

Representation of Intense Loneliness Through Speech Acts in *White Nights* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

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Abstract

This study aims to explore illocutionary types in *White Nights* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky and to examine how the illocutionary acts represent intense loneliness experienced by the narrator in the novel using Searle's Speech Act Theory. This study applies a qualitative descriptive method by analyzing the narrator's utterances that contain illocutionary acts, which were collected through a close-reading technique. After collecting the data, the researcher categorized the utterances into different types of illocutionary acts. The study found that in *White Nights*, there are 61 utterances identified as illocutionary acts. They consist of 22 expressive, 19 assertive, 11 directive and 9 commissive, while declarative speech acts were not found within the literary work. In the study, the author categorized each type of these illocutionary acts to identify and examine how they represent the narrator's intense loneliness. In addition, the narrator's incapacity to form a relationship, his needs for emotional understanding, fears of being rejected are reflected through each type of illocutionary acts. These findings indicate that speech acts are not only used to identify and interpret the intended meaning behind the character's utterances but also provides a deeper explanation of how intense loneliness is represented through language use in the literary works.

Keywords: Illocutionary acts, intense loneliness, Language, Misunderstanding, Speech acts

INTRODUCTION

We are constantly engaged with language in our lives. Language is an essential aspect in human interaction and influences the effectiveness of communication to establish relationships between the speaker and the listener in transmitting information, ideas, feelings, and intentions. According to Mwakapina, J. W (2021), language is the

fundamental aspect of human beings; through language, humans can communicate with others. Sapir, E (1921) also argues that language is an inherent method of expressing ideas, desires or emotions, through a system of spoken symbols. However, in some cases, some individuals have difficulty and struggle in expressing their intention, which can lead

to misunderstanding or failure in communication as a consequence.

Misunderstanding occurs when the listener does not achieve the same understanding as the speaker intended, whether regarding an activity or a referent (Robles, 2017). The feeling of being misunderstood could affect individuals' well-being, for instance, by unconsciously undermining their energy for their activities (Segerstrom, 2007, as cited in Crockett et al., 2022). This feeling of being misunderstood can also hinder the development of close relationships between individuals. It then creates a gap between the speaker and the listener that can foster feelings of loneliness.

Loneliness occurs when a person lacks intimacy and fails to meet personal expectations regarding others (Russell & Pang, 2016). This statement demonstrates how loneliness can lead to unpleasant feelings and affect a person's physical and emotional well-being. In addition, Perlman and Peplau (1981) and Rokach and Patel (2024) state that loneliness is perceived as a discontented feeling about one's interactions with others because the connection did not achieve the goals the person expected, compared to the actual relationship they have. Loneliness is not only related to a person's emotional state but also affects the development of various coping mechanisms, the maintenance of interpersonal relationships, and the expression of oneself through language. Thus, speech acts are used in this study to examine the intended meaning behind the speaker's utterances that represent loneliness.

According to John Langshaw Austin (1962), the speech act theory explains the intended meaning of a speaker's utterance and refers to the actions performed through utterances. John Langshaw Austin explains that speech acts consist of three types:

locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary acts refer to an act that states the literal meaning of utterances. Illocutionary acts refer to an action that is performed through utterances with a certain intention behind it. Perlocutionary refers to an act that influences the listener, which is performed by making utterances. While these three types of speech acts are closely related, this study focuses primarily on illocutionary acts. Illocutionary acts allow the researcher to identify how loneliness is represented; therefore, it employs illocutionary acts to understand the speaker's intended meaning and is reflected through how the speaker expresses the emotions, responding to the other speaker and forming meaningful relationships through one's utterances, and it also helps to avoid misunderstanding during communication. Furthermore, five categories of illocutionary acts were introduced by J. Searle (1979), such as directives, expressive, assertive, declarations, and commissive. Therefore, illocutionary acts are relevant to analyze the intended meaning in literary works, including *White Nights* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

The relation between speech acts and loneliness can be observed through the narrator's utterances. *White Nights* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, published in 1848, translated by Olga Shartse. A literary work presented in a form of a written confession by an unnamed narrator in the novel. The narrator, who lives in isolation and longs for connections with others.

