LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL EXPLORATION IN *THE GIRL WHO FELL BENEATH THE SEA*: ANALYZING DIRECTIVE AND PERLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the unique appeal of fantasy literature, emphasizing its ability to engage readers in discussions on universal themes such as morality, identity, and the nature of good and evil. Fantasy's imaginative world-building fosters creative and critical thinking, providing a flexible space to explore complex topics. Through a close analysis of *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* by Axie Oh, this paper examines how the novel intertwines Korean mythology with an intricate plot, following Mina's journey to break a curse in the Spirit Realm. Additionally, the study investigates the novel's use of directive illocutionary acts (asking, pleading, ordering, demanding, requesting, and warning) and their perlocutionary effects (successful and unsuccessful outcomes) to understand how dialogue shapes meaning. The findings reveal a prevalence of successful perlocutionary acts, demonstrating effective communication. This study highlights fantasy literature as both entertainment and a medium for cultural, social, and linguistic exploration.
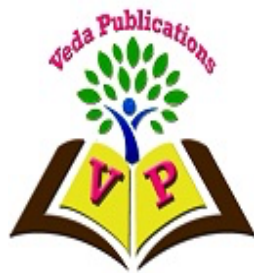
1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in communication, serving as a medium to express thoughts, emotions, ideas, and even cultural identity. According to (Axie, 2022; Denise, 2021; Away, 2001), language acts as a symbol of identity for its speakers and represents national identity. It shapes human interaction and distinguishes individuals based on their linguistic traits. In addition, language plays a pivotal role in venturing into the diversity of culture, religiousness, and the history of civilization. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines how languages are used, enabling people to communicate intended senses, assumptions, and purposes besides the literal use of words (Denise, 2021).Speech acts are one key focus of pragmatics in that they are regarded as actions spoken or written with (Arvanti and Sujana, 2022; Buansari et al. 2022; Ralda Rinjani, 2024).

Speech acts are part of the general study of pragmatics, with an emphasis on how language is used to perform actions and not just to convey information (Ralda Rinjani, 2024). They include illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, which are not only found in everyday speech but also found in literary works such as novels. One such prominent example is The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea by Axie Oh, which is a book that intermixes fantasy with some aspects of Korean history and culture. In addition to its exciting narrative, the book touches on ethics, tradition, and compliance with authority, particularly in the context of Korean social mores (Franklin, 2025; Pancheva et al. 2025; Asiri, 2025).

The reason why The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea has been chosen as the topic of this research is that it contains an unusual blend of fantasy and history, and a dense deployment of directive illocutionary acts in character talk and narrative discourse. It aims to categorize some types of directive illocutionary acts used in the novel and determine whether the corresponding perlocutionary acts successfully provoke the intended reaction. Previous studies, such as those of, indicate the perlocutionary acts' dominance in speaker-listener communication. Likewise, studies (Nunn, 2021) have determined assertive speech acts to be the most common in speech interaction. By examining directive and perlocutionary speech acts in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea, this study aims to contribute to the study of speech acts in literary language, providing insight into how language constructs meaning and interaction in fiction.

This paper integrates literary and linguistic analysis in a fresh way, both providing narrative structure and speech act pattern analysis of The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea. Through the analysis of directive and perlocutionary acts along with cultural themes, this research offers a new approach to how fantasy fiction affects reader perception and involvement and therefore is a successful tool for greater communication and reflection.

Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the research seeks to address the following questions:

- What types of directive illocutionary acts are present in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea?

- How effective are the perlocutionary speech acts in response to the directive illocutionary acts in the novel?

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Aim of the Study

This study aims to:

- Identify and categorize the types of directive illocutionary acts found in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea.

- Analyze the effectiveness of perlocutionary acts following directive illocutionary acts within the novel.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The term pragmatics was first introduced by Charles Morris in 1938 to describe the philosophical approach developed by Charles S. Peirce, known as pragmatism or pragmaticism (Özkurt, 2023). Etymologically, the words pragmatics, pragmatism, and pragmaticism originate from the Greek word pragma, meaning 'action' or 'deed.' Morris classified pragmatics as a subfield of semiotics, which he divided into three categories:

➤ Syntax – The formal relationship between signs.

➤ Semantics – The relationship between signs and their meanings.

➤ Pragmatics – The relationship between signs and their users.

