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Construction of Hell as a Non-Physical Condition through Illocutionary Acts in Sartre's *No Exit*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the concept of hell is constructed as a non-physical condition through illocutionary acts and interpersonal conflict in Jean-Paul Sartre's drama *No Exit*. While previous research on the play has predominantly focused on philosophical themes such as existential freedom and the absurdity of human life, the specific linguistic mechanisms—particularly how characters use language to exert power and induce suffering, have received less attention. Addressing this gap, this research highlights how verbal interaction functions as the primary instrument of torment. Using Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts (assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative), this study analyzes selected utterances from the three main characters: Garcin, Inéz, and Estelle. The analysis also considers the perlocutionary effects of each utterance to examine the dynamic discourse battles among the characters. The findings show that out of five illocutionary acts, four are actively utilized to construct this condition. Assertive acts establish fixed and inescapable judgments that trap the characters in a shared reality, while directive acts consistently fail, revealing that the characters cannot mentally or physically avoid one another. Furthermore, expressive acts expose involuntary emotions that cannot be concealed from the judgment of others, and commissive acts demonstrate that promises fail to guarantee connection or safety. The fifth act, declarative, is notably absent, emphasizing the characters' complete lack of authority to alter their environment. These acts demonstrate that hell in the play is not a place of physical torture, but a psychological state continuously produced through inescapable verbal interaction. This study contributes to the understanding of how pragmatic features of language, especially illocutionary acts, can construct social and psychological meaning within literary works.

Keywords: *Drama, Existentialism, Illocutionary Acts, Pragmatics, Sartre*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language in drama and theatre operates within specific artistic and performative conventions that distinguish it from everyday communication. One major difference is that playwrights often use poetic language or rhythmic verse to make the dialogue feel more like art than everyday speech (Sitorus, 2022). Additionally, because the audience must follow the narrative as it develops on stage in real time, drama language is specially created to engage a live audience without being overly complicated or complex (Anson, 2021). Because audiences cannot pause a live performance as they can when reading a text, dramatic dialogue tends to adopt a colloquial rhythm that reflects the pace and sound patterns of natural conversation (Colyvas et al., 2023; Li, 2022). At the same time, dramatic dialogue minimizes distracting verbal fillers, like stutters or false start to maintain clarity and ensure that each utterance

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effectively conveys the character's intentions to the audience (Locher et al., 2023; Li, 2022). In addition, dialogue may include direct address to the audience, momentarily breaking the fourth wall to reveal the deepest character's emotion (Armstrong et al., 2023). Language in drama or theatre is not just conversational but structurally designed to perform actions within the dramatic space.

In the theatre or drama works, dialogue serves as the central means through which characters generate action, negotiate conflict, and shape interpersonal relationships, functioning not just as exposition but as a performative element that drives the narrative (Simasiku & Woldemariam, 2023). Instead of simply expressing information like in casual conversation, dialogue in theatre functions as situated speech, which is an activity used in the changing narrative conditions that maintains suspense and dramatic motion (Boldea, 2022). Playwrights use this theatrical dimension to insert complex social and psychological dynamics into their works, actively creating the characters lived realities through lexical selections and syntactic patterns (Nweke, 2024). As implied meanings and context can carry just as much weight as clear statements, the authenticity of a character's voice and the implicit meanings in their speech are so crucial (Xie et al., 2025). Therefore, it is important to view dramatic utterances as dynamic acts that constantly modify connections within the fictional universe rather than as passive representations of events (Karahanci, 2024). The ideas of speech act theory, especially the idea of illocutionary, which highlights how utterances carry out certain functions and goals within interaction between characters, have a strong connection with the idea of dialogue as action.

Dewi & Utami (2022) stated that illocutionary acts, as an essential part of speech acts, are important to analyze to understand the intended meaning of an utterance. Searle (1969) classified illocutionary acts into five types: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Various scholars have explored how these specific acts function in communication, such as changing reality, expressing beliefs and feelings, or initiating actions and commitments (Yule, 1996; Hutajulu & Herman, 2019; Rosyidi et al., 2019; Husain et al., 2020). However, rather than merely defining each category individually, this study utilizes Searle's classification because it is highly relevant for analyzing the power dynamics and emotional suffering between the characters in the play. These categories illustrate how language functions not just as a tool for performing everyday social actions, but as a primary weapon for shaping interpersonal conflict and psychological tension.

Building on the concept of illocutionary acts, which refer to the speaker's intended meaning and the action performed through an utterance, drama can be seen as a literary genre where characters' speech directly shapes the fictional world (Sinha, 2021). Unlike everyday communication, where certain speech acts such as declarations are usually limited to people with specific authority (for example, in legal or formal situations), characters in drama regularly use illocutionary acts that influence the storyline, relationships, and tension between characters (Simasiku & Woldemariam, 2023; Bergman & Franzen, 2022). In drama, utterances do not simply describe events but actively create meaning and reality within the story (Allington, 2021). This performative nature makes drama different from other literary genres. Therefore, drama uses speech not only to share information but also to build events, develop conflicts, and move the plot forward (Jegede, 2024). Through illocutionary acts, characters can create new situations, shape power relations, and trigger interpersonal conflicts within the dramatic world (Bergman & Franzen, 2022).