Previous studies on speech acts have been conducted to analyze how meaning can be understood through language in the speaker's intention based on specific contexts through various media, such as literary works, films. (Rahayu et al., 2018; Sefriana, 2020;

Noviyanti & Weda, 2024; Milantina et al, 2025; Sutrisno & Rahim, 2025). In addition, illocutionary acts have been widely used to identify the speaker's intended meaning and classify the types of illocutionary acts that are used by the speaker. (Mayrita, 2020; Dewi & Candra, 2024; Kabalmay, T., & Susanto, D, 2025). On the other hand, several scholars on loneliness have focused on the psychological aspects, social behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Moore, 1978; Perlman and Peplau, 1981, 1998; Rokach and Patel, 2024)

There are also several scholars who analyze *White Nights*; these scholars have mainly focused on the narrator's psychology. Several researchers emphasize topics like alienation, defense mechanisms, inner conflict, emotional detachment (Peterson, 2015; Göncüoğlu, 2017; Suryaningrum & Atmaja, 2024; Subha & Lakshmi, 2025), and the concept of love (Yousefvand & Tatari, 2015). These studies tend to focus on the narrator's psychological aspects, thus not analyzing the communicative function in depth.

Although previous studies have examined *White Nights* through different lenses. The majority of findings focus more on psychological aspects than on identifying communicative intentions. Therefore, this study aims to identify the various types of illocutionary acts in the narrator's utterances and to examine how these acts are used to represent intense loneliness in *White Nights*.

METHODS

The researcher in this study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the representation of intense loneliness through speech acts in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *White Nights*. Qualitative research aims to analyze and comprehend the meaning of human experience, identify subtleties in

context that are often overlooked, and relate them to social issues (J. Creswell, 2009; Atmowardoyo, 2018). The research employs qualitative methods, using textual and non-numeric data such as words and other forms of expression.

This study employs two types of data sources: primary and secondary. The primary data source is the text of *White Nights* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, and the secondary data sources are journals, books, and prior studies on speech acts, illocutionary acts, and loneliness. The research data consists of utterances made by the narrator in the novel *White Nights*. The data were collected through close reading related to loneliness, identifying the narrator's utterances, and categorizing those relevant to the research objectives. However, not all the identified data were analyzed. They are the most relevant ones, instead.

This study's theoretical foundation is speech act theory, introduced by John Langshaw Austin and further developed by John Searle. In particular, illocutionary acts are used as the theory to classify and analyze the narrator's utterances in *White Nights*. It particularly uses Searle's five categories of illocutionary acts. Furthermore, articulated illocutionary acts are analyzed and interpreted in relation to context and loneliness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of illocutionary acts in *White Nights*

After reading the text of *White Nights*, it is found that there are 60 instances of illocutionary acts in the collected data. These illocutionary acts were then classified using Searle's (1979) theory of five categories of illocutionary acts, namely commissive, assertive, expressive, directive, and

declarative, as presented in the following table.

Table 1. Types of illocutionary acts in *White Nights*

No	Type of Illocutionary acts	Frequency
1	Expressive	22
2	Assertive	19
3	Directive	11
4	Commissive	9
5	Declaration	0
Total		61

Based on Table 1, the most frequent occurred in 22 instances of dialogue, followed by assertive with 19, directives with 11, and commissive with 9. While declarations barely function within the novel. Meaning that the narrator mostly conveyed his emotions through actions rather than words.

The classified data were then analyzed in context to interpret the intended meaning of the utterances. In addition, the illocutionary acts were also analyzed to indicate intense loneliness. It is found that the representation of loneliness in the narrator's utterances is not only shown through his uttered words that express loneliness, but also through illocutionary acts that reflect to the narrator's intense loneliness, his desire to establish an interpersonal relationship, his lack of ability to maintain connection with others, his highly anxious of fear of losing or being rejected, along with his interpretation often mistakenly guessed.

Representation of the intense loneliness through illocutionary acts in *White Nights*

Intense loneliness occurs when a person lacks social intimacy with others and causes emotional discomfort, leading to seeking reassurance, fear of rejection, and a

desire for connection. It creates gaps between a person's expectations and the social relationships they actually have. Therefore, it can be seen in some illocutionary acts uttered by the narrator.

Through the narrator's utterances with a female stranger, Nastenska, his intense loneliness is represented in the following assertive illocutionary acts "I'm already twenty-six years old, but I don't ever see anyone. So then, how can I speak well, cleverly and to the point?" "not a single woman, ever, ever! No acquaintances at all! And all I dream of every day is that, at long last, I will meet someone. Oh, if only you knew how many times I've fallen in love like that!" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 12) The assertive illocutionary act functions to state his lack of social relationships. Furthermore, he strongly emphasizes, through the illocutionary act, the absence of his interpersonal relationships, and the repeated use of "ever, ever" further underscores his lack of experience with women, representing his intense loneliness. As a result of this unfamiliar situation, he began to question his ability to engage with or respond to others, including Nastenska, which left him feeling insecure during such spontaneous interactions.

The datum also shows the narrator's loneliness, which hinders him from pursuing new possibilities for establishing the interpersonal relationships he has always wanted. As a consequence of his difficulties in establishing relationships, the narrator has a tendency to perceive every new interaction as deeply significant to him. Through these experiences, the narrator tends to form emotional attachments and idealize connections that have not yet happened. Therefore, the illocutionary act not only functions to state a fact or describe a situation but also represents how intense loneliness

shapes the narrator's perception of himself and his interpersonal relationships.

Representation of intense loneliness is seen through assertive illocutionary acts, when the narrator stated, "I'm timid with women, I'm nervous", "It's like a dream, but even in my dreams I never guessed that I would ever talk with a woman." (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 11) Through these utterances, it points out a gap between the social relationship he hoped for and the one he actually has in his real life. The gap represents the intense loneliness the narrator experienced. His utterances imply that the narrator hesitated to initiate a conversation; his infrequent communication with others is evident in the way he expressed nervousness. He believes such occurrences, interacting with people, to be something that he can hardly imagine and appears to be an impossible circumstance to him. This suggests that such interactions are unusual for him; as a result, he has few opportunities to form social connections and eventually creates limitations for himself. Due to this condition, his encounter with Nastenka feels awkward, as he is directly confronted with situations he has never experienced before. Therefore, the illocutionary function is not only a manifestation of his desire to establish a new connection but also a representation of his intense loneliness.

The next illocutionary act showing the intense loneliness is expressed, "But is it possible, is it really possible that we shall never see each other again? ... Is it possible it will end like this?" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 15)

From this statement, it can be interpreted that the narrator expresses intense loneliness through his desire to form his recently established relationship with a woman. He employs a directive illocutionary act through his utterance, which is intended to seek reassurance, and he was also

attempting to influence the woman to make a consideration to arrange another meet-up. By doing so, he was hoping to have further interaction with her. It expresses that his fear arises from his encounter with Nastenka; it might only last a day. The narrator views Nastenka as his only opportunity to form a genuine interpersonal relationship. It shows that the narrator readily labeled the relationship as profoundly significant to him, given that he had been lonely for a long time. It strongly made him yearn for a connection. This means the narrator does not view his relationship with a woman as a simple form of communication. However, he concludes that the woman could change something in his life as a whole, as someone who could accompany him, for instance. Therefore, his intense loneliness is reflected in his statements, indicating a fear of losing connection and a need for constant reassurance.

In the following line, intense loneliness can be caused by the limited social competence with others, particularly with women, in the narrator's case. The acts of stating he employed, representing his intense loneliness, indicate that he had been struggling to form connections with people. His statements, "I've grown quite unused to women" and "I never became used to them" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 11), show that his social inexperience has progressively worsened his ability to interact with women. Moreover, he also boldly underlined his statement with "I'm alone," and then followed by "I don't even know how to talk to them. Even now I don't know whether I've said something stupid to you" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 11) which explains that the narrator has never felt comfortable or familiar when he was in a situation where he had to interact with women, which implies that his insufficient social experience is the primary reason for his intense loneliness.

These utterances were caused by his lack of self-confidence in communication, which contributed to his incompetence at engaging with people, especially with women. Therefore, his utterances reflect his intense loneliness and have influenced his approach to interpersonal relationships.

The narrator's fear of losing connection is reflected in this statement "I'll come here tomorrow." (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 15) This utterance, did not only function as a mere desire but also the narrator did not want his encounter with Nastenka to come to an end, he assumed by meeting Nastenka, might be his only opportunity to form a genuine interpersonal relationship, because he had lived in seclusion throughout his life; this could also represent that the narrator values any interaction he had with, even the smallest social interaction. He views his relationship with Nastenka as deeply significant to him, and he grew concerned that the words he uttered might have caused the relationship he has just begun. His concern is reflected in the following statement, where he said, "Oh, forgive me, I'm already making demands..." (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 15) Fearing he might lose his relationship with Nastenka, the narrator began to be extremely anxious and cautious about how his words might be perceived negatively by Nastenka. Through his utterances here, "I'll come here tomorrow. Oh, forgive me, I'm already making demands..." (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 15) It can also be seen that he is highly self-aware; aware of how others might perceive him through his way of speaking or behavior; his actions towards social interaction have made him uncomfortable due to constantly regulating his own behavior; that any mistakes he made might ruin his relationship with Nastenka, in this case. In short, his utterances reflect his fear of being apart from Nastenka; this can be

seen as a form of intense loneliness, in which the narrator views his newly formed relationship as a valuable opportunity.