Since the users of signs are humans both those who produce and interpret them understanding signs always involves interpretation based on context, background knowledge, and the relationship between the user and the sign (De Vries, 2024; Schine, 2024). Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). It primarily concerns itself with what people mean when they speak, beyond the literal meaning of words and phrases. This highlights the essential role of pragmatics in communication

effective communication occurs when a listener or reader accurately understands the intended meaning of a speaker or writer (Hartley-Kroeger, 2022).

Furthermore, pragmatics explores how context affects language use and how meaning is derived from situational factors (Thomson, 2022). It gives insight into how people communicate and perceive meaning in various communicative contexts, focusing on the dynamic nature of language and interpretation .Pragmatics considers various elements such as speaker intent, social norms, cultural background, and the relationship between interlocutors to determine how meaning is constructed beyond literal word meanings. This area of study is central to understanding how individuals manage conversation, make inferences, and react to various social and linguistic cues. Through the study of speech acts, implicatures, presuppositions, and context-dependent expressions, pragmatics defines meaning as not fixed but constructed as a by-product of the interactive nature of communication. This applies especially in literature, where quoted speech, speech of characters, and cultural background regulate other characters' and readers' reception of messages. Pragmatics is thus called upon to build on our existing knowledge in regards to linguistic encounters, illuminating how communication is negotiated and the way language as an extremely efficient instrument for intention, emotion, and social relationships articulation is used.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fantasy offers a lot to the thoughtful reader with respect to relevance and complexity. The tendency of fantasy literature to pose important

life concerns is among its most intriguing features. It encourages readers to think about topics like the universal morality, nature of good and evil, life after death, bravery and personal character, the individual's role in society, and the significance of cultural diversity. Sense of freshness is found in many fantasy works. Writing style of fantasy genre in not only different, but the fictional worlds in these novels are often very unique and unlike the present world. While this might seem obvious, it has interesting effects in the readers, Axie Oh's novel *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* might struggle with the symbolic dialogue between the boys on the island. However, this assignment is easier because the story takes place in a world deprived of magic, anywhere the physics are familiar, there are witches, no trolls, or dragons, the land itself doesn't influence the events, and words don't have the power to change physical reality.

The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea by Axie Oh is a fantasy novel deeply rooted in Korean mythology. The novel is filled with magical elements that shape its world, drawing readers into a place where gods, spirits, and mythical creatures exist. The fantasy elements in the story include a magical setting, supernatural beings, and a quest to break a powerful curse. The spirit realm, where much of the novel takes place, is an otherworldly place inhabited by divine entities, spirits, and various magical creatures. This realm is full of enchantment and danger, creating a sense of wonder as Mina explores it. The curse itself is central to the story's conflict, as it affects not only the Sea God but also the balance

between the spirit realm and the mortal world. As Mina tries to lift the curse, she faces various challenges that test her bravery and determination. The novel blends fantasy and mythology to create a tale about sacrifice, love, and destiny, as Mina strives to restore harmony between the human and divine worlds.

In fantasy worlds, where all these elements might exist, readers must read more carefully, engaging more actively with the text to understand this strange world. The fantasy world does not follow the usual rules as followed in the real world. A reader cannot understand the kind of literary reality as used in the fantasy book unless they engage thoughtfully and creatively through the text. The depth of fantasy mechanism provides a great opportunity for readers to develop critical reading skills. Complex characters, deep themes, personal relevance, strong writing, and engaging stories are all key elements of high-quality literature.

Fantasy literature has involved a lot of academic attention, similar to the way classic and mainstream literature is studied. The rising body of academic work on fantasy, along with the ongoing profitable achievement of fantasy books and films, shows that this genre plays an important role in American culture. *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* is a beautifully written fantasy with a vibrant atmosphere and creative world-building. The author crafts lke rich setting that it feels like the work of a seasoned writer, yet it's still easy for all kinds of fantasy readers to enjoy. The book starts with a strong opening, and it's surprising how quickly things get moving the

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main events of the synopsis happen in the main chapter, which was a nice surprise. The characters were all unique and fun, each playing an important role in the plot and having a big impact on Mina, the main character. Mina is such a sweet, selfless, and strong character. It was a lot of fun and lovely to imagine the creatures, the magic framework, the place, and the wonderful and whimsical mood.

In *The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea* by Axie Oh, Korean mythology is woven into a modern fantasy narrative. The novel is inspired by the Korean myth of "*The Tale of Shim Cheong,*" a story about a young girl who sacrifices herself by leaping into the sea to help her blind father. Denise McGill in the newsletter talks about "*The Tale of Shim Cheong: A Korean Fairytale,*" Cheong decides to offer herself as a sacrifice to the Dragon King after overhearing seamen discussing the need for a valuable offering to ensure safe passage across the sea. She convinces the seamen to promise 300 sacks of rice to her father in exchange for her sacrifice. As Cheong throws herself into the treacherous sea of Indangsu, the Dragon King, moved by her bravery, resurrects her in a lotus flower. Her story does not end in tragedy; upon hearing about her miraculous resurrection, Emperor Chenghua marries her, making her an Empress.

In Oh's reimagining, the protagonist, Mina, plunges into the sea to save her village and the boy she loves, entering the Spirit Realm and becoming part of a mystical underwater world. When Mina volunteers to be the Sea God's bride, she determines the red string of fate, a symbol said to join a person to their destiny. The novel's storytelling balances world-building with character development, shifting between Mina's experiences in the Spirit Realm and flashbacks to her interactions with her grandmother, adding depth and emotional resonance to the narrative.

When the main character, Mina, volunteers to be the Sea God's bride, she arrives the Spirit Realm and determines the red string of fate, which is said to join a person to their destiny. The storytelling is a perfect balance of world-building without overwhelming the reader. The author interchanges between Mina learning things in the Spirit Realm and flashbacks to her conversations by her grandmother.

The film Spirited Away and the novel The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea feature young girls as protagonists who undergo incredible journeys in magical worlds.. In Spirited Away, Chihiro enters a mysterious, spirit-filled realm to save her parents, who have been cursed, and grows in bravery and resilience. She goes through challenges, forms friendships, and learns to trust herself.

Likewise, in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea, Mina journeys into a magical underwater realm to break a curse that is tormenting her village. She encounters gods and legendary creatures, has to overcome obstacles, and must make difficult decisions to save her family. Both stories show how these girls' paths are as much about becoming brave as they are about growing up, becoming selfless, and finding their own strength. Through fantasy worlds and quests, the stories impart courage, perseverance, and the power of compassion.

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Mina embarks on a mystical journey in a realm filled with spirits, reminiscent of Spirited Away, where she encounters beings both kind and sinister. Much like Chihiro in the film, Mina must navigate an unfamiliar world with strict rules, mystical contracts, and strange creatures lurking around every corner. Her alliances with the three men resemble Chihiro's complex relationships with Haku and other figures, who provide assistance but have secrets of their own. Time is of the essence, as Mina only has a month to release the Sea God, echoing the pressure Chihiro feels to save her parents. Meanwhile, Mina faces haunting dilemmas that challenge her identity, strength, and courage in ways she never anticipated. With every step, she inches closer to understanding her true self, yet the stakes remain perilously high if she fails, she will lose herself to the spirit realm forever, just as Chihiro risked fading into obscurity in a world where the living and spirit realms intertwine.

The novel, *The girl who fell beneath the sea* has action, adventure, love together platonic, romantic, and strong themes, which made the story even more heartwarming. While some of the twists are predictable, they do not take away the enjoyment of the story. In the story, deadly storms have plagued Mina's homeland for generations, and the people believe the Sea God has cursed them. Every year, a young girl is sacrificed to the sea in hopes of ending the curse. It is said one of these girls will eventually become the Sea God's true bride, ending the curse. When Mina's brother's beloved, Shim Cheong, is chosen as the next sacrifice, Mina cannot bear to see her brother heartbroken. So, on the fated night, Mina takes Shim Cheong's place and throws herself into the sea instead.

Brushed into the spirit world, Mina meetings many things, including the Sea God, who is in a magical sleep. She meets a young man named Shin, along with goddesses, demons, and spirits. Mina recognizes she has to wake the Sea God, no matter what it takes. It feels like a fairy tale set in a fantasy world, and it's inspired by Korean folklore and mythology. Guided by a majestic and slightly intimidating dragon, Mina arrives the spirit world, where things are not quite as she imagined. The sea god is not evil or plotting to harm her village. Instead, he is trapped in an enchanted sleep. If Mina wants to end the curse, she needs to wake him up so he can select her as his accurate bride. With the help of new friends, with a mysterious boy named Shin, Mina embarks on a quest to uncover the secret to waking the Sea God. But time is running out, as humans can first continue in the Spirit realm for a short time.

Fantasy world allow readers to discuss topics that might be considered too sensitive or unpleasant in real life. Since the story takes place in an imaginary world, the restrictions on discussing difficult topics are lifted. The ethical concerns about structuring lessons or offending anyone are less relevant because the events and situations are not real. Fantasy world reflect issues of the real world.

Fantasy literature provides a unique platform for readers to explore complex, thought-provoking themes in a setting removed from the real world. By weaving together imaginative

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worlds, intricate moral questions, and richly developed characters, fantasy invites readers to engage deeply and critically with the text. The disconnection with reality makes safe exploration of sensitive issues possible, and thus these stories are satisfying and meaningful. Novels such as The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea illustrate how fantasy can blend magic and profundity, providing information on the social and human matters. Finally, fantasy literature is entertaining, but also promotes intellectual and emotional growth, and it is therefore of fantastic value to both scholarly thinking and popular culture.

This study aims to identify the types of directive illocutionary acts and assess the effectiveness of perlocutionary speech acts in Axie Oh's novel The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea. A qualitative descriptive approach was used to examine the data and provide a systematic understanding of speech acts within the novel.

According to (Bungin and Moleong, 2007), qualitative research employs a naturalistic approach to explore and interpret phenomena within a specific context. This study follows a descriptive pattern, meaning that it seeks to systematically present facts and characteristics of the subject matter in an accurate and detailed manner. By using this method, the research focuses on interpreting the speech acts found in the novel's narration and dialogues.

The English novel The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea by Axie Oh, published in 2022 by Feiwel & Friends, is the main data source for this research. The novel, with 336 pages, is the basis for analyzing directive illocutionary acts and their

related perlocutionary effects. Secondary sources such as books and journal articles on speech act theory offer theoretical background for the analysis. The information was drawn from some of the dialogues and narrative parts chosen in the novel that represent illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, according to the works of John R. Searle and John L. Austin. In order to conduct the analysis, the research followed the following steps:

- Categorization of examples of directive illocutionary acts in the novel according to John R. Searle's classification.

- Evaluation of whether the illocutionary acts have had successful or failed perlocutionary effects, based on John L. Austin's paradigm.

- Interpreting the data and giving concise explanations of the findings.

- Drawing conclusions based on the analysis.

By adopting these steps, the research provides insights into how directive speech acts work in the novel and how they impact communication in the context of the story.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part of the paper presents the research findings, including the categorization of directive illocutionary acts in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea by Axie Oh, and their respective perlocutionary effects.

Types of Directive Illocutionary Acts

The research determined different kinds of directive illocutionary acts according to Searle's (1979) categorization. Table 1 below illustrates the

frequency of each directive illocutionary act in the novel.

Table 1: Frequency of Directive Illocutionary Acts

No	Type of Directive Illocutionary Act	Frequency
1	Asking	175
2	Begging	11
3	Bidding	0
4	Commanding	8
5	Demanding	29
6	Forbidding	0
7	Ordering	36
8	Recommending	0
9	Requesting	8
10	Warning	15
	Total	**282**

As is shown in Figure 1, 'Asking' is used most frequently among directive illocutionary acts, then followed by 'Ordering' and 'Demanding'. The bar chart displays how frequent directive illocutionary acts are within The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea, classifying the different speech acts to control others' behaviors. The x-axis represents different types of directive illocutionary acts, while the y-axis represents how frequently they are found in the given text. The most striking fact is the frequency of questioning, which is done nearly 180 times, much more than all the other categories. This suggests that interrogation is a dominant theme of the novel's discourse, perhaps an outgrowth of Mina's incessant questioning of fate, destiny, and the supernatural realm she is living in. The frequency of commanding and asking further confirms the existence of authoritative voices controlling others, perhaps gods, spirits, or other authority figures in the mythological context of the novel. At the same time, commanding and forbidding occur with moderate frequency, indicating that commands and prohibitions are the essence of character speech. On the other hand, begging, bidding, requesting, and warning are very rare, indicating that characters in the novel use stronger forms of utterance than supplicatory or submissive speech. The overall frequency of these speech acts gives us a glimpse into the linguistic and cultural dynamics of the novel, supporting the themes of hierarchy, power struggles, and the pursuit of knowledge. The use of questions as a complement to commands reflects the struggle between human action and providential intervention, a pervasive motif throughout the novel. Through such a linguistic motif, we get a better understanding into how speech acts build up character relations, relations of power, and overall thematic organization in the novel.
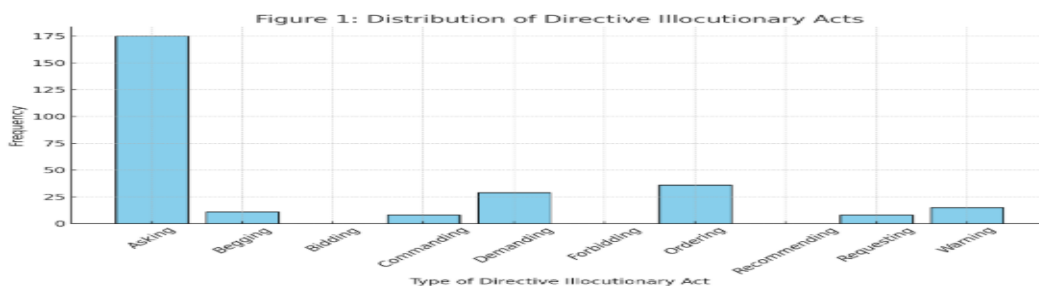

Figure 1: Distribution of Directive Illocutionary Acts

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4.1 Successful and Unsuccessful Perlocutionary Acts

Perlocutionary acts refer to the effect an utterance has on a listener. Table 2 presents the success rate of perlocutionary acts found in the novel. From the data, 62% of perlocutionary acts were successful, while 38% were unsuccessful, as illustrated in Figure 2. The chart is a pie chart displaying the perlocutionary acts' rate of success in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea with two broad categories : Successful (62.1%) and Unsuccessful (37.9%). The green section, occupying more space on the chart, indicates that the majority of perlocutionary acts within the novel accomplish the intended action, i.e., when an utterance or a directive made by a character is intended to persuade or impact another, more likely than not, it gets recognized and complied with. This confirms that communication throughout the novel, as a whole, is successful, where speech acts are properly responded to by characters in reference to the speech act's intended action. The red section, standing for unsuccessful perlocutionary acts at 37.9%, refers to those places where directives are unsuccessful in eliciting the desired reaction, which could be attributed to any of the reasons including resistance, counter-power relations, agency of the individual, or misunderstanding. The prevalence of a large number of unsuccessful actions is an emblem of the richness of interaction in the narrative, depicting moments when characters subvert expectations, define their autonomy, or defy authority, leading to communication breakdowns or foiled purposes. This tension between successful and unsuccessful perlocutionary acts highlights the dialogicality of conversation in the novel, in which linguistic exchange is not quite transactional but highly invested in the cultural and thematic universe of the narrative. Through this close reading of such patterns, we gain a greater understanding of how language is an instrument of influence, negotiation, and resistance within the novel's mythological and interpersonal universe.

Table 2: Success Rate of Perlocutionary Acts

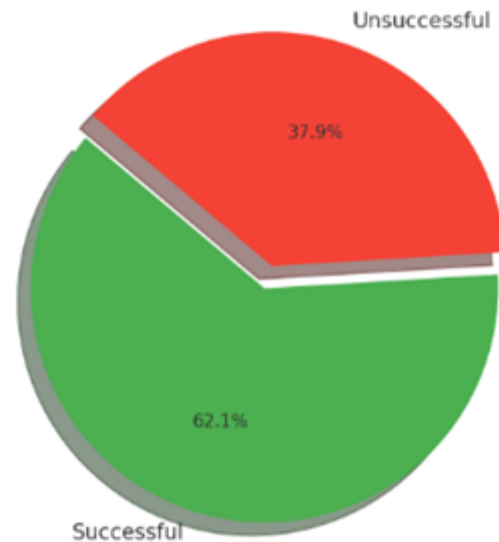| No	Type of Perlocutionary Act	Frequency
1	Successful	175
2	Unsuccessful	107
Total		**282**

Figure 2: Success Rate of Perlocutionary Acts

4.2 Analysis of Directive Illocutionary Acts

4.2.1 Asking

Example : *Mina asked, "Grandmother, what makes the God of the Sea more powerful than the other gods?"*

- **Context :** Mina reminisces about her late grandmother's stories about the Sea God.

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- **Analysis :** This utterance falls under the directive illocutionary act of 'Asking,' as Mina expects an answer.

- **Perlocutionary Effect : Successful** – Her grandmother provides an explanation.

4.2.2   Begging

Example: Mina whispered, "Please."

- Context: Mina pleads with the dragon to take her instead of Shim Cheong.

- Analysis: The word 'please' signals an act of begging, emphasizing desperation.

- Perlocutionary Effect: Unsuccessful – The dragon does not immediately act on her plea.

