

Speech Function in *Joker* (2019) Movie: Confronting Responses in Arthur and Penny's Conversation

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Abstract. When people communicate, they use language to create interpersonal meaning and exchange information. This research aims to analyze the speech function found in the conversation between Arthur Fleck and his mother, Penny Fleck in the movie *Joker* (2019). It focuses especially on the confronting responses produced by Arthur and Penny, by applying the framework of speech function developed by Halliday (1985). A descriptive qualitative method was employed to analyze the data, by classifying Arthur and Penny's utterances and labelling them into the types of confronting responses. The findings reveal that the relationship between Arthur and Penny was heavily characterized by disclaimer and contradiction in their conversation, indicating an emotional disobedience and dysfunctional relationship between them. Contradictions are found to be the dominant speech function in their conversation, implying the disagreement and clashing perceptions between them. Disclaimers are the second highest finding, suggesting the avoidance in answering questions in their relationship. It can be concluded that negative responses in the conversation may indicate a crack or a sign of a dysfunctional relationship between individuals. Furthermore, this research suggests that language can be used as a tool to observe tension and issues in a family setting using the framework of speech function.

Keywords: confronting responses; dysfunctional relationship; movie; speech function

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Communication has been central to human existence ever since our forefathers came up with complex language as a main tool. We slowly developed signs to communicate things that could not be expressed through words, and hence developed additional ways of communicating ideas and expressing ourselves within society. Language, for example, has been at the center of bringing people together and helping them understand one another. Language is a coordinated system of signs, sounds, and movements through which we write and speak, conveying and sharing our thoughts with each other (Crystal, 2019). This clearly places language at the center of our way of communication, from the things and activity to the event in life. With language, communication was facilitated, developing with time from one shared by communities to one involving an individual self.

When it comes to communication, the meaning that conveyed in the messages can not be neglected as it is the essential part of the communication itself. According to (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 107), dialogue is a dynamic exchange involving two key variables: the commodity being exchanged and the act of exchange itself. (Eggins & Slade, 1997) add that the way people shape their speech plays an important role in how familiar or close they become. To manage relationship dynamics, people need to choose speech patterns that keep the interaction going. In closer relationships, this often means engaging in more challenging exchanges rather than just agreeing, as this kind of back-and-forth strengthens the connection.

(Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p. 108) identify four main types of speech functions: statements, commands, questions, and offers. In communication, speakers adopt roles based on what they aim to

achieve, they might offer something, share information, ask for action, or request information. Each of these speech acts has a typical or expected response: accepting an offer, carrying out a command, acknowledging a statement, or answering a question. However, listeners don't always respond as expected, they might reject an offer, resist a command, question a statement, or avoid answering entirely.

The object for the study itself takes focus on the *Joker* (2019) directed by Todd Phillips, the movie itself was about a mentally challenged and mentally damaged young lad named Arthur Fleck who failed his career as a comedian and live together with her mother Penny in the cramped apartment in the heart of Gotham City, a fictional city based of Los Angeles in United State. With the understanding of the speech function and the object itself, this paper will focus on the confronting responses that occur in the object of the movie, precisely between the dialogue that involves Penny and Arthur.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Previous Studies

(Dewi, 2024) analyzed speech functions in the animated film *Frozen II* and determined that expressive functions were the highest percentage at 47%, then directive at 31%, and referential at 22%. The expressive function was most used to convey characters' emotions, the directive function was comprised of commands or requests, and the referential function was related to sharing or inquiry of information.

(Rohmah, 2022) analyzed a movie called *Maleficent* (2014), which tells the story of a dark faerie's journey from betrayal to redemption. Her research identified six types of speech function categories used by the protagonist, who is Maleficent. the type of speech function includes 35% expressive, 31% referential, 22% directive, 7% metalinguistic, 4% phatic, and 1% poetic. Expressive speech was the most dominant, showing how deeply Maleficent's words were rooted in her emotions.

(Dwiningtyas, Krisnawati, & Malini, 2020) analyzed speech functions in *Over the Moon*, a story about a girl called Fei Fei. They identified 23 speech acts: 8 directive, 7 expressive, 3 referential, 3 phatic, and 2 poetics. What their study indicates is how different stories and characters trigger different patterns in the use of speech functions.