"I'm terrified even to think about the future, because the future is once again loneliness" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 36). This represents his anxiety grew significantly over the thought of his return to loneliness, as he imagines his future self-returning to where he previously lived in a state of intense loneliness. As he stated in "I'm terrified even to think about the future" shows that he perceived his future as the main cause of his anxiety. An expressive illocutionary act conveyed fear and gratitude towards what the future holds for him. It becomes apparent when the narrator is not only expressing his fear but also describing his future as "once again this stagnant, useless life" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 36), by his statement shows that he views loneliness not merely as the absence of others; rather he stumbled upon a state in which he feels lacking in motivation, directionless in life and unable to achieve the same level of happiness he felt when he was interacting with a woman, in this case with Nastenka. On the contrary, his time spent with Nastenka is seen as an immensely important experience for the narrator, since he had been in a state where he isolated for the longest time. That being said, his utterances reflect his uncontrollable urge to return to his solitary life, which is seen as a manifestation of his intense loneliness.

In this passage, "Oh, Nastenka, Nastenka! If only you knew how lonely I am now!" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 66) The narrator's attempts to influence Nastenka to understand his emotional state, representing intense loneliness, where he only desired to be understood by someone. Continued by "If only you knew how lonely I am now!" The narrator not only conveyed what he had

suppressed but also hoped that Nastenka would eventually understand his miserable life. It shows a gap between his emotional experience and how others perceive him, which is far from what he had expected. To put it another way, the narrator believes that no one truly knows his inner desire or his state.

Through his unrealistic expectations to be understood, the narrator's needs are no longer restricted to the mere presence of someone by his side. The narrator also stated that he still feels his intense loneliness lingering over him despite being with Nastenka at the moment. This utterance represents intense loneliness and can be categorized as an expressive illocutionary function, in which he states that the presence of others cannot simply dispel his loneliness. Rather, he longed for a meaningful connection in which his experiences are successfully understood by others.

This data represents intense loneliness through the misunderstanding that arises in the narrator's interaction with Nastenka. The narrator interprets his interaction with Nastenka as an intimate relationship, whilst it did not happen that way in actual life. His prolonged loneliness affects the way the narrator responds to social situations, leading him to mistakenly conclude that he had developed an attachment to Nastenka. It is reflected in the narrator's words, "I couldn't bear it any longer now" (Dostoyevsky, 1848, p. 36), which indicates that he can no longer keep his feelings hidden and that he has the urge to confess them to Nastenka.

Then, in the following line "you are to blame, you are to blame for all this, not me", this utterance shows that Nastenka's words and actions as someone who triggers his feelings, he would rather interpret it that way, instead of seeing it as a decision that he made

on his own. It shows that he mistook his interaction with Nastenka based on his personal expectations and perceived his conversation with Nastenka according to his emotional needs, resulting in a discrepancy between his intended meaning and the expectation he made.

Through assertive illocutionary acts, he expresses his belief that Nastenka was the sole reason that he confessed his feelings towards Nastenka, and then the narrator's attempt to justify the reason behind it. In other words, his utterance reflects his intense loneliness. The narrator reveals his tendency to interpret interactions subjectively when he is confronted with something that rarely happens to him: interacting with a woman.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it is concluded that speech acts play a significant role in representing intense loneliness in the narrator's utterances in *White Nights*. This study found that intense loneliness is conveyed not only through the narrator's direct utterance expressing it, but also through a variety of illocutionary acts that further explain the narrator's interpersonal relationships.

In this study, the narrator's inability to establish meaningful relationships, his desire for a longer-term relationship, his fear of being neglected, and his belief that his life was slowly losing its meaning, all owing to his loneliness, were indications of intense loneliness.

Thus, speech acts theory, particularly John Searle's concept of illocutionary acts, can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the representation of the character's intense loneliness through an analysis of the narrator's utterance in the literary work.

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