In *No Exit*, Jean-Paul Sartre places three individuals in a confined room where the entire dramatic action unfolds through dialogue. As Mahdi (2020) notes, the well-known statement "Hell is other people" redefines punishment not as a physical location, but as a condition arising from human relations. Consistent with this view, the play presents no physical torture; instead, tension develops through the characters' ongoing interactions. Abdalla et al. (2025) emphasize that their suffering

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results not from material punishment, but from their sustained engagement with one another within this enclosed space. In this context, utterances such as accusing, judging, exposing, and confronting operate as illocutionary acts that continually reinforce the condition of hell inside the dramatic setting. This interpretation aligns with Sartre's existentialist perspective, which maintains that in the absence of divine authority, individuals define themselves through their choices and their relations with others (Zuraikat, 2022).

Recent years have seen an increasing interest in illocutionary acts in literature and cinema. Nuraini et al. (2024) utilized Searle's framework in their study of illocutionary acts in the *Paddington* movie and discovered that speech acts help to convey educational values through the interactions of characters. Similarly, Nisa' and Pravitha (2023) analyzed the *Don't Look Up* movie script and found that illocutionary acts play an important role in character interaction and the development of the story. Mariani et al. (2023) investigated the illocutionary acts in *Akeelah and the Bee*, classification of speech acts and indirect speech acts in conflict situations. Kanzunnudin et al. (2023) reported similar results when they analyzed an Indonesian drama script *Cantik Itu Luka* and found that all five types of illocutionary acts were used with assertive acts being the most frequent. Rakaj (2023) also applied Searle's classification to film dialogue and found that assertive and directive acts were the dominant types, showing how characters use language to express ideas and influence others. These studies demonstrate that Searle's framework provides a valuable tool for the analysis of the language of fictional dialogue. But the majority of them concentrate on the identification and classification of illocutionary acts and do not pay much attention to how those utterances construct deeper meanings in the story. Numerous studies have likewise chosen No Exit as the focus of their analysis. Other studies have discussed the absurdity of existence and conflict between the characters (Abdalla et al., 2025), the philosophical reading of the expression "Hell is other people" (Mahdi, 2020), and freedom in Sartre's philosophy (Zuraikat, 2022). These studies, however, are mainly interested in philosophical and thematic interpretations, and do not pay much attention to the linguistic processes through which the characters' suffering is constructed. Thus, the role of illocutionary acts in the construction of hell as a non-physical condition has not been fully explored.

Despite earlier research that has analyzed *No Exit* from various philosophical angles, such as existential freedom, the absurdity of life, and the notion that "Hell is other people," several aspects still need further investigation. First, many studies concentrate mainly on thematic and ideological analyses of the play, highlighting existentialism and human responsibility, but give little consideration to the linguistic strategies through which these themes are expressed. Second, although the play is presented entirely through dialogue, only a few scholars have analyzed how the characters' utterances operate as actions that generate interpersonal tension. While there has already been a great deal of research on illocutionary acts, this study specifically sheds light on how these everyday speech acts are manipulated to create a state of psychological suffering. Consequently, the contribution of illocutionary acts to the construction of a non-physical form of hell has not been thoroughly examined.

To fill the gaps, this study focuses on examining the illocutionary acts in Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* in order to uncover how interpersonal conflict is expressed through language in the dialogue. By identifying and analyzing the types and functions of illocutionary acts produced by the characters, this research seeks to show that hell in the play is not simply a philosophical idea, but a state that is continuously shaped through verbal interaction. Therefore, this study explores how the concept of non-physical hell is constructed through illocutionary acts in *No Exit.*

2. METHOD

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the data. Qualitative research

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aims to understand human behavior by interpreting social phenomena within their natural contexts and constructing a comprehensive picture of the situation being studied (Wati et al., 2025; Latief, 2012).

The data were obtained from the dialogue in the English translation of Jean-Paul Sartre's drama script, *No Exit* (originally written in French as *Huis Clos*). Since pragmatic analysis heavily relies on syntactic and lexical structures, the use of the translated version serves as a fundamental parameter of this study, acknowledging that the interpretation of illocutionary forces inherently relies on the linguistic choices made by the translator. The utterances in the play were examined using Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts, namely assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The primary data consist of 14 utterances spoken by the three main characters: Garcin, Inéz, and Estelle, which were initially identified as containing illocutionary acts relevant to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition. To maintain analytical focus and depth, eight representative utterances were purposively selected for detailed analysis. These utterances best illustrate how four types of illocutionary acts (assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive) contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition in the play. The unit of analysis is each individual utterance that carries an identifiable illocutionary act.

