THE PRAGMATICS OF DIRECTIVE SPEECH ACTS IN ACTION-COMEDY FILM: AN ANALYSIS OF BAD BOYS: RIDE OR DIE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines directive speech acts in the action-comedy film Bad Boys: Ride or Die to identify their types, strategies, and pragmatic functions. Directive speech acts are essential in film dialogue because they guide actions, express authority, and create humor, especially in high-stakes action-comedy contexts. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected from the utterances of the two protagonists, Mike and Marcus, which were transcribed and classified. The analysis applies Searle's classification of directive speech acts, which includes commanding, requesting, suggesting, advising, and forbidding. It also refers to Cutting and Fordyce's framework of direct and indirect strategies, as well as Crabtree's model of context, which covers physical, social, linguistic, and epistemic aspects. The findings reveal a total of 72 directive speech acts, with commanding as the most dominant type. These directives are expressed through both direct and indirect strategies, showing a preference for clear and explicit communication while also using indirectness for humor or subtlety. The pragmatic function of directives is seen in coordinating actions, asserting authority, and creating a balance between tension and comedy. This study shows that directive speech acts in Bad Boys: Ride or Die not only function linguistically but also narratively, supporting the film's dual identity as both action and comedy. The novelty of this research lies in the pragmatic analysis that connects speech strategies with the role of dual film genres, thus enriching the study of speech acts in popular discourse.

Keywords: pragmatics, directive speech acts, action-comedy film, Bad Boys: Ride or Die, Searle's speech act theory

INTRODUCTION

Speech acts hold a central role in human interaction since they demonstrate how language operates as a form of action. Among them, directive speech acts are commonly employed to influence the actions of others, whether through commands, requests, or suggestions. Within films, directives serve not only to advance the storyline but also to reveal how characters engage and relate to one another in varying social contexts. The action-comedy genre, in particular, combines serious and humorous contexts, making directive speech acts central in both building tension and creating humor. Searle (1979) classifies speech acts into five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Directives warrant particular focus as they offer direct insights into power structures, collaborative relationships, and character interactions. Within action-comedy films, these linguistic tools frequently surface during moments requiring character

coordination, problem-solving scenarios, or displays of dominance. This research examines *Bad Boys: Ride or Die (2024)* as its primary subject, viewing it as an exemplary representation of action-comedy filmmaking. The film weaves together high-energy action scenes with comedic elements, creating an ideal environment for examining directive language usage.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The theoretical framework of this study is based on pragmatics, focusing on speech acts as described by Searle (1979), who views them as the basic units of communication used to perform actions. Directive speech acts are central because they aim to influence others through commands, requests, suggestions, prohibitions, or advice. To analyze how these acts are delivered, the study applies Cutting and Fordyce's (2020) classification of speech act strategies into direct and indirect forms, which helps explain whether characters express intentions explicitly or implicitly. In addition, Crabtree's (1991) four contexts, physical, epistemic, linguistic, and social, are used to interpret how meaning is shaped in interaction. Together, these theories provide the basis for examining how directive speech acts in Bad Boys: Ride or Die reflect character dynamics, narrative development, and the mix of tension and humor typical of action-comedy films.

1. Types of Directive Speech Acts

According to Searle (1979), directive speech acts are utterances in which the speaker attempts to make the listener act. In other words, the speaker's words are intended as a reason for the listener to act. The types of directive speech acts can be categorized as follows:

Commanding: A command directly instructs the hearer to perform or avoid an action. For example, "I'm telling you not to waste your time on that" (Kreidler, 1998, p. 190). This utterance functions as a command because the speaker explicitly tells the listener what not to do.

Suggesting: A suggestion presents an idea or plan for consideration. For instance, "Well, perhaps if we reason with her" (Muhartoyo & Kristani, 2013). The speaker proposes a possible course of action without imposing it.

Requesting: A request is a polite way of asking the hearer to do something. For example, "Can you open the door for me?" (Searle, 1976, p. 11). The speaker signals that the hearer is capable of performing the requested action.

Forbidding: A prohibition directs the hearer not to carry out a particular action. For example, "I warn you to stay away from my wife!" (Searle, 1979, p. 28). This utterance expresses a restriction by preventing the listener from acting.

Advising: Advice is given when the speaker encourages or guides the listener. For example, "Just do your best, dear" (Muhartoyo & Kristani, 2013). The speaker supports the hearer by suggesting the best course of action.

2. Speech Act Strategies

Cutting & Fordyce (2020) classify speech act strategies into two types: direct and indirect.

Direct Strategy: In this strategy, form and function match directly, so the hearer can easily understand the intention. For example, "Get me one" expresses a clear request without hidden meaning.

Indirect Strategy: In this strategy, the form and function do not correspond directly. The speaker uses another structure, such as a question, to express an action indirectly. Take the example of "Could you get me a tuna and sweet corn one please?", This utterance isn't genuinely inquiring about someone's capability, but rather serves as a polite way of asking the listener to retrieve the specified item.

3. Contexts

According to Crabtree (1991) contextual components play an important role in understanding speech acts, since they decide how meaning gets constructed during communicative exchanges. Four distinct contextual categories can be distinguished:

Physical Context: relates to the setting and situation of the conversation

Epistemic Context: which concerns the shared knowledge between speaker and listener

Linguistic Context: which considers how previous utterances influence interpretation

Social Context: which reflects the roles and relationships of the speaker and listener

These categories of context are particularly useful in analyzing directive speech acts in film dialogues, where humor, authority, and interpersonal dynamics are developed through language.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses descriptive qualitative methodology to examine directive speech patterns found in the 2024 film *Bad Boys: Ride or Die*. The choice of qualitative methodology proves suitable for this examination as it allows researchers to analyze how characters statements carry meaning within their particular situations, moving beyond mere numerical analysis. The primary objective centers on exploring the ways directive language shapes conversations between characters, moves the plot forward, and generates comedic moments throughout the film. The data for this research were taken from *Bad Boys: Ride or Die*. To maintain precision in data collection, the researcher conducted multiple viewings of the film before creating written transcripts of conversations between the two protagonists, Mike and Marcus. These transcribed dialogues underwent careful examination to locate instances of directive communication, which were then sorted into categories for detailed analysis. The table serves as an example of how the researcher systematically arranged the data before conducting further analysis.

Table 1. Example of Table Coding Data

No	Scene\Time Code	Context	Type of Directive	Strategy	Pragmatic Function
1.	00:04:08 Mike: "Marcus, get in the car"	Physical Context (This directive is delivered by Mike to Marcus in a tense situation where they need to leave without delay.)	Commanding	Direct (this command is clearly delivered to make Marcus get into the car immediately)	Increasing tension & urgency (It functions to heighten the sense of urgency in the scene.)
2	00:37:15 Mike: "Dorn, shut it down"	Physical Context (spoken by Mike to Dom during a risky operation)	Commanding	Direct (this command is clearly spoken to stop an ongoing activity)	Supporting plot development (It advances the storyline by halting the ongoing risky action)
3	00:29:07 Mike: "Stop that shit, Marcus"	Social Context (spoken by Mike to Marcus in a close personal interaction, reflecting their friendship)	Commanding	Direct (this order is clearly expressed to make Marcus immediately stop what he is doing)	Supporting plot development (He interrupts Marcus's actions to focus back to the mission while preserving their humorous)

The analysis was processed in a systematic to ensure the accuracy of both classification and interpretation. After the data were collected and coded, the researcher proceeded through several stages of analysis. First, utterances containing directive speech acts were identified. Next, these utterances were grouped according to Searle's (1979) classification of directive types, namely commanding, requesting, suggesting, forbidding, and advising. The strategies used to deliver them were then examined using Cutting and Fordyce's (2020) framework of direct and indirect speech acts. Finally, their meanings were interpreted with reference to Crabtree's (1991) four types of context: physical, epistemic, linguistic, and social.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study identifies 72 directive speech acts in Bad Boys: Ride or Die (2024), consisting of commanding 38, suggesting 9, requesting 11, forbidding 6, and advising 8, which demonstrate how characters use language to influence others' actions. Based on Cutting and Fordyce's (2020) framework, most of these utterances are delivered through direct strategies 50 rather than indirect ones 22, showing a preference for clear and explicit expression while still allowing for subtle or humorous delivery. Furthermore, the analysis of pragmatic functions using Crabtree's (1991) contexts shows that physical context dominates 39, followed by social context 17, with fewer

instances of linguistic 8 and epistemic 8 contexts. These findings indicate that directive speech acts in the film are shaped by urgent situations and character relationships, reflecting both the tension of action and the humor of camaraderie typical of the action-comedy genre.

Type of Directive Speech Acts

1. Speech Acts of Commanding

Screen Capture 1. Example of Data Commanding
(01:32:04 → 01:32:10)

Mike: Dorn, **we need cover and we need eyes inside. Go, now**.

The utterance "*Go, now*" is classified as a commanding type of directive speech act, because Mike gives a forceful order to Dorn during an intense moment under gunfire. The strategy is direct, conveyed through a short, imperative form that leaves no room for negotiation or hesitation. The context is a physical context because characters are caught in a life-threatening exchange of gunfire, where every second matters. In such a high-stakes environment, language must be stripped down to its most efficient form, fast, clear, and authoritative. The pragmatic function of this directive is to ensure coordination between characters in risky situations. Mike's command as the leader synchronizes the team's actions, directing Dorn to deploy surveillance and support without delay. This coordination is vital for maintaining control and survival during the mission.

2. Speech Acts of Requesting

Screen Capture 2. Example of Data Requesting
(01:08:18 → 01:08:24)

Marcus: Hey Dorn **can you safely get me into my Ring app?** I wanna see my family

Marcus's utterance "*Can you safely get me into my Ring app? I wanna see my family*" can be categorized as a directive speech act in the form of a request, where he asks Dorn for technical help. The request is motivated by Marcus's anxiety about his family's condition after days of being

on the run. The context in this utterance is best understood through epistemic context, as Marcus is seeking access to information (his family's safety) that he cannot obtain on his own. The indirect form "*Can you…*" softens the request, making it polite and dependent on Dorn's ability. Therefore, the utterance functions as a requesting directive shaped by Marcus's emotional need for reassurance and access to hidden knowledge.

3. Speech Acts of Suggestion

Screen Capture 3. Example of Data Suggestion
(01:01:06 → 01:01:11)

Marcus: **all you gotta do is close your eyes, Mike**

the scene shows Marcus persuading Mike to go along with a strange request from Tabitha, which Mike initially refuses because he finds it disgusting. Marcus, knowing they need Tabitha's help, tries to reduce Mike's hesitation by downplaying the action and making it sound easy and harmless. The phrase "All you gotta do is close your eyes" is delivered as a soft suggestion. The context of this utterance is best explained through linguistic context, as Marcus uses simplified, persuasive language to make the request seem less unpleasant. Thus, this utterance can be categorized as a directive speech act in the form of suggestion.

4. Speech Acts of Advising

Screen Capture 4. Example of Data Advising
(00:54:04 → 00:54:10)

Marcus: Mike**, this is a moment. Express with your son.**

As shown in the utterance above, this example represents an advising directive speech act, where Marcus provides guidance to help Mike improve his relationship with Armando. Aware of Mike's struggle with guilt and emotional distance from his son, Marcus advises him to "express with your son," encouraging open communication at a critical moment. His intention is entirely supportive, with no personal gain, as he seeks to help Mike reconcile and heal his relationship. The phrase "this is a moment" underscores the urgency of seizing the opportunity for reconciliation. This

aligns with the function of advising speech acts, in which the speaker aims to promote the hearer's well-being by offering constructive guidance.

5. Speech Acts of Forbidding

Screen Capture 5. Example of Data Forbidding
(00:47:18 → 00:47:21)

Marcus: It's too heavy!
Mike: **Don't let go!**

Mike and Marcus are in a life-threatening situation aboard a damaged airplane. Marcus is holding a rope connected to a cage carrying Armando, who is key to proving Captain Howard's innocence. As the plane descends and the door opens, Mike yells at Marcus, fearing that letting go would kill Armando. The phrase "Don't let go!" functions as a forbidding directive speech act, aiming to stop Marcus from releasing the rope. It is short, sharp, and emotionally charged, signaling the seriousness of the consequences if not followed. The physical context is central in this scene due to the extreme conditions: a plane midair, about to crash, with the lives of all three characters at stake.

Speech Act Strategies

1. Direct Strategy

Screen Capture 6. Example of Data Direct Strategy
(01:29:30 → 01:29:33)

Marcus: **Dorn! Take out that sniper!**

the context of the scene is a physical context because it takes place during an intense shootout between Marcus, Mike, and their enemies. Marcus and Mike are under fire, and a sniper is targeting them from a hidden position. Through his earpiece, Marcus urgently instructs Dorn to eliminate the sniper to protect them and allow further movement. The line "Take out that sniper!" shows the

situation where Marcus gives a direct and immediate order to Dorn in a life-threatening moment. The utterance is included in the direct strategy because it uses a clear imperative sentence with no softening or mitigation. Marcus's intention is urgent and non-negotiable, reflecting the high-stakes physical environment.

2. Indirect Strategy

Screen Capture 7. Example of Data Indirect Strategy
(00:15:51 → 00:15:55)

Mike: **Ey ey come on man. That's my phone**

In data, the context shows Marcus using Mike's phone to make a video call to his wife. During the call, Marcus gets too carried away with his emotions and starts kissing the phone screen. Mike reacts to this behavior by saying, "*Ey ey come on man. That's my phone*," as a way to remind Marcus that the phone is not his. This utterance can be seen as a requesting directive speech act that uses an indirect strategy. Instead of directly saying "*Stop that*" or "*Give me back my phone*," Mike chooses to state a fact that the phone belongs to him. This indirect way of speaking helps him express discomfort without sounding too aggressive or rude. The phrase "That's my phone" works as a soft way to ask Marcus to stop. By speaking this way, Mike avoids confrontation but still makes it clear that he wants Marcus to respect his personal item.

Pragmatic Functions of Directive Speech Acts

1. Increasing Tension and Urgency

Screen Capture 8. Example of Data Increasing Tension and Urgency
(01:33:18 → 01:33:24)

Mike: **Armando go for Callie**

In the data, the physical context takes place during a dangerous mission to rescue hostages. Mike tells Armando to go after one of them, Callie. The phrase "*go for Callie*" is a simple and clear

command, without any polite words or extra explanation. This shows how urgent the situation is. It is a directive speech act in the form of a command using a direct strategy. The pragmatic function of this command is Increasing Tension and Urgency. This utterance reflects the high-stakes nature of the situation, where any hesitation could endanger lives. Rather than softening his words, Mike delivers a brief and forceful command that mirrors the life-or-death urgency of the moment. The conciseness of the directive not only heightens dramatic tension for both characters and audience but also underscores the need for immediate and precise action.

2. Coordination

Screen Capture 9. Example of Data Coordination
(01:20:02 → 01:20:28)

Mike: I don't trust anybody that's not standing right here, right now. **Every extra person that we involve increases the likelihood that they know we're coming, which increases the likelihood that Christine and Callie don't make it out of there. That means no SWAT, no marshals, no backup**. It's just us

In this scene, the physical context shows that Mike and Marcus are in the midst of a high-risk rescue operation, where every decision could tip the balance between success and failure. The utterance contains a directive speech act of forbidding, delivered through an indirect strategy. Mike frames his prohibition as a logical consequence rather than a direct order. The pragmatic function is coordinating teamwork, as Mike clearly defines the operational parameters and ensures that both of them share the same tactical approach. By eliminating the involvement of outside forces, he aligns their actions toward a unified plan, enhancing cooperation and minimizing the risk of exposure. This reflects how, in action sequences, forbidding can be used strategically to solidify trust and streamline coordination among team members under extreme pressure.

3. Supporting Plot Development

Screen Capture 10. Example of Data Supporting Plot Development
(00:37:15 → 00:37:18)

Mike: Dorn, **shut it down!**

In utterance, Mike commands Dorn to turn off the projector that is displaying a barcode containing sensitive information related to their ongoing case. The physical context indicates that they are at the crime scene of a recent shootout, where the presence of such information poses a significant security risk if left exposed. This is a directive speech act of commanding, delivered through a direct strategy, ensuring that the order is immediately understood and acted upon without ambiguity. The pragmatic function is supporting plot development, as shutting down the projector prevents the confidential data from being compromised and allows the investigation to proceed without interference.

4. Irony or Overstatement

Screen Capture 11. Example of Data Irony or Overstatement
(00:49:30 → 00:49:44)

Marcus: Damn. **That Lowrey DNA is a bitch. Y'all some strong motherfuckers. Okay. Now, look, everybody unflex. On three**

As seen in the data above, the social context shows a situation where Mike and Armando, who are father and son, are in the middle of a heated argument that nearly escalates into a fight. Marcus steps in dramatically, opening with the blunt remark, "*Damn. That Lowrey DNA is a bitch. Y'all some strong motherfuckers.*" He then delivers the unusual command, "*everybody unflex. On three.*" The exaggerated phrasing and unexpected vocabulary make the directive sound more humorous than practical. This is a directive speech act of commanding, performed using a direct strategy. The pragmatic function reflects irony or overstatement, where Marcus intentionally delivers the command in a way that amplifies the absurdity of the situation. While the intention is to stop the conflict, the dramatic and comically impractical choice of words injects humor and undercuts the seriousness of the moment.

5. Contrast Serious and Humorous

Screen Capture 12. Example of Data Contrast Serious and Humorous
(00:43:47 → 00:43:55)

Mike: **We don't have your blankie, but you could just rest your eyes**

Marcus: That's exactly how you was as **a donkey**

In the data, the social context shows Mike talking to Marcus, who is acting strangely after recovering from an illness. Mike makes a light joke by saying, "*we don't have your blankie*," and then gently suggests, "*you could just rest your eyes*." The suggestion is polite and humorous, making it an indirect directive speech act in the form of a suggestion. The pragmatic function of this utterance is Humor and Sarcasm. This is because Mike's language does not simply aim to instruct Marcus but also to make fun of his behavior in a playful way. By using the sarcastic phrase, Mike exaggerates Marcus's condition as if he were a child, which adds a layer of comedy. The humor softens the suggestion that follows, so instead of sounding like serious medical advice, it becomes a friendly nudge framed in banter.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated how directive speech acts operate in the 2024 action-comedy film Bad Boys: Ride or Die, showing their important role in character communication, action coordination, and relationship expression. The findings revealed that commands appeared most frequently, followed by requests, advice, suggestions, and prohibitions is a distribution that reflects the urgent, high-stakes nature typical of action films. Characters primarily used direct communication rather than indirect methods, demonstrating their preference for clear language during dangerous situations, while indirect approaches were mainly employed to create humor or reduce social tension. The analysis showed that directive usage was influenced by physical environments, social relationships, language choices, and character knowledge, illustrating how different factors and character dynamics shape meaning. The directive speech acts examined served two main purposes: they allowed characters to respond quickly to threatening situations while maintaining the humor and friendship that characterize action-comedy films. Future research can examine directive speech acts across different film genres and how genres affect language strategies. These results provide important insights for pragmatics students, screenwriters, and dialogue analysts by showing how language reflects power, solidarity, and entertainment in film dialogue.

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