



## SPEECH ACTS IN FILM DIALOGUES: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF MIKE BAMILOYE'S *ÀBÈJOYÈ* SEASON 5

**Olumide Joshua Oki**

Department of Performing Arts, Music, and Film Studies,  
Lead City University, Ibadan. Nigeria.

Email: [okiolumide@yahoo.com](mailto:okiolumide@yahoo.com)

**Idowu David Alademomi**

Mount Zion Institute of Christian Drama  
Ile, Ife, Osun State. Nigeria.

Email: [idowualademomi@gmail.com](mailto:idowualademomi@gmail.com)

**Olubunmi Elizabeth Oki**

Institute of African Studies,  
University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

Email: [Email.okiolubunmi@gmail.com](mailto:Email.okiolubunmi@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Language in film serves as a powerful tool for communication, shaping narratives and influencing audience perception through the strategic use of speech acts. This study examines the use of speech acts in the dialogues of Àbèjoyè Season 5, a Nigerian Christian film, through the lens of pragmatics. Drawing from John Searle's Speech Act Theory, the research identifies and analyses illocutionary acts such as directives, commissives, and expressives that drive interactions between characters, particularly in moments of conflict and persuasion. The study highlights how performative utterances—including witches' incantations, pastoral declarations, and moral instructions—function to command, persuade, or challenge other characters, thereby advancing the film's religious and cultural themes. The findings reveal that speech acts in Àbèjoyè are not only a storytelling medium but also a means of ideological reinforcement, shaping moral and spiritual convictions. The study concludes that the film's dialogues illustrate how language in religious films serves as an agent of influence, fostering audience engagement and reinforcing Christian beliefs. This research contributes to the growing field of pragmatics in film studies by providing insights into how language generates meaning and action within cinematic narratives.*

**Keywords:** *Speech Acts, Pragmatics, Film Dialogue, Àbèjoyè, Nollywood, Christian Film.*

## Introduction

Language is a fundamental component of human communication, serving as a vehicle for expressing thoughts, emotions, and intentions. In film, dialogue plays an essential role in shaping narratives, developing characters, and conveying thematic concerns. Beyond its basic function of verbal exchange, language in film has a performative dimension, influencing audience interpretation and reinforcing ideological messages (Richardson, 2010). The way characters speak, what they say, and how they respond to one another contribute significantly to the film's storytelling process. In particular, dialogue in religious and morally-driven films often serves a didactic purpose, aiming to instruct, persuade, or affirm specific beliefs (Lindsay, 2023). Given this, the study of language in film requires a pragmatic approach that goes beyond mere textual analysis to explore how speech functions in communicative contexts.

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, has grown into one of the most influential film industries in the world, producing films that reflect cultural, religious, and social realities. One of its sub-genres, Christian films, has gained popularity due to its emphasis on spiritual themes, moral teachings, and evangelistic messages. Among these, *Abèjoyè*, a faith-based film series by Mike Bamiloye of the Mount Zion Faith Ministries Nigeria, stands out as a work that integrates Christian doctrine with dramatic storytelling. The film employs language not just as a narrative device but as a means of ideological reinforcement, where utterances are often loaded with moral, spiritual, and persuasive functions. Season 5 of the series, in particular, presents a compelling case for analysing how dialogue is used to shape interactions between characters, convey spiritual authority, and promote religious values.

Despite the growing popularity of religious cinema in Nollywood, there is limited scholarly engagement with the linguistic dimensions of these films. Most existing studies on Nollywood focus on themes, cinematography, or socio-political representations, while little attention has been paid to the pragmatic functions of dialogue in faith-based films (Olakunbi-Black,

2024; Olayiwola, 2019). This gap presents an opportunity to explore how language operates in *Abèjoyè* beyond its literal meaning, examining its function as a tool for persuasion, conflict resolution, and ideological transmission.

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it aims to identify the different types of speech acts employed in the dialogues of *Abèjoyè* Season 5. Second, it seeks to analyse how these speech acts function in character interactions, particularly in moments of conflict, persuasion, and moral instruction. Lastly, the study examines the broader implications of these speech acts in reinforcing Christian beliefs and shaping audience reception.

This study seeks to address the lack of focused linguistic analysis of religious Nollywood films, particularly in terms of how dialogue functions pragmatically. While previous research has explored religious themes in Nollywood cinema (Onyemauwa & Akuchie, 2020; Gobo, 2020), little has been done to examine how language performs actions that drive narratives and influence viewers. By applying a pragmatic lens to the dialogues in *Abèjoyè*, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how speech acts operate in filmic discourse.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both film studies and linguistic pragmatics. By examining how language is used performatively in *Abèjoyè*, the study provides insights into the role of dialogue in religious films. It also contributes to the broader discourse on Nollywood's impact, shedding light on how Nigerian filmmakers use speech to engage, instruct, and influence their audiences. More broadly, this research adds to the field of pragmatics by demonstrating how speech acts function in cinematic storytelling, thereby enriching scholarly discussions on the intersection of language, religion, and media.

## Literature Review

The study of speech acts in media discourse, particularly in religious and supernatural narratives, draws upon a robust body of literature within pragmatics, communication theory, and film studies. Speech Act Theory, originally

developed by Austin (1962) and extended by Searle (1976), posits that language is not merely used to convey information but also to perform actions. This framework is especially pertinent in film dialogues, where utterances often serve to influence, persuade, or assert authority, rather than solely communicate facts.

In religious communication, indirectness and politeness strategies are particularly significant. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory explains how speakers use indirect speech acts to maintain social harmony and mitigate face-threatening acts. This has been extended to the analysis of pastoral discourse, where leaders often rely on indirect directives to guide behaviour without imposing authority overtly (Collins, 2009; Waziri, 2022). In such contexts, religious figures utilise language to foster compliance while preserving the agency of their audience.

Research by Inya (2012) specifically examines hesitation and delay tactics in Nigerian Christian sermons, highlighting how speakers balance authority and empathy through strategic speech acts. His work reveals that speech acts serve dual purposes: expressing emotional states and guiding moral decision-making. This is consistent with Mariam's (2024) findings on the role of expressive acts in religious narratives, which are often used to depict internal conflict and spiritual growth.

The performative nature of religious language is further elaborated in the works of Sawyer (2012) and Moro (2018), who argue that in mystical traditions, speech has an inherent force capable of manifesting spiritual realities. Performative speech acts, as identified by Austin (1962), are crucial in supernatural discourse, where declarations are believed to bring about real-world consequences. Asprem (2020) explores incantatory and ritual language, emphasising the role of repetition and metaphor in asserting mystical authority, particularly in African oral traditions.

African oral literature has long recognised the power of words as transformative tools. Imbo (2002) notes that, in traditional African spirituality, language is not neutral but instrumental in shaping communal and

metaphysical realities. Nollywood films, particularly those with Christian themes, often integrate these oral traditions into their narratives, using speech to signify spiritual power, identity, and transformation (Viljoen, 2016).

Within the Nollywood context, language serves as a rhetorical device that reflects and shapes socio-religious ideologies. Nwankwo (2015) argues that performative acts in Nigerian religious films often represent a struggle between competing powers, with speech functioning as both a tool of domination and resistance. Praise, Okpala, and Alaku (2023) further assert that Nigerian pastors in media employ emotionally charged, indirect language to engage their audiences and reinforce theological worldviews.

Richardson (2010) underscores the ideological function of language in religious media, noting that Christian films use speech not just for dramatic effect but as a method of moral instruction. In this sense, speech acts in films like *Abèjoyè* serve as mechanisms for both narrative development and ideological transmission, embedding Christian values into everyday discourse and character interactions.

This study draws upon these scholarly frameworks to analyse the use of speech acts in *Abèjoyè* Season 5, demonstrating how dialogue in Nollywood Christian cinema functions as a site for ideological contestation and spiritual transformation. Through a pragmatic lens, it explores how directives, expressives, commissives, and performatives shape both interpersonal dynamics and broader moral narratives.

### Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to analyse the use of speech acts in *Abèjoyè* Season 5. Since the study focuses on how language functions in the film's dialogues, a pragmatic analysis is most suitable. The research involves a close analysis of five selected scenes, identifying and categorising speech acts—specifically directives, expressives, commissives, declaratives, and performatives—based on John Searle's Speech Act Theory, with a focus on how these acts function within religious and supernatural

discourse in *Abèjoyè* Season 5. Through purposive sampling, specific dialogues that showcase key communicative interactions—such as moments of persuasion, conflict resolution, and moral instruction—are examined to determine their illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects.

The data for this study consist of transcribed dialogues from *Abèjoyè* Season 5. The dialogues, originally in Yoruba, were translated into English by the researcher and verified by two native Yoruba speakers with academic backgrounds in linguistics to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity. The transcription process ensures that key linguistic elements—including tone, emphasis, and contextual usage—are preserved. To validate the transcription, inter-rater reliability was employed, with independent reviewers confirming consistency and accuracy across samples. The study employs discourse analysis as a tool to interpret how speech acts function within the film's socio-religious context. Specifically, it adopts John Searle's Speech Act Theory, which categorises utterances into five types: directives (attempts to get the hearer to do something), commissives (commitments to future actions), expressives (revelations of the speaker's psychological state), assertives (statements of belief or description), and declarations (utterances that change social reality simply by being spoken). The selected scenes include precise time stamps from the film, and references to these specific minutes are maintained consistently across both the findings and discussion sections to ensure analytical transparency and traceability. The findings are then thematically categorised to highlight recurring patterns in the use of directives, commissives, expressives, and other illocutionary acts.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in John Searle's Speech Act Theory (1976), which provides a framework for analysing how utterances perform actions rather than merely conveying information. Searle classifies speech acts into five main categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Each category

serves different communicative functions within dialogues. In the context of *Abèjoyè*, these speech acts are integral to the film's religious messaging, character interactions, and dramatic progression. Searle's framework is particularly suitable for this study because it emphasises the relationship between language and action—a central theme in religious discourse where words often serve as instruments of spiritual intervention, instruction, and transformation. The theory provides a clear typology of speech acts that allows for precise categorisation and analysis of the characters' utterances in the film.

Directives (e.g., commands, requests, warnings) are commonly used by spiritual leaders in the film, such as pastors and elders, to instruct or correct characters. Commissives (e.g., promises, vows, commitments) appear in dialogues where characters make spiritual or moral commitments. Expressives (e.g., blessings, curses, prayers, emotions) are evident in moments of emotional or spiritual intensity, particularly in scenes involving prayers or supernatural encounters. Declaratives (e.g., pronouncements, spiritual decrees) are used by religious figures when making authoritative statements, such as pastoral blessings or condemnations of evil forces.

Additionally, this study draws on Pragmatics Theory, particularly the concept of performativity as introduced by J.L. Austin (1962). The idea that "saying is doing" is especially relevant to religious films, where spoken words often have spiritual or supernatural implications. The study also considers contextual pragmatics, which emphasises how meaning is shaped by situational and cultural factors (Mey, 2001). Given *Abèjoyè*'s Christian framework, understanding how speech acts function within its religious and cultural context is essential.

Furthermore, for a speech act to be successful—what Austin and Searle call "felicitous"—certain conditions must be met, including appropriate context, speaker authority, and hearer recognition. These felicity conditions are evident in *Abèjoyè*, where pastors, witches, and spiritual elders hold socially and spiritually sanctioned roles that grant them the illocutionary force to perform blessings, commands, or curses



effectively. Their utterances succeed because the characters—and by extension the audience—recognise their authority within the narrative's moral and religious framework.

By applying these theories, the study aims to demonstrate that dialogue in *Àbèjoyè* is not merely a storytelling device but a performative tool that enacts spiritual authority, moral persuasion, and ideological reinforcement.

### Synopsis of *Àbèjoyè* Season 5

*Àbèjoyè* Season 5 continues the overarching theme of spiritual conflict, redemption, and the life-changing power of faith in Christian doctrine. The season follows the protagonist, Olayiotan Àbèjoyè, and his immediate family as they navigate the complexities of spiritual warfare, cultural traditions, and moral dilemmas. The narrative underscores the superiority of Christian faith over traditional and occult practices, reinforcing biblical teachings through character development and plot progression.

A central focus of this season is the character of Kinkin-Yìùn, who faces a decisive confrontation with her past as witches from Ajíbógun attempt to lure her back into their fold. However, equipped with a profound understanding of Christian doctrine—specifically the significance of the Lord's Supper—she resists their influence and reaffirms her commitment to Christ. This struggle serves as a microcosm of the broader conflict between Christian salvation and indigenous spiritual practices.

The season also explores the contrasting spiritual journeys of different characters. While Baba Àbèjoyè undergoes rapid spiritual growth, immersing himself in scripture and embodying Christian teachings, Chief Awòpònré in America demonstrates the consequences of a superficial faith. His failure to nurture his spiritual life results in his eventual regression into his former pursuit of power, illustrating the biblical warning about the dangers of a lukewarm faith.

Beyond the spiritual battles, *Àbèjoyè* Season 5 addresses socio-cultural issues, particularly in the area of family and marriage. The marriage of Bámidéle and Láidé faces significant strain due to Láidé's professional

advancements, which lead to emotional and physical distance from her husband. Her increased detachment and acts of infidelity expose the fragility of their relationship, highlighting the themes of marital commitment, gender roles, and the consequences of neglect within the family unit.

The political and spiritual transformation of the King serves as another critical narrative arc. His rejection of traditional rituals and ancestral sacrifices in favour of Christian beliefs sparks conflict with the ruling elite and spiritual authorities who uphold the old ways. His defiance and ultimate victory over adversarial forces symbolise the tension between Christianity and indigenous religious practices, reflecting the broader discourse on religious conversion and cultural identity.

Through its multi-layered narrative, *Àbèjoyè* Season 5 critically engages with the themes of faith, cultural transition, and spiritual resilience. The season presents a compelling exploration of the consequences of religious commitment, the enduring struggle between light and darkness, and the transformative power of unwavering belief in Christian doctrine. As a work of religious drama, it serves not only as an entertainment piece but also as a theological and socio-cultural commentary on contemporary Christian experiences within African societies.

### Findings and Discussion

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping meaning and interaction in films, and *Àbèjoyè* Season 5 serves as an exemplary case study for examining the use of speech acts in film dialogues. By analysing conversations within the film, this study identifies various forms of pragmatic expressions, demonstrating how speech acts function as tools for communication, persuasion, and ideological reinforcement.

The dialogues in *Àbèjoyè* Season 5 demonstrate the intentional deployment of speech acts to construct meaning, establish authority, and evoke responses. As John Searle's Speech Act Theory suggests, language is not just about conveying information but about performing actions (Saragi et al., 2019). The film's dialogues illustrate this through different types of speech

acts, including directives, expressives, commissives, declaratives, and performatives, each shaping the interactions between characters.

### Directive and Expressive Speech Acts in Pastoral Conversations

In *Àbèjoyè* Season 5, the conversation between the Pastor and Awoponire illustrates the use of directive and expressive speech acts in religious discourse. Directives are utterances that seek to get the hearer to do something, while expressives convey psychological states or emotions. These speech acts play a crucial role in shaping interpersonal interactions, particularly in faith-based conversations where persuasion and emotional engagement are key.

The Pastor's dialogue with Awoponire is structured around a request that serves as a directive speech act:

**Pastor:** "He wants to discuss with you about the possibility of bringing you as one of the Guest Ministers to share your testimony." (*Àbèjoyè*, 2021, 17:30–17:47)

This utterance contains an indirect directive, as it presents the invitation as a possibility rather than an outright command. The Pastor does not directly tell Awoponire, "You must come," but subtly frames it as an opportunity, making it more persuasive. The phrase "the possibility of bringing you" is particularly significant because it leaves room for consideration rather than imposing an obligation.

The Pastor's invitation is an example of an indirect directive, a linguistic strategy commonly used in persuasive religious discourse (Hernández & de Mendoza, 2002). Indirect directives are often more effective in religious contexts because they reduce resistance by allowing the listener to feel they have agency in decision-making (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Collins, 2009). By presenting the request as a discussion rather than an imposition, the Pastor increases the likelihood of a positive response. This technique aligns with the broader strategies of politeness theory, which emphasise maintaining social harmony through indirect and face-saving communication (Waziri, 2022).

This subtle approach is particularly significant in faith-based films, where spiritual

leaders must balance authority with compassion. The effectiveness of religious persuasion often relies on the ability to guide rather than force decisions, as seen in the Pastor's strategy. The use of indirect directives ensures that followers perceive spiritual leadership as an invitation rather than coercion, reinforcing the relational aspect of pastoral communication.

However, Awoponire's response reflects expressive speech acts, as it conveys hesitation and personal struggle:

**Awoponire:** "I will think over it, sir." (*Àbèjoyè*, 2021, 17:56–17:58)

His use of "think over it" signals internal conflict, showing that he is not immediately receptive to the idea. Awoponire's hesitant response functions as an expressive speech act, revealing his emotional state and reluctance. His wording suggests internal struggle, a common communicative strategy when individuals wish to delay commitment (Holmes, 2013). This moment of hesitation illustrates how expressive acts are used to mitigate difficult decisions, particularly in religious or moral discussions where individuals must reconcile personal struggles with external expectations (Mariam, 2024).

This response also reflects a broader pattern in religious discourse, where individuals facing moral or spiritual decisions often use language to buy time before making a commitment. The phrase "I will think over it" serves as a soft rejection or a deferment of decision-making, allowing Awoponire to avoid immediate compliance while leaving room for future reconsideration. This aligns with Inya's (2012) observations on the role of hesitation and delay tactics in religious interactions, where followers may resist directives in a manner that does not overtly challenge spiritual authority.

The Pastor's response, however, challenges this hesitation:

**Pastor:** "You will think over it?" (*Àbèjoyè*, 2021, 17:59–18:01)

Here, the Pastor's echo-question functions as an expressive act, revealing his surprise and disappointment. The repetition of Awoponire's words serves to emphasise the unexpected nature of his hesitation. This moment demonstrates how speech acts shape

interpersonal dynamics. The Pastor expects a firm commitment, but Awoponire's reluctance alters the flow of conversation, creating a moment of tension and persuasion. The echo-question subtly pressures Awoponire by making his hesitation more noticeable, nudging him towards reconsideration.

This interaction showcases how language is used to guide, resist, and negotiate decisions, with directive acts initiating action and expressive acts revealing personal stances. The Pastor's rhetorical strategy here is consistent with Inya's (2012) analysis of religious communication, where leaders often employ repetitions and reformulations to subtly challenge hesitation and encourage spiritual obedience. Religious discourse often involves an implicit expectation of compliance, and when followers show hesitation, leaders use language to reinforce commitment.

Moreover, the Pastor's use of an echo-question serves another strategic purpose—shifting the burden of explanation onto Awoponire. By questioning his hesitation, the Pastor implicitly asks for justification, thereby increasing social pressure for Awoponire to provide a more definitive response. This tactic is commonly observed in persuasive communication, where subtle linguistic cues are employed to encourage compliance without overt coercion.

The findings here highlight the strategic use of directive and expressive speech acts in pastoral conversations, particularly in the exchange between the Pastor and Awoponire. This interaction illustrates how religious figures employ indirect directives to encourage compliance while maintaining an air of humility and persuasion. Similarly, expressive speech acts function as tools for emotional engagement and negotiation in decision-making. These findings align with existing studies on religious discourse and persuasion, which emphasise that pastoral communication often relies on indirectness to maintain relational harmony (Inya, 2012).

This exchange also demonstrates the power dynamics in religious discourse, where leaders use subtle linguistic strategies to guide followers' decisions. By structuring directives as

invitations rather than commands, religious leaders make their requests more persuasive, ensuring that followers comply while feeling they have made independent choices. This aligns with the study by Praise, Okpala, and Alaku (2023) on the rhetoric of Nigerian pastors, which argues that religious persuasion often relies on indirect and emotionally charged language.

Furthermore, this conversation highlights the role of face-saving strategies in religious communication. The Pastor's indirect directive allows Awoponire to maintain his sense of agency while still being influenced towards a particular decision. Meanwhile, Awoponire's use of an expressive act to delay commitment reflects an attempt to navigate the social expectations placed upon him without outright refusal. This dynamic interaction illustrates the complex interplay between persuasion, politeness, and power in religious discourse.

Beyond the immediate interaction, these findings also reinforce the role of language as an ideological tool in religious cinema. The Pastor's use of directives and expressive speech acts is not just about communication but about reinforcing spiritual and moral expectations. This supports Richardson's (2010) argument that religious films use language not only for storytelling but also for moral instruction and ideological reinforcement. By employing strategic speech acts, the film subtly conveys broader themes of faith, obedience, and the tension between personal struggle and spiritual duty.

### **Performative Speech Acts in the Witches' Dialogue**

Another significant use of speech acts in *Àbẹ̀jọ̀yẹ̀* Season 5 is seen in the witches' interaction with Kinkin-Yiun. This scene is particularly rich in performative speech acts, where utterances do not merely describe reality but actively shape it. According to Austin (1962), performative speech acts are statements that do not just convey information but actually perform an action. This is crucial in supernatural and religious discourse, where words are believed to carry spiritual force.

The witches' dialogue is structured around powerful declarations that seek to affirm their authority, intimidate, and exert control over

Kinkin-Yiun. From the outset, their speech is filled with self-affirming performative statements:

**Witch 1:** “We are the thousand spirit birds that screech in the jungle.”

**Witch 2:** “We are the combination of all the witches that gather under the sacred tree.” (*Àbèjoyè*, 2021, 1:57–2:16)

These statements function as performative speech acts because they do not merely describe the witches’ identity; they actively establish and reinforce it. By uttering these words, the witches perform the act of asserting dominance and invoking fear. In mystical and religious traditions, words themselves serve as a source of power—a concept well documented in linguistic studies (Sawyer, 2012; Moro, 2018).

This strategy aligns with research on incantatory language, where repetition and metaphor create an aura of dominance and supernatural legitimacy (Asprem, 2020). The metaphorical imagery in their statements, linking the witches to wild, untamed forces, amplifies their illocutionary force, making their authority seem unquestionable. By presenting themselves as part of a larger, powerful collective—“the thousand spirit birds” and “all the witches that gather under the sacred tree”—they position themselves as figures of immense mystical power. In African oral traditions, language is often regarded as an active force capable of shaping reality and bringing spiritual truths into existence (Imbo, 2002). The witches’ dialogue reflects this belief, demonstrating how Nollywood films integrate indigenous oral traditions with Christian theological themes. Their performative speech acts function in a way that aligns with traditional African spirituality, where spoken words can summon forces, invoke curses, or assert dominance over others. However, this supernatural control is not absolute, as the unfolding conversation with Kinkin-Yiun later reveals.

The implication here is that language in *Àbèjoyè* is more than a communicative tool; it is a weapon of supernatural control. The witches use performative speech acts to establish their dominance, ensuring that their presence is not

only acknowledged but also feared. However, as the scene progresses, the film subverts this power dynamic, showing how the failure of performative speech acts can symbolise a spiritual shift. In Christian narratives, divine authority is often depicted as superior to occult forces (Viljoen, 2016), and Kinkin-Yiun’s resistance to the witches’ words exemplifies this theme.

### Directive and Commissive Speech Acts in Spiritual Power Struggles

The exchange between Witch 3 and Kinkin-Yiun further illustrates the power of speech acts, particularly through the use of directive and commissive speech acts. Directive speech acts are used to compel someone to take action, while commissive speech acts commit the speaker to a particular future action (Ashfiya & Degaf, 2023). In this scene, the witches attempt to reassert their authority through questioning and direct commands:

**Witch 3:** “Why did you refuse to bring back - reports of the errands?”

**Witch 3:** “Kinkin-Yiun, why did you refuse to come back?” (*Àbèjoyè*, 2021, 2:21–2:38)

These questions function as directive speech acts, demanding accountability from Kinkin-Yiun. In hierarchical spiritual structures, directives are often used to reinforce power relations, compelling subordinates to act in accordance with group expectations. By interrogating Kinkin-Yiun, the witches attempt to force her into submission, reminding her of her obligations and demanding that she explain her defiance.

However, Kinkin-Yiun’s response disrupts the witches’ expectations, functioning as a counter-performative act:

**Kinkin-Yiun:** “I got there, and my eyes got opened that I had been in darkness.” (*Àbèjoyè*, 2021, 3:00–3:12)

Her use of metaphorical language (“my eyes got opened”) signifies spiritual enlightenment, aligning with Christian conversion narratives where divine revelation leads to a break from former allegiances (Inya, 2012). This utterance is a performative speech act in itself, as it does not just describe a change but actively marks the moment of her transformation.



By speaking these words, Kinkin-Yiun is not only explaining her newfound faith but also rejecting the witches' control.

This moment also illustrates the perlocutionary effect of speech acts. While the witches' initial speech was intended to demand compliance, Kinkin-Yiun's response instead creates shock and disruption among them. The implication here is that power in supernatural discourse is not absolute—it depends on whether the listener accepts or rejects the performative act. By rejecting their authority, Kinkin-Yiun neutralises their control, shifting the balance of power.

### The Failure of Performative Speech Acts in the Face of Spiritual Resistance

Kinkin-Yiun's speech not only resists the witches' commands but also includes a commissive speech act, committing herself to a new allegiance:

**Kinkin-Yiun:** "I met with greater power, and the power has overcome mine." (*Abèjoyè*, 2021, 3:12–3:17)

By admitting that she has encountered a superior force, Kinkin-Yiun performs a commissive speech act, declaring her renunciation of the witches' authority. This disrupts the original intent of the conversation, forcing a shift in the power dynamics. The phrase "the power has overcome mine" symbolises her spiritual surrender to a higher force—a common theme in Christian storytelling where individuals acknowledge divine supremacy.

The witches, in turn, attempt to reassert their control through a combination of threatening and declarative speech acts:

**Witch 2:** "Come closer, we need to empower you." (*Abèjoyè*, 2021, 3:16–3:36)

Here, the phrase "we need to empower you" functions as both a directive speech act (ordering Kinkin-Yiun to obey) and a declarative speech act (asserting their continued dominance). However, because Kinkin-Yiun has already rejected their authority, the speech act fails to achieve its intended perlocutionary effect. This demonstrates that for a performative act to succeed, certain conditions must be met—one of which is that the audience must recognise and accept the authority of the speaker (Austin, 1962).

Since Kinkin-Yiun no longer acknowledges their power, their words have lost their effectiveness.

This aligns with Nwankwo's (2015) analysis of power struggles in Nigerian religious rhetoric, which suggests that when authority is challenged, performative speech acts can lose their force. The witches' speech acts, which were initially used to establish dominance, become ineffective in the face of Kinkin-Yiun's spiritual resistance.

The broader implication of this scene is that spiritual authority in Nollywood Christian films is often depicted as contingent upon obedience. The failure of the witches' speech acts reinforces the film's Christian ideological framework, where divine power is shown to be superior to occult forces. This narrative device not only aligns with Christian theology but also serves as a moral lesson for the audience, emphasising the necessity of breaking free from dark influences.

Therefore, performative speech acts play a crucial role in shaping supernatural authority and power dynamics in the witches' dialogue. Unlike ordinary speech, which merely describes reality, performative utterances enact change—particularly within the spiritual and mystical context of the film. The witches' self-affirming declarations, directives, and threats all serve to establish dominance, while Kinkin-Yiun's counter-performative acts disrupt their authority, marking a significant shift in power.

These findings align with research on language as power in religious and supernatural discourses (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976) and provide insight into how Nollywood Christian films use speech acts to construct and challenge ideological structures. Thus, this scene in *Abèjoyè* Season 5 exemplifies how language functions not only as a means of communication but as a powerful force that shapes spiritual realities.

### Conclusion

This study concludes that speech acts in *Abèjoyè* Season 5 are not merely linguistic tools but active forces that drive persuasion, power struggles, and ideological reinforcement. The analysis of directive and expressive speech acts in pastoral conversations reveals that religious leaders use

indirect directives to persuade followers, while expressives function as tools for emotional negotiation.

Similarly, performative speech acts in the witches' dialogue demonstrate how language constructs and sustains supernatural authority. The witches' self-affirming declarations serve to establish dominance, but Kinkin-Yiun's counter-performative acts disrupt this, leading to a shift in power. The failure of the witches' speech acts reinforces the film's Christian ideological message, wherein divine power supersedes occult forces.