The data collection and analysis were conducted through several steps. First, the researcher conducted a close reading of the script to understand the overall dramatic context. Second, utterances produced by Garcin, Inéz, and Estelle were identified and classified according to Searle's (1976) categories of illocutionary acts. This process resulted in 14 utterances relevant to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition. Third, eight representative utterances were purposively selected for in-depth analysis based on their relevance to the research objectives and their ability to illustrate each identified category. Finally, the selected utterances were interpreted to explain how they function in constructing hell as a non-physical condition within the dramatic interaction.

To ensure the scope of the study remains focused, this research establishes several limitations. First, the dataset is limited specifically to utterances that manifest interpersonal conflict, power dynamics, and psychological tension among the characters, rather than exhaustively analyzing every speech act in the play. Second, the conceptual framework is strictly limited to illocutionary acts and their perlocutionary effects, deliberately omitting other pragmatic frameworks such as implicature to maintain theoretical depth and precision.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Searle (1976) classifies illocutionary acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. In the first data identification process, one declarative utterance was identified, but was excluded from the detailed analysis as it does not contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition. Searle (1976) states that declarative speech acts need institutional authority and bring about change in social or institutional reality through the utterance itself. The found declarative utterance plays a purely administrative role in the dramatic environment, having no part in the construction of the characters' psychological suffering. The present analysis therefore concentrates on the four categories of illocutionary acts that directly contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical state.

This analysis will identify these four remaining categories in the script of *No Exit* and explain their perlocutionary effects (the impact of utterances on the interlocutor) that contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition. Before moving on to the detailed analysis of the data, a summary of the findings is presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Distribution of Illocutionary Acts Identified in No Exit and Selected for Detailed Analysis

Type of Illocutionary Acts	Initially Identified	Selected for Detailed Analysis	Function in Constructing Hell as a Non-Physical Condition
Assertive	5	3	Establishing fixed and inescapable judgments, declaring a shared reality and irreversible finality that traps the characters together.
Directive	4	3	Attempting (and consistently failing) to enforce silence, isolation, or withdrawal, which reveals the inescapable forced coexistence.
Expressive	1	1	Exposing raw, involuntary emotions and vulnerabilities that cannot be hidden from the constant, judging gaze of others.
Commissive	3	1	Making desperate promises to secure connection or avoid abandonment, highlighting deep emotional insecurity and reliance on others.
Declarative	1	0	Not analyzed because it does not contribute directly to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition.
Total	**14**	**8**	

3.1 Assertive

Assertive acts were identified as the most dominant illocutionary act contributing to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition in No Exit. According to Searle (1976), assertive acts commit speakers to the truth of their propositions. In this play, these utterances function not only to express beliefs but also to establish fixed judgments and shared realities that psychologically trap the characters. The following analysis explains how assertive acts construct this condition through interpersonal conflict.

Data 1

INÉZ: *"**Yes, we are criminals-- murderers-- all three of us. We're in hell**, my pets; they never make mistakes, and people aren't damned for nothing."*

ESTELLE: *"Stop! For heaven's sake–"*

GARCIN: *"Will you keep your mouth shut, damn it!"*

(Sartre, 1946, p. 16)

The bold utterances performed by Inéz are assertive in the form of concluding and claiming collective guilt. It can be identified from the phrases "we are criminals - murderers" and "we're in hell," which function as assertive statements because they present a claim as a fact. The use of "we are" and "we're" signals a definitional claim. This is supported by Prentice et al. (2021), who explain that the expression "we are" is often used to introduce a collective assertion of established facts or shared understanding, functioning as a rhetorical device for framing definitional claims. Therefore, the utterance functions as a definitional claim because Inéz assigns a fixed identity to all characters as

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"criminals" and "damned souls." The lexical choices "criminals," "murderers," and "hell" are strong evaluative words that reinforce the seriousness of the claim.

Analyzed as a dynamic battle of discourse, the perlocutionary effect of this utterance shows how Inéz uses language to establish dominance. This is observable in Estelle's panicked response, "Stop!" and Garcin's aggressive, "Will you keep your mouth shut." Both are directives aimed at silencing Inéz, rather than offering logical counter-arguments. Because they react by trying to stop the statement from being spoken rather than disputing it, this indicates that they secretly accept what Inéz said. Hidden guilt becomes visible, and they are forced into a defensive position. When Inéz says "they never make mistakes," she establishes that their punishment is final and cannot be changed, effectively stripping away their psychological defenses. This leads to the idea of a non-physical hell: the suffering comes from a fixed judgment that is weaponized through language. Once Inéz declares it, it cannot be undone, and they must suffer the reality of it together.

Data 2

INÉZ*: "Dead! Dead! Dead! Knives, poison, ropes – useless.* ***It has happened already, do you understand? Once for all, SO here we are, forever.****"*

ESTELLE*: "Forever. My God, how funny! Forever."*

GARCIN*: "For ever, and ever, and ever."*

(Sartre, 1946, p. 47)

The bold utterance performed by Inéz is assertive in the form of concluding and claiming irