Behind the words: Exploring speech acts in "The Aesop for Children"

Naela Hidayatul Mukaromah[*], Amalia Rosaline, and Rika Setyawati

Postgraduate Program of English Education, Universitas Negeri Semarang, **Indonesia**

*Corresponding Author: naelamukaromah@gmail.com

Abstract: This study analyzed speech acts in selected fables from the website "The Aesop for Children" to explore how utterances convey meaning and moral values. Utilizing the speech act theories of John L. Austin and John R. Searle, the research examined locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts within four fables: "The Gnat and The Bull", "The Plane Tree", "The Fox and The Goat", and "The Cock and The Fox". The findings reveal that most speech acts are directive, emphasizing the influence of utterances on the interlocutors. The moral lessons derived from these fables highlight the importance of humility, gratitude, caution, and the consequences of deception. This research underscores the significance of understanding speech acts in children's literature, providing insights for parents and educators in guiding children's reading experiences. Future studies could expand the scope by analyzing a larger corpus of fables from diverse cultural backgrounds to compare how speech acts function across different storytelling traditions. Incorporating multimodal elements such as illustrations and audio-visual adaptations could also offer deeper insights into how various modes of communication contribute to meaning-making and ethical development in children's literature.

Keywords: speech acts; fable; children's reading activity; linguistics

1.   Introduction

In daily communication, meaning is something important for each party involved (van Ruler, 2018). People involve themselves in communication and interaction with others to convey particular meanings (De Felice et al., 2023; Litt et al., 2020). In this case, meanings are exchanged and delivered among one another. Thus, meanings are the most essential thing to be understood and gained appropriately within such communication. However, the meaning within utterances is sometimes not understandable. What is said sometimes does not truly mean what is said. It might refer to such contradictions, disclaimers, rejections, etc. It is no wonder that people may get it wrong when interpreting the meaning of someone's utterances. It is because the interpretation of meaning should be learned and gained through specific experience or knowledge. Often, utterances convey intentions that go beyond the literal meanings of words. This is where the study of speech acts, initiated by John L. Austin and expanded by John R. Searle, becomes essential. Speech acts explore how utterances function as actions, enabling communication to inform, command, promise, threaten, and more (Jegede, 2024; Jucker, 2024).

One of the studies that indicates the meaning of someone's utterances is the study of Speech Acts by John L. Austin and Searle. Derived from its term, speech acts consists of two words: speech, which means verbal utterances, and acts, which refers to actions of doing something. Speech acts refer to verbal actions where a person performs such actions by delivering their utterances (Amalia et al., 2021; Rahayu & Eripuddin, 2023). Thus, a person's utterance implies a specific effect on the interlocutors or the hearers. This kind of explanation is discussed more in the aspect of perlocutionary force. Another

force of speech acts also reveals what utterances are intended to do, such as promising, apologizing, threatening, etc. This aspect is well-known as illocutions. The theory of speech acts and its forces can help us understand the intention of someone's utterances in honest daily communication and avoid misunderstandings (Hanna & Richards, 2019).

Speech acts in fables are not only tools of character development but also vehicles through which moral lessons are delivered. Through various speech act types (directives, representatives, expressives, and others), characters express opinions, guide actions, and reveal emotions, all of which shape the didactic core of each story. In this study, fables are chosen because of their prevalence in childhood education and their rich use of pragmatic elements that influence how children comprehend right and wrong. Moreover, fables serve as cultural instruments reflecting values, making it essential to understand how children from diverse backgrounds interpret these messages differently.

Speech acts are found in honest spoken communication and written utterances. These utterances are usually found in texts with double apostrophes (') in the initial and final parts of the utterance. For instance, the analysis of speech acts primarily deals with literary texts, drama, and novels. (Altikriti, 2011) mentioned that literary texts, drama, and books have received massive attention in terms of meaning analysis, particularly for speech acts, and only slight concern is given to the short stories or fables. Meanwhile, short stories or fables are highly needed and widely read by children worldwide. The analysis of speech acts realized in the utterances within short stories has been considered. This analysis will also deal with the relation of speech acts and the development of moral value implied within short stories or fables.

