked patterns also found
Ariasih & Candra (2025)	<i>Nimona</i>	Assertives predominated	Convergent: assertives most frequent
Sianipar et al. (2025)	<i>Inside Out 2</i>	Directives and expressives most frequent	Differs: assertives lead here; expressives third (21.8%)
Jayanto & Milal (2025)	<i>She's the Man</i>	Directive 35.8%, assertive 32.6%; rare categories pivotal	Convergent: the two declarations mark turning points

The findings converge with Putra and Ardiantari (2025) on commands: among the comparable sub-types (commands, requests, suggestions, and warnings),

commands are the most frequent (58 of 124 acts, 46.8%). They also qualify the picture of a commanding leader. Questions and summons make up 49.0% of the directives, and questions are Moana's most frequent directive type, so a taxonomy limited to commands, requests, suggestions, advice, and warnings would leave about half of the directive acts outside the analysis. Moana's leadership is exercised by asking, calling, and suggesting as well as commanding, which suits a leader who recruits and consults a crew. This refinement depends on classifying questions as directives, which follows Searle (1979) but may differ from earlier studies.

Compared with Cahyanti et al. (2025), Moana's profile in the sequel shows directives (39.5%) overtaking assertives (36.2%, against 56.82% in the first film), a higher expressive share (20.7% against 10.61%), and fewer commissives (3.3% against 6.82%). A cautious interpretation is that the shift mirrors her new narrative position: in the first film she explains and claims her calling, and in the sequel she leads others. The figures come from different transcripts and coding rules, so they indicate tendencies only. The expressive share is also sensitive to a coding decision: 92 of 152 expressives (60.5%) are exclamations or greetings of one to three words, and without them the expressive share falls to 9.9%, close to the shares reported for single protagonists, such as 8.6% for Merida (Dewi & Jannah, 2022). Studies of speech acts in film are therefore comparable only if they state how interjections, questions, and obligation statements were coded.

The rarity of commissives and declarations is general among the films reviewed, but commissives are less frequent here than for Merida (6.9%) or for Moana in the first film (6.82%). Searle (1979) explains the scarcity of declarations: they succeed only when the speaker holds a standing granted by an institution, and in this film only a chief or a ritual situation provides it. Jayanto and Milal (2025) noted that rare categories are pivotal at turning points, and the two declarations here mark the threshold of Moana's leadership and her passage into the unknown. Commitment is voiced collectively: 41 of the 243 directives (16.9%) contain first-person-plural forms such as "we gotta" and "let's", which were coded as suggestions and not as promises.

The felicity analysis shows that authority is relational. Moana's commands succeed with her crew and fail with the Kakamora, and Maui's appeal to being a demigod fails with his tattoo; both are failures of the preparatory condition (Searle, 1969). The abuses cluster in protective or morale-managing speech, which in fiction often reveals care for others and not deception for gain. That 98.9% of acts were felicitous is expected in scripted dialogue written to serve narrative functions (Kozloff, 2000), but sincerity judgments for fictional characters can only be made from narrative context and remain interpretive.

Character and theme development

Earlier studies linked a single aggregate distribution to a character's leadership or role (Bagis et al., 2025; Cahyanti et al., 2025). The contribution of the present study is temporal. Moana's trajectory (assertive, then directive, then assertive and expressive again) shows leadership as a process: she first explains and claims, then directs and asks, and returns to a warm register once the goal is reached. This is the kind of change

that Forster (1927) and Chatman (1978) associate with a developing character. In Forster's (1927) terms, a round character is capable of surprising the reader in a convincing way, and in Chatman's (1978) terms, character is a narrative construct inferred from traits and actions. The phase-by-phase distribution makes this construct visible in verbal behaviour: Moana's directive peak in the Climax is not merely frequent; it is functionally dominant because it coordinates the crew at the point where the quest requires collective action. Maui's rising expressive share, with its early abuses and late dependence, fits a character who becomes more emotionally open, because expressives are acts that express a psychological state (Searle, 1979). The analysis therefore connects pragmatic categories to narrative theory rather than treating frequency as an end in itself.

The partial convergences are instructive. Moana's loss of confidence, Maui's supportive turn, and the theme of sacrifice were carried by a few key utterances or by non-verbal action, not by the aggregate distribution. This supports Culpeper's (2001) view that impressions of a character are built from textual cues and not from one feature: the distribution captures the register in which a character speaks, whereas turning points are carried by particular utterances. It also reflects the multimodality of film. A speech act analysis isolates the verbal channel, and Moana's dive, the central act of sacrifice, is not a speech act. The partial convergences therefore mark the scope of the method: they show where speech acts carry development and where action, image, and music must be consulted.

At the level of theme, the clustering of categories at structurally important moments is the kind of pattern that Fitriani et al. (2020) used to relate speech acts to narrative nodes, and the recurrence of phrases across characters agrees with the view that theme is built through recurrence (Abrams & Harpham, 2015) and with the thematic role of film dialogue (Kozloff, 2000). Hijriati (2021) showed that a distribution of illocutionary acts can reflect a community's values; by analogy, the collective directives and the expressive peak at the reunion are consistent with a communal value of togetherness, but this reading is suggestive only, because the film is a Disney production with a Polynesian-inspired setting. Of the four components of Pragmatic Significance, Narrative Salience provided the most checkable evidence and Social and Cultural Reflection the least.

CONCLUSION

The main characters of *Moana 2* performed 698 illocutionary acts, dominated by assertives (40.1%), directives (34.8%), and expressives (21.8%), while commissives (3.0%) and declarations (0.3%) were rare; almost all acts were felicitous (98.9%). In answer to the first research question, the locutionary content centered on voyaging and wayfinding, the curse and the quest for Motufetu, the coordination of action on the canoe, and relationships, while the perlocutionary effects formed patterns of compliance or adaptation, resistance or ignoring, reciprocity, and disclosure. These findings show that the verbal action of the film is carried mainly by acts that establish what is true, direct what others must do, and express psychological states, with institutionally grounded declarations appearing only at marked moments.

In answer to the second research question, the distribution of illocutionary acts reflects character and theme development, but only partially. Moana moves from an explanatory assertive register in the Exposition to a directing register in the Rising action and Climax, and then returns to a warmer assertive and expressive register in the Resolution; Maui moves from guarded assertions and sincerity abuses to a steadily rising expressive share, indicating greater emotional openness. At the ensemble level, commissives cluster in the Rising action, directives peak in the Climax, and expressives peak in the Resolution, in line with the thematic emphasis of collective effort, coordinated action, and restored connection. Of the twelve comparisons with the narrative baseline, eight were convergent and four were partly convergent, with none divergent; the partial convergences occurred because key utterances and non-verbal action, such as Moana's dive, carried aspects of character and theme that the aggregate distribution could not capture. The distribution of illocutionary acts is therefore a meaningful but partial indicator of character and theme development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies should include the songs, compare the sequel with the first film using identical coding rules, add a second coder and report inter-coder agreement (e.g., Cohen's Kappa), and combine speech act analysis with analysis of the visual and musical channels so that non-verbal acts of narrative significance are not left outside the interpretation. Studies should also state explicitly how questions, interjections, and statements of obligation are coded, because these decisions substantially affect the comparability of distributions across films. For pedagogical purposes, short scenes from *Moana 2* can be used as authentic input for teaching speech acts, especially to show how the same leader commands, asks, summons, and suggests in different situations and why an act succeeds with one addressee and fails with another; because the dialogue is scripted, it should be presented as a model of pragmatic choices rather than as natural conversation.

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