4.2.3 Ordering

Example: Mina commanded, "Take me instead!"

- Context: Mina urges the dragon to redirect its focus from Shim Cheong to herself.

- Analysis: The imperative tone and exclamation mark highlight the commanding nature of the utterance.

- Perlocutionary Effect: Unsuccessful – The dragon does not respond immediately.

4.2.4 Requesting

Example: Mask reproached, "Watch your language."

- Context: Mask warns Dai for speaking disrespectfully about the God of Death.

- Analysis: The utterance acts as a warning and an indirect request for Dai to alter his speech.

- Perlocutionary Effect: Successful – Dai refrains from further disrespectful remarks.

The directive illocutionary acts in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea demonstrate how characters employ language to make others do something, albeit with some degree of success. For 'Asking,' Mina's query,

"Grandmother, why is the God of the Sea stronger than the other gods?" is an example of a directive act where she is anticipating a response, and thus there is a successful perlocutionary effect as her grandmother explains. This is a demonstration of how inquiry is a pivotal device to grasp the mythical world of the novel. Conversely, 'Begging' is illustrated where Mina pleads with the dragon, mouthing "Please," as she attempts to volunteer herself in the place of Shim Cheong. The unsuccessful perlocutionary effect signifies that the dragon has no regard for her, bolstering the narrative of power discrepancies where entreaties by hopeless individuals might not always prevail against greater powers. Similarly, 'Ordering' is seen in Mina's command, "Take me instead!" where the imperative form taken commands power and urgency. But, like with her request, this command as well fails, supporting the premise that human effort is commonly impotent when against magical powers out of control. Conversely, 'Requesting' is stronger when Mask threatens Dai with "Watch your language," reminding him in a veiled manner to be respectful of the God of Death. The perlocutionary success, as Dai stops offending, illustrates how indirect directives are effective when they are based on social and cultural hierarchies. Overall, these examples illustrate how speech acts function in the narrative of the novel, resonating with themes of power, agency, and the constraining power of language control. Whereas 'Asking' and 'Requesting' tend to solicit compliance, 'Begging' and 'Ordering' are less successful, especially when issued to supernatural creatures. This perlocutionary variation is a reflection of the dynamic nature of communication, success in which is not only dependent on the intention of the speaker but also on

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context, authority, and cooperation of the addressee to react accordingly.

4.3 Discussion

The research shows directive illocutionary acts are common in The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea, with 'Asking' occurring most frequently, a sign of how essential questioning, bargaining, and seeking knowledge are to the novel in its construction. This ubiquity of questioning means that characters will naturally employ of navigating their world, understanding their fate, and interacting with other characters, particularly in a world where divine intervention and mystical forces build their reality. Perlocutionary act success rate again emphasizes that people in the novel have a tendency to comply with orders, showing communicative efficacy with a feeling in which speech acts elicit anticipated responses to support interpersonal relations and social control. But failed perlocutionary effect is precisely emphasized when problems of power relation or agency collapse, and cases of actors flouting orders, defying command, or drawing boundaries against control despite verbal pleading are documented. These cases highlight tension between submission and resistance within the novel's mythological and cultural context, demonstrating pressure of communication and on the function of language as an agency in establishing intersubjective relationships among characters. By virtue of these linguistic trends, there is no doubt that directive and perlocutionary speech acts not only carry the story along but also function as an aid for examining more profound issues such as fate, free will, and social structure in the narrative.

5.CONCLUSION

This research explains for the employment of directive illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in Axie Oh's The Girl Who Fell Beneath the Sea, in which it identifies how language serves as a means of communication and influence in the novel. The research presents several forms of directive illocutionary acts, including asking, pleading, ordering, demanding, requesting, and warning, that are enacted in the dialogue and narratives.Such speech acts not only indicate the intention of the characters but also exhibit cultural dimensions in communication in the context of the story. Lastly, the investigation of perlocutionary acts proves that the successful responses more often than the unsuccessful ones transpire, pointing to the success of the novel in depicting useful interactions and the influence of the characters through communication. It is through this crossover of literary study and linguistics that the analysis emphasizes how speech acts construct stories and build characters. Lastly, this research favors the idea that fantasy novels do not exist only as an amusement venue; rather, they serve as a domain for linguistic and cultural exploration. In its focus on speech acts, the novel provides much valuable insight into forms of communication structure, and for this reason it is a deservedly worthy focus of both literary and linguistic discourse.

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