Another problem has arisen when there are many sources of short stories or fables that the children can easily access (Benabbes & AbdulHaleem Abu Taleb, 2024). Parents and teachers should accompany and guide the children or students when reading stories (Aram & Yashar, 2023; Kirsch & Bergeron-Morin, 2023; Pelletier et al., 2024). They have to select which website, book, or sources of short stories or fables are good to read. Parents and teachers must also teach the children the moral values within the stories. Therefore, the theory of speech act is necessary for this case. Later, this mini-research will focus on analyzing speech acts within some fables. Fables are chosen because they are familiar and close to the children's lives. Children can also learn something from the characteristics of animals figured out in the fables.

One of the most accessed websites providing fables is http://www.read.gov/aesop/008.html. This website states the moral value of each story at the end of the story. The figures' utterances mostly imply moral values. This mini-research will examine and analyze the three forces and the kind of speech acts realized in the figures' utterances within the fables. This research investigates how speech acts function within selected fables from The Aesop for Children and how these acts contribute to communicating moral values. The findings aim to assist parents, teachers, and educators guide children to understand the meanings behind spoken or written utterances and appreciate their moral messages.

2.   Literature review

2.1   Speech acts

John L. Austin's work 'How to Do Things with Words' had an extraordinary impact on linguistics philosophy, especially pragmatics (Austin, 1962). Austin's theory of speech acts was then established and classified by the American philosopher John R. Searle, Austin's student. The speech act theory has been a pragmatic concept since 1962. Speech acts are verbal actions that occur worldwide (Mey, 1993). The speech act theory describes what utterances are intended to do, such as promise, apologise,

and threaten (Cutting, 2002). Expressing a speech act means we do something with the words in our utterances. In other words, it could be performing an activity that changes as a result of the utterances that we heard.

In addition to the foundational theories of Austin and Searle, recent studies have explored the role of speech acts in children"s literature. For instance, Babazade (2025) examine how directive and expressive acts in fairy tales reinforce cultural norms. Similarly, Küntay & Şenay (2003; Ögel-Balaban & Aksu-Koç, 2020) analyzed Turkish children"s storybooks to identify how different types of speech acts introduce moral and social lessons. These studies underscore that children's narratives frequently utilize a balanced mix of expressive (emotional), directive (behavioral guidance), and representative (truth-based) acts. Speech acts theory said that the action performed when the utterance is produced can be analyzed on three different levels:

1) The first is the words themselves. This is the locution, what is said, the form of the words uttered; the act of saying something is called the locutionary act (Cutting, 2002). A locutionary act is the act of saying something. It is the action or activity involved in saying something. As stated in the Austin book, locution is used in many ways. Some of them, as quoted in lecture VIII, are when we are asking or answering a question, giving some information or an assurance or a warning, announcing an intention, pronouncing a sentence, making an appointment or an appeal or a criticism, making an identification or giving a description, and numerous others. In a normal situation, I make a statement by uttering the words. For instance, "It is cold here". This statement is intended to inform the hearer that the weather is cold without considering performing an act or influencing someone.

2) The second is what the speakers are doing with their words. This is the illocutionary, what is done in uttering the words, the performance of an act, the function of the words, the specific purpose that the speaker has in mind (Cutting, 2002). Austin explains in his book that an illocutionary act is the performance of an act in saying something. Certain words used in the utterances sometimes must be explained based on the context. When we say an utterance, we usually produce specific effects based on the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience or other people. Through those feelings, thoughts, or actions, it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them.

3) The last is the result of the words, known as perlocutionary. What is done by uttering the words is the effect on the hearer, the hearer's reaction (Cutting, 2002).

On the other hand. Searle classified the speech act into the following macro classes:

1) Declarations

It means that words and expressions could change the world with their utterance. According to Yule (2019), declarations are the kinds of speech acts that change the world via words. The utterance that the speaker produces can change the situation or condition. Cutting (2002) stated that some words and expressions change the world by their utterances, such as "I bet", "I declare", and "I resign". As Levinson (1983) stated, declarations can bring immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions. For example, when a man said, "I resign from this company," he would never work again for his previous company. Austin used this dissimilarity to create what he saw as the central divider in speech acts theory, the difference between locutionary and illocutionary acts.

2)   Representative

According to Joan Cutting, these are acts in which the words state what the speaker believes to be the case, such as describing, claiming, hypothesizing, and predicting. Yule (2019) stated that a representative tells the truth about the utterance. Based on Leech, representatives are assertions about matters in the world that carry true or false values. Assertion sometimes represents an individual state of mind, meaning that the speaker asserts an intention as accurate in force of his or her belief. Searle used the term "assertive" to state this category. For example, "I can only do nine". This utterance is representative because it tells the truth.

3)   Commissive

Joan Cutting stated that this includes acts in which the words commit the speaker to future action, such as promising, offering, threatening, refusing, vowing, and volunteering. A commissive utterance makes someone do some action or plan in the future. It can be performed by the speaker alone or as a group. For example, someone said, "I will be back in twenty minutes." This utterance is commissive because someone promises that they will return in the future.

4)   Directive

This category covers acts in which the words aim to make the hearer do something, such as commanding, requesting, inviting, and forbidding. According to Jacob Mey, directives express an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something, or in other words, to direct someone toward some goal. Austin named them either exercitives or behabitives.

5)   Expressive

Expressiveness is when the words state the speaker's feelings, such as regretting, apologizing, etc. These speech acts express the speaker's inner state; the expression is subjective. Expressiveness is a subjective character that changes according to different social guilt behaviors.

2.2   Fables

Fables are fictional stories, poems, or prose that convey a specific moral or lesson to the reader. It often includes similar features. They communicate a moral lesson to the reader. Often, fables tell a story through the use of animal characters. These animals are not only personified but also given anthropomorphic abilities, such as the ability to reason. Particularly in fables, the characters' utterances carry layered implications: they move the plot, influence other characters' actions, and communicate the underlying moral of the story. Therefore, a broader literature review provides theoretical grounding to examine how fables function as pragmatic tools for moral education.

3.   Methods

The research method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive research can be interpreted as a problem-solving procedure that is investigated by describing the present research object based on data/facts that appear or as they are. In broad terms, qualitative research is an approach that allows people to examine others' experiences in detail, by using a specific set of research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, observation, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies. Creswell & Creswell (2018) states that the descriptive method describes or analyzes a research result, but does not make broader conclusions. Based on the description above,

this type of research uses qualitative research because the data analysis is in written words. This research is not bound by place because the object of research is taken only from dialogues in the fables to answer the formulation of speech act problems.

According to Wallwey & Kajfez (2023), the source of the data is where the data is obtained using specific methods in the form of humans, artifacts, or documents. The data in this research are in the form of speeches or dialogues of figures in a collection of fables, which were selected from four fables, while the data source in this study was in the form of documents. The document was sourced from fables contained on a website. The Library of Congress presents it, adapted from the book "The Aesop for Children: with Pictures by Milo Winter," published by Rand, McNally & Co. in 1919. Four fables were selected from the website www.read.gov/aesop, hosted by the U.S. Library of Congress. These fables were chosen based on the following criteria. First, Popularity and Accessibility: The stories are widely available and familiar to educators and learners. Next, the diversity of Speech Acts. Each fable features multiple types of speech acts, enabling a comparative analysis. Next, moral clarity. The fables explicitly state their moral, analyzing speech acts about moral lessons more straightforwardly. The last is Narrative Simplicity. Short length and simple dialogue for children ensure focused pragmatic analysis. These criteria help ensure that the selected texts represent meaningful data for examining the interaction between speech acts and moral instruction in children's reading.

Data collection techniques in this research used observation techniques, which consisted of document analysis and recording. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), observation is a systematic observation and recording of what appears in every symptom or symptoms on the research object. The recording technique records data or findings after collecting the analyzed object. This technique contains the recording data needed to be analyzed using existing theories. The researcher prepares the object of study, in this case in the form of a dialogue on the fables containing the elements of speech acts (locution, illocution, and perlocution), then, after making preparations, the researcher takes notes and analyzes speech acts (locution, illocution, and perlocution). The research uses a flow analysis model as the data analysis technique. This process's analysis is intertwined and carried out continuously during data collection. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), the steps of data analysis are reduction, presentation or display, and conclusion/verification preparation.

4.   Results and discussion

The analysis will focus on the three forces of speech acts realized in some fables. Fables are chosen since they are very familiar and close to children. Most children are also delighted by reading fables. Meanwhile, each utterance of the figures in the fable hides meaning that should be considered. Therefore, the analysis of locutions, perlocutions, and illocutions is essential. The analysis of these three forces of speech acts will show how the speech acts relate to the moral value implied within the story. While the fables offer concise moral messages, children from different cultural or developmental backgrounds may interpret these lessons differently. For example, humility in The Gnat and The Bull may resonate differently in collectivist versus individualist cultures. Furthermore, children in early developmental stages may focus more on concrete actions (e.g., the Fox jumping on the Goat) than abstract moral lessons (e.g., "Look before you leap").

To address these differences, educators should consider the cultural and cognitive background of readers when introducing fables. Speech acts like expressives ("Ungrateful creatures!") can emotionally prime children to empathize, while representatives help them recognize truth claims. A balanced exposure to these speech acts is crucial. While directive acts were dominant in all four fables, representative and expressive acts also play vital roles:

a) In The Plane Tree, the tree's retort, "Ungrateful creatures!" is an expressive speech act that conveys indignation. This utterance personalizes the tree, prompting the child reader to reflect on gratitude.
b) In The Fox and the Goat, the Fox's final remark serves as a representative speech act that delivers a reflective judgment, transforming a deceptive act into a didactic moment.
c) In The Cock and the Fox, the expressive utterances of both animals create tension and humor, culminating in a reversal where the intended trickster is outwitted.

By incorporating more examples of representatives (e.g., stating beliefs or truths) and expressive (e.g., sharing feelings), children can be guided to explore how emotions and beliefs are communicated and relate to broader ethical behavior. The following is the analysis of locutions, perlocutions, and illocutions within four fables on the website www.read.gov/aesop/001.html. This website contains a lot of fables and short stories provided for children, teens, and adults. The selected fables below belong to the category of fables for children. These four fables were chosen since they are short in length, contain unique utterances, and contain good moral values that children can learn. The fables go under the title The Gnat and The Bull, The Plane Tree, The Fox and The Goat, and The Fox and The Cock.

Fabel 1

The Gnat & the Bull

A Gnat flew over the meadow with much buzzing for so small a creature and settled on the tip of one of the horns of a Bull. After he had rested for a short time, he made ready to fly away. However, before he left, he begged the Bull's pardon for using his horn for a resting place.

"You must be very glad to have me go now," he said.

"It is all the same to me," replied the Bull. "I did not even know you were there."

Moral Value: We are often of greater importance in our own eyes than in the eyes of our neighbor. The smaller the mind, the greater the conceit.

Locution 1	"You must be happy to have me go now," he said.
Perlocution	The effect for the interlocutor is that the Bull paid little attention to the Gnat and realized that the Gnat was there (on the Bull's horn)
Illocution	The Gnat intended to start leaving the Bull and show pride that he must have disturbed the Gnat. Overall, he wanted to show his conceit despite his tiny body. **(leaving and boasting)**
Speech act	Directive, as it is said to have the Bull pay attention to the Gnat.
Locution 2	"It is all the same to me," replied the Bull.
Perlocution	The Gnat may feel disappointed, realizing that he was not noticeable at all by the Bull.
Illocution	The bull showed significantly less attention or ignorance to what the Gnat said. **(ignoring)**
Speech act	Expressive, the Bull expresses its feelings about the Gnat's utterance.

Locution 3	"I did not even know you were there."
Perlocution	The Gnat might start to get angry because the Bull significantly underestimated him; his existence meant nothing to the Bull, who was bigger than the Gnat.
Illocution	The Bull wanted to emphasize his ignorance to the tiny Gnat, who was very arrogant. **(ignoring)**
Speech act	Directive, the Bull is trying to keep the Gnat from bothering it by being arrogant to the Bull.

The series of utterances in "The Gnat & The Bull" started with the utterance by the Gnat. The Gnat first thought that he might have disturbed the Bull by resting on the Bull's horn. So, before leaving, he begged the Bull's pardon while showing little conceit to the Bull. The first locution indicates the Bull's intention to leave and boast. However, the Gnat's conceit did not mean anything to the Bull. The Bull did not even realize that there was a gnat on his horn. It is obviously because the gnat looks very small in the Bull's eyes. So, the Bull ignored the Gnat by delivering the second and third locutions.

These utterances teach us, as readers, the important moral value that sometimes we feel is that we are superb and meaningful to others. Meanwhile, we might be ordinary in the eyes of other people. So, we tend to be arrogant by showing our pride to others. The smaller the mind, the greater the conceit. Ultimately, we must be humble and behave ordinarily in front of others.

Fabel 2

The Plane Tree

Walking in the noonday sun, two Travelers sought the shade of a widespread tree to rest. As they lay looking up among the pleasant leaves, they saw that it was a Plane Tree.

"How useless is the Plane!" said one of them. "It bears no fruit whatever, and only serves to litter the ground with leaves."

"Ungrateful creatures!" said a voice from the Plane Tree. "You lie here in my cooling shade, yet you say I am useless! Thus ungratefully, O Jupiter, do men receive their blessings!"

Moral value: Our best blessings are often the least appreciated.

Locution 1	"How useless is the Plane!" said one of them.
Perlocution	This utterance would irritate the Plane Tree.
Illocution	The traveller intended to mock and underestimate the tree.**(mocking)**
Speech act	Expressive, it shows the traveller's feelings about the tree.

Locution 2	"It bears no fruit whatever, and only serves to litter the ground with leaves."
Perlocution	The tree might be very irritated by the traveler's following utterance.
Illocution	The traveler intended to emphasize his mocking of the tree. **(mocking)**
Speech act	Representative, it tells the truth about the tree's condition.

Locution 3	"Ungrateful creatures!" said a voice from the Plane Tree.
Perlocution	This utterance might have shocked the traveler since the plane tree rebutted the traveler.
Illocution	The tree accused the traveler of being ungrateful, showed anger, and intended to defend himself from the raveler's mockery. **(accusing and protesting)**
Speech act	Expressive, the tree shows its feelings towards the travelers' mockery.
Locution 4	"You lie here in my cooling shade, yet you say I am useless! Thus ungratefully, O Jupiter, do men receive their blessings!"
Perlocution	The traveller might realize his mistake of underestimating the tree.
Illocution	The tree was intended to emphasize his defense and show the peak of his anger. He also explained why the travelers should not have mocked the tree and that they should look at the other blessings God gives to the tree. **(protesting and deploring)**
Speech act	Representatively, the tree points out that the travelers benefit from the tree, yet they mock it.

The fable starts with the traveller who mocked a plane tree where he and his friend rested. Locutions 1 and 2 showed that the traveler intended to mock the tree since he thought it useless to provide it with no fruit. Hearing these utterances, the plane tree got angry and accused the traveler of being an ungrateful creature (locution 3). The tree also protested the traveler's argument by revealing why the traveler should be more grateful and appreciative of the tree's other blessings (locution 4). These utterances lead us to realize that sometimes we only pay less attention to the best blessing we have. We notice the surface or something that we can see from the outside. Therefore, we should be grateful for God's blessings, whether they become our strengths or weaknesses.

Fabel 3

The Fox & the Goat

A Fox fell into a well; though it was not deep, he could not escape again. A thirsty Goat came by after he had been in the well a long time. The Goat thought the Fox had gone down to drink, so he asked if the water was good.

"The finest in the country," said the crafty Fox, "jump in and try it. There is more than enough for both of us."

The thirsty Goat immediately jumped in and began to drink. The Fox just as quickly jumped on the Goat's back and leaped from the tip of the Goat's horns out of the well.

The foolish Goat now saw what a plight he had got into, and begged the Fox to help him out. However, the Fox was already on his way to the woods.

"If you had as much sense as you have beard, old fellow," he said as he ran, "you would have been more cautious about finding a way to get out again before you jumped in."

Moral value: Look before you leap.

Locution 1	"The finest in the whole country," said the crafty Fox,
Perlocution	The fox might attract the goat's utterance.
Illocution	The fox started deceiving the goat. He told lies, and the information he gave was not accurate at all. **(deceiving)**
Speech act	Directive, it is meant to lure the Goat down the well.
Locution 2	"Jump in and try it. There is more than enough for both of us."
Perlocution	The goat might start to believe in what the fox said.
Illocution	The fox misled the goat and tricked the goat into taking real action of jumping. **(deceiving and tricking)**
Speech act	Directive, to have the Goat come down the well.
Locution 3	"If you had as much sense as you have beard, old fellow," he said as he ran, "you would have been more cautious about finding a way to get out again before you jumped in."
Perlocution	The goat felt regretful and realized how foolish he was
Illocution	The fox felt proud of himself, realizing he had succeeded in deceiving the goat. He also advised the goat to think critically before jumping into the well. **(tricking and advising)**
Speech act	Representatively, the Fox assumes that the Goat would do the opposite action if only the Goat knew that it was being deceived.

The illocutions of the three locutions relate to tricking and deceiving. Although those two actions are not good to apply to children, the series of utterances in this fable tries to lead the readers to realize something important to do before doing anything. Locutions 1 and 2 tell us that the Fox tried to trick the goat to save himself and escape from the well. These utterances significantly affected the goat, so the goat believed in the fox's deception and did what the fox directed him to do. Finally, the goat was successfully deceived, and the fox could escape from the well. The locution three by the fox realized that the goat and we had to think critically before doing anything. It is well-known in English proverb as "look before you leap".

Fabel 4

The Cock & the Fox

One bright evening as the sun was sinking on a glorious world a wise old Cock flew into a tree to roost. Before he composed himself to rest, he flapped his wings three times and crowed loudly. However, just as he was about to put his head under his wing, his beady eyes caught a flash of red and a glimpse of a long, pointed nose, and there just below him stood Master Fox.

"Have you heard the wonderful news?" cried the Fox, joyful and excited.

"What news?" asked the Cock very calmly. However, he had a queer, fluttery feeling inside him, for, you know, he was very much afraid of the Fox.

"Your family, mine, and all other animals have agreed to forget their differences and live in peace and friendship forever from now on. Just think of it! I cannot wait to embrace you! Come down, dear friend, and let us celebrate the joyful event."

"How grand!" said the Cock. "I certainly am delighted at the news." However, he spoke absently, and stretching up on tiptoes, seemed to be looking at something afar off.

"What is it you see?" implored the Fox.

"Why, it looks like a couple of Dogs are coming this way. They must have heard the good news and—"

However, the Fox did not wait to hear more. Off he started on a run.

"Wait," cried the Cock. "Why do you run? The Dogs are friends of yours now!"

"Yes," answered the Fox. "But they might not have heard the news. Besides, I have a critical errand I had almost forgotten about."

The Cock smiled as he buried his head in his feathers and went to sleep, for he had succeeded in outwitting a very crafty enemy.

Moral value: The trickster is easily tricked.

Locution 1	"Have you heard the wonderful news?" cried the Fox joyfully and excitedly."
Perlocution	The cock started to be attracted and showed his attention to the fox.
Illocution	The fox did not intend to inform something important to the cock, but he started to get the cock"s attention. **(attracting)**
Speech act	Directive, the Fox intend to get the cock"s attention.
Locution 2	"What news?" asked the Cock very calmly.
Perlocution	The fox might feel that he had succeeded in attracting the cock.
Illocution	The cock intended to ask the fox with the feeling of suspicious and started to be more aware of what would happen next. **(asking)**
Speech act	Directive, the Cock is trying to get the Fox telling the information.
Locution 3	"Your family, mine, and all other animals have agreed to forget their differences and live in peace and friendship forever from now on. Just think of it! I cannot wait to embrace you! Come down, dear friend, and let us celebrate the joyful event."
Perlocution	The cock might think whether what the fox said was true or not.
Illocution	The fox deceived the cock. **(deceiving)**
Speech act	Directive, to get the Cock put trust on the Fox.
Locution 4	"How grand!" said the Cock. "I certainly am delighted at the news."
Perlocution	The fox might be happy for thinking that he succeeded to deceive the cock
Illocution	The cock also deceived the fox back by pretending that he was very delightful. **(deceiving and pretending)**
Speech act,	Directive, to have the Fox put trust back on the Cock.

Locution 5	"What is it you see?" implored the Fox.
Perlocution	The cock taught that the fox was caught in his "trap".
Illocution	The fox asked the cock due to his curiosity. **(asking)**
Speech act	Directive, the Fox demand for the answer of the question it gave to the Cock.

Locution 6	"Why, it looks like a couple of Dogs are coming this way. They must have heard the good news and—"
Perlocution	It might have frightened the fox.
Illocution	The cock tried to deceive the fox. Meanwhile, no dogs are approaching them. **(deceiving and tricking)**
Speech act	Directive, it is meant to make the Fox believe in the Cock and then be afraid.

Locution 7	"Wait," cried the Cock. "Why do you run? The Dogs are friends of yours now!"
Perlocution	The dog did not care about what he said. He believed in the cock and realized that his deception did not work well to make the cock as his prey.
Illocution	The cock insisted in frightening the fox to save himself by pretending to ask the serious question. **(tricking, pretending, and threatening)**
Speech act	Directive, to make the Fox explain about why itwas about to run and finally make the Cock sure that the Cock successfully deceive it.

Locution 8,	"Yes," answered the Fox. "But they might not have heard the news. Besides, I have a critical errand I had almost forgotten about."
Perlocution	The cock won. He could not be deceived. He felt proud of himself and free of the fox's threat.
Illocution	The fox intended to make up excuses to hide his fear and pretended that he was alright. **(making up an alibi)**
Speech act	Directive, to make the Cock let the Fox runaway.

The set of utterances in this fable is quite complicated. The locution 1-4 indicate that the fox was trying to deceive and fool the cock so the cock could be his prey at that time. It also seems that the fox would successfully trick the cock. However, the cock smelled a rat. He thought that the fox did not tell the truth. Therefore, the cock tried to think the way to escape from the fox"s threats by deceiving his back! Locution 5-6 showed us how the cock tried to make up stories that there were a group of dogs coming. This made-up story scared the fox. So, the fox decided to get away instead of trying to chase the cock. Locution 7 showed that the cock pretended to ask why the fox ran away. Besides, the cock tried to frighten the fox and made sure that the fox was scary. At the end, to cover his shames and scare, the fox made up excuses while running away from the cock. These utterances lead us to one moral lesson: the trickster is easily tricked.

5.   Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion of the dialogs of fables in this research, it can be concluded that the Fables contain three styles of speech acts: locution, illocution, and perlocution. The fables are also related to Searle's theory, which is found to be representative, directive, and expressive. In the analysis of the fables above, the theory of speech acts illocution, the most dominant and often emergent, is directive, which is one of the ten directives. Then, the conclusion can be drawn that the fable's dialogue

contains many utterances used to govern and ask for something from the interlocutor. Moreover, only a few utterances contain expressive and representative speech acts.

Based on the Austin and Searle speech acts theory, we can take the moral values that are visible and implied from the actions and utterances contained in the dialogues mentioned above. The moral value of the dialogues above makes it easy to determine the intrinsic elements in the fable. We can easily determine whether the character is good, evil, arrogant, or wise. Third, the analysis of speech acts in the fables above has some implications for the readers. The speech acts theory above reveals moral values that can affect the social and psychological aspects of the readers. Readers can take wisdom from the mandate of these fables and behave to respect others and themselves so that harmony will be established within oneself and in the social environment.

To support children's moral development through literature, parents and educators should engage in Dialogic Reading: Ask children questions like "What did the Fox want?" or "Why did the tree feel angry?" to encourage pragmatic reasoning. Then, highlight Speech Functions: Explicitly identify when a character requests, commands, or expresses emotion to increase metalinguistic awareness. After that, a culturally adapted interpretation provides context or culturally relevant examples that help children grasp the intended moral values. The last, use Role-Playing: Let children act out characters' utterances to internalize different speech acts and their effects.

In short, integrating speech act analysis into fable reading enhances linguistic competence and fosters ethical and empathetic understanding in young learners. Future research might expand this approach to multilingual or multicultural contexts, where pragmatic interpretations can vary.

Author's declaration

Author contribution

Naela Hidayatul Mukaromah conceived the research idea, analyzed speech acts within the selected fables, and drafted the manuscript. **Amalia Rosaline** contributed to data collection, literature review, and manuscript editing. **Rika Setyawati** assisted with the conceptual framework and provided critical feedback on the analysis and interpretation of the findings. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Data availability

The data analyzed in this study consist of four selected fables from the website "The Aesop for Children"—namely "The Gnat and The Bull," "The Plane Tree," "The Fox and The Goat," and "The Cock and The Fox." These texts are publicly accessible on the website and are cited accordingly. Additional data, such as coding sheets or analysis notes, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this research and publication.

Ethical clearance

This research did not involve human participants, animals, or any sensitive data requiring ethical approval.

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This article is the original work of the author without using AI tools for writing sentences and/or creating/editing table and figures in this manuscript.

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