Speech Function

Communication is always be an essential contributor of human life itself, communication reflecting human's nature on their interaction as social beings. it does not matter how diverse the variation of language and the ways people interact across the globe that have a vast number of different cultures and societies, certain patterns remain consistent. In every exchange, there is always someone who initiates and someone who responds, a provider and a receiver. (Halliday M. A., 1994, p. 69) explains that conversation occurs because there is always an initiation followed by a response, which forms the foundation of what he defines as speech function. Diving deeper into this concept, speech function involves two basic roles: giving and demanding. These roles operate within the exchange of specific

commodities, which can be goods, services, or information, depending on the purpose of the interaction.

In any conversation, there are usually four methods that one can start an exchange: by giving something, by giving a command, by stating a fact, or by asking something. Each of these provokes a response, which can either support the speaker or challenge him. These responses usually come in two forms, supportive or confrontative, and there are eight typical types. Supportive responses are accepting an offer, obeying a request or command, agreeing to a statement without further protest, and responding to a question with a straightforward answer. They keep the conversation going and reflect cooperation or comprehension. On the other hand, a type of negative reaction express opposition or disagreement in their function. For example, regarding negative function, a person can decline an invitation, disobey an instruction, challenge a statement by offering an alternative, or decline to respond to a query.

These actions are easily observed in everyday situations. Acceptance is manifested by a yes to a person's help. Working together with someone comes from doing what somebody wishes. Being in agreement with someone without negating what he/she say is a sign of comprehension. Responding to a question directly is proof of being engaged. Rejecting help, however, is a no, not agreeing with what one individual requested is a refusal, negating someone's claim is disagreeing, and avoiding answering a question is referred to as giving a vague or evasive answer.

Confronting Responses

Confronting responses refer to a set of responses that carry a negative hint of a response, usually labelled as a dispreferred response of a speech function. The confronting response can contradict, reject, or disagree with the initiation given by the speaker who took the turn before, the confronting response can also disrupt the harmony of a conversation through the response. As stated, the response can occur in any type of speech function, as a command may meet the refusal, the statement may be met with contradiction, an offer may be met with rejection, and a question may also be met with a disclaimer. Confronting responses are usually marked by their choice to disobey alignment and are often used to assert independence, authority, or emotional distance in a relationship.

a. **Contradiction**

The contradiction refers to the confronting response of the speech function statement, contradiction directly opposes another speaker and messes with the harmony in the conversation. For example, "Actually, the meeting starts at 11 AM." to reply if the statement said the meeting in 10 AM.

b. **Disclaimer**

The disclaimer is a negative or confronting response to a question, usually given by the speaker to avoid the responsibility of answering a question or maintaining the harmony of the conversation. For example, "I'm not sure when it arrives."

c. **Refusal**

The refusal refers to the confronting response that directly opposes the command function. For example, "I'd rather not close the window." It is a confronting response that directly opposes the command. Disrupting the harmony in the conversation.

d. **Rejection**

The rejection refers to the confronting response that opposes the function offer. For example, “No, thank you.”, a rejection aimed to reject an offer of service.

RESEARCH METHOD

This paper utilized a descriptive qualitative method for the analysis. As put by (Nassaji, 2015), descriptive research has the goal to discover and outline the characteristics of a case where the focus is set on an event that is happening rather than how or why the event happens. This type of research involves the collection of relevant data in order to describe and explain the situation and conditions of the research object (Hikmawati, 2020), in this case is the dialogue between Arthur and Penny. the qualitative research as a procedure provides clear explanations of specific situations or events related to the topic. This approach was chosen for this paper since this method allows the data to be comprehended better through direct description rather than numeric analysis, which would not often occur in the case that is presented.

Following the case that is studied in this paper, the main focus of this paper is on the dialogue that exists between Arthur Fleck and Penny Fleck in the movie *Joker* (2019). To be specific, the main focus of the segment that delved into is the negative responses involved in their communication, which involve the response rejection, followed by refusal, then contradiction, and the disclaimer.

The method of data collection will consist of choosing the line both from Arthur and Penny, then enclose them in a table before giving label based on the function and response type of the utterances. The data analysis starts with rereading the data before labeling the response type, followed by describing the role relationship and drawing conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discussed the findings of the research, which examines the findings of confronting responses that occurred in the conversation between Penny and Arthur in the movie *Joker* (2019). This section only included confronting responses (contradiction, disclaimer, refusal, rejection), aligning with the scope of the study.

Confronting responses

Confronting responses are a type of response function that occurs in the framework of the speech function proposed by (Halliday, 1985). Confronting responses refer to the reaction towards the speaker who carries the disagreement, challenge, and refusal. Rather than complying or agreeing with the utterances that are spoken by the speaker who took the turn before. In the movie, judging from the script that has been analyzed, Arthur and Penny gave a lot of confronting responses to each other across the entire movie.

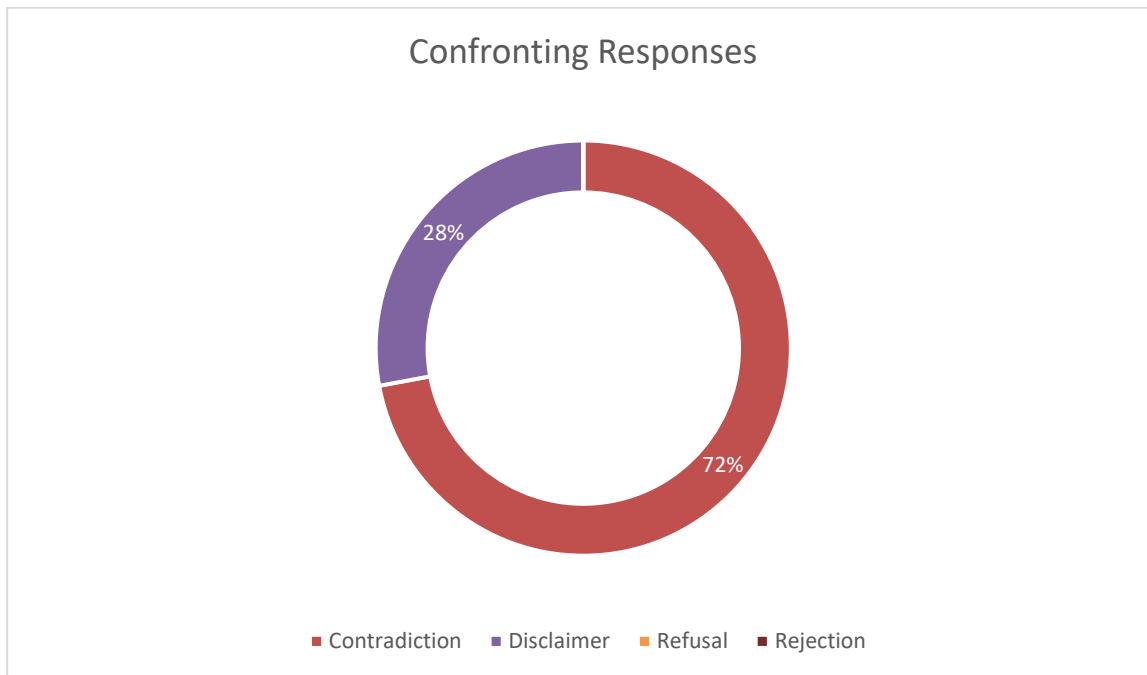


Chart 1: Distribution of Confronting Responses

The chart shows the distribution of confronting responses that occurred between Arthur and Penny across the entire movie. The major confronting responses that appeared were the contradiction, with 72% appearances over other confronting responses. Followed by the disclaimer, who made 28% appearances in the dialogue between Arthur and Penny, and then two other confronting responses, which refusal and rejection did not make any appearance in the dialogue, neither Penny nor Arthur used the refusal and rejection as their confronting responses.

1. Contradiction

Contradiction refers to a response type that falls into the group of confronting responses. The contradiction has a function to interrupt a conversation, and messes up the flow of the conversation with disagreement towards the other speaker's statement or utterance (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Contradiction appeared more than other types in the dialogue between Arthur and Penny, marking the fact that Arthur used this response on many occasions, while Penny also used this response type on many occasions.

Penny used this function eighteen times across the entire movie, consistently challenging the other speaker and also opposing the idea that was already made by the other speaker, which in this case, was Arthur. This fact also highlighted that Penny has a tendency to resist or reject what has been presented in the dialogue

Penny: "You have no right opening my mail."

In this line, Penny produced a contradiction, stating that Arthur did not have the right to open the mail she wrote for Thomas Wayne. This line is a sign that Penny used a contradiction to assert her dominance in the relationship

Arthur used contradictions than Penny in their dialogue. Arthur here used thirteen contradictions across the entire dialogue. Which in this case highlighted that he has fewer tendencies to reject or oppose the idea given to him.

Arthur: "I'm not yelling! I'm just excited."

Arthur's line in this instance is categorized as a contradiction response, with its speech function identified as a statement. This is indicated by the way he conveyed information to Penny. Additionally, Arthur's line serves as a contradiction because he disagreed with Penny rather than supporting her viewpoint.

2. Disclaimer

The response type disclaimer is a response type that, rather than fully disagreeing with the idea that has been presented by the other speaker, partially agrees to dodge the weight of disagreement. This response type played a strategic role in the conversation, while keeping the harmony of the conversation and also expressing the disagreement of speaker.

Penny used this response type four times in the movie, fewer than Arthur used the disclaimer to respond to her. This is also a sign that Penny was less likely to try to maintain the harmony when she engaged in a conversation and did not agree with Arthur's idea.

Penny: "What happened? Did you hurt yourself again?"

This is a disclaimer since Penny would rather dodge that Arthur found out her letter to Thomas Wayne and read what was inside. Dodge the topic and rather focus on Arthur's condition

Arthur used a disclaimer on a bigger number compared to Penny, which means that in their relationship, Arthur is the one who always tries to keep the conversation in harmony and express disagreement more subtly.

Arthur: "How could you keep that from me?"

This line is a disclaimer, marked by the attempt from Arthur to get back in the line of the conversation about the letter rather than follow through on Penny's attempt to shift the topic to Arthur's condition.

3. Refusal

In the study of speech function proposed by (Halliday, 1985), refusal is the confronting response to the command initiation. Naturally, the refusal is to not obey the command given to the subject and to not be involved further with the command that was given.

Arthur and Penny did not give any refusal across their whole conversation, nor was any refusal to a command found by the researcher after examining the script, due to Arthur not giving any command to Penny, while Penny gave many commands to Arthur, he did not give any refusal towards her commands.

4. Rejection

Rejection in the study of speech function under the framework developed by (Halliday, 1985) refers to a certain response that falls into the segment of a confronting response towards the speech function of an offer. The response type aimed to reject a service or goods that are being offered by another speaker in their turn.

The researcher had found zero rejections across the entire dialogue in the script of the movie *Joker* (2019). The number of rejections came from Arthur, who did not offer much, while Penny also did not offer much something they both did not gave rejection when offered something by the other.

CONCLUSION

The research already maps a clear way to conclude. Based on the data gathered from the movie *Joker* (2019), the researcher draws a conclusion that the most frequently appearing confronting responses in the data given by Arthur and Penny are contradictions, with 31 data points appearing. Which is divided into 13 from Arthur and 18 from Penny. This indicates Penny has less tendency to maintain the harmony of the conversation because she gives more contradictions than Arthur.

The use of a disclaimer, which is traditionally used to soften the disagreement, also appeared in contrast between both subjects, while Penny only gave 4 disclaimers, Arthur gave 8 disclaimers. This finding suggests that Arthur was more likely to approach confrontation more subtly compared to Penny.

Furthermore, there were no examples of refusal or rejection from either character, neither from Penny nor from Arthur. In the dialogue between them, Arthur did not issue many commands and never refused any made by Penny, and similarly, neither Arthur nor Penny refused offers made by the other. Overall, the data reflects the conversational patterns of both of them, while Arthur was more likely to approach confrontation in a more subtle way due to his role as Penny's child; on the other hand, Penny approaches confrontation more directly due to her role as a parent in their relationship.

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