This study concludes that speech acts in Nollywood Christian films function beyond storytelling; they shape belief systems, reinforce religious ideology, and serve as performative acts that influence character decisions and audience perception. Through pragmatic analysis, this study demonstrates that dialogue in *Àbèjoyè* is a site of power negotiation, where language dictates allegiance, resistance, and transformation.

## References

- Ashfiya, H., & Degaf, A. (2023). An analysis of commissive speech acts used by the main characters in women-centric movies. *International Journal of Humanity Studies*, 7(1), 21 – 35. <https://doi.org/10.24071/ijhs.v7i1.4857>
- Asprem, E. (2020). The magical theory of politics: Memes, magic, and the enchantment of social forces in the American magic war. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 23(4), 15-42. <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2020.23.4.15>
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford University Press.
- Bamiloye, M. (Director). (2021). *ÀBÈJOYÈ* (Season 5, Episode 1) [Film]. Mount Zion Film Productions.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Collins, D. E. (2009). Indirectness in legal speech acts: An argument against the Out of Ritual hypothesis. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41(3), 427 – 439. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.06.010>
- Gobo, P. (2020). Nollywood, Religion and Development in Nigeria. *East African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(1), 49 – 62. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajis.2.1.177>
- Imbo, S. O. (2002). *Oral traditions as philosophy: Okot p'Bitek's legacy for African philosophy*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Inya, O. (2012). Defending a thesis: Pragmatic acts in contemporary Christian apologetics. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(10), 2016-2023.
- Lindsay, J. (2023). Documentary Film as Interreligious Dialogue: A Cognitive Perspective. *Religions*, 14(3), 293. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030293>
- Hernández, L. P., & de Mendoza, F. J. R. (2002). Grounding, semantic motivation, and conceptual interaction in indirect directive speech acts. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34(3), 259-284. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(02\)80002-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)80002-9)
- Holmes, J. (2013). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Routledge.
- Mariam, A. (2024). Speech acts on Nigerian classroom discourse: A discourse analysis approach. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies*, 6(1), 20-32. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v6i1.15280>
- Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics: An Introduction*. Blackwell.
- Moro, P. A. (2018). Witchcraft, sorcery, and magic. *The international encyclopedia of anthropology*, 1-9.

- Nwankwo, B. O. (2015). Rhetorics and realities of managing ethno-religious conflicts: The Nigerian experience. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 3(3), 292–300. <https://doi.org/10.12691/education-3-3-7>
- Olakunbi-Black, T. (2024). The Evolution and Influence of Christian Filmmaking in Nigeria. *African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions*, 7(3), 90 – 97. <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJCHRT-MLN0EIY6>
- Olayiwola, E. (2019). Nigerian evangelical film genres: the spectacle of the spiritual. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 32(2), 115 – 130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1610364>
- Onyemauwa, V. U., & Akuchie, R. (2020). Thematic issues in selected Nollywood movies: A paradigm shift for the promotion of Christian virtues and morality. *Evaia: International Journal of Ethics and Values*, 1(1).
- Praise, A. C., Okpala, N. V., & Alaku, M. E. (2023). Exploring rhetorical strategies in selected South Eastern Pentecostal church sermons. *Journal of Human, Social and Political Science Research*, 2(2). <https://ssaapublications.com/index.php/sjhspsr/article/view/107>
- Richardson, K. (2010). *Television Dramatic Dialogue: A Sociolinguistic Study*. Oxford University Press.
- Saragi, V., Nuratika, S., Fransiska, F., Yolanda, M., & Ardiyanti, N. (2019). A Review of Speech Act Theories Focusing on Searle (1969). *ELSYA : Journal of English Language Studies*, 1(2), 61-68. <https://doi.org/10.31849/elsya.v1i2.3529>
- Sawyer, J. (2012). *Sacred languages and sacred texts*. Routledge.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A Classification of Illocutionary Acts. *Language in Society*, 5(1), 1–23.
- Viljoen, F. P. (2016). Perspectives from the Christ hymn in Colossians 1:13–20 on cosmic powers and spiritual forces within an African context. In *die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, 50(2), a 2433. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i2.2433>
- Waziri, Z. Y. (2022). Politeness theory and resolution of misunderstandings in social media communication. *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*, 30(2), 61-70. <https://doi.org/10.62250/nsuk.2022.30.2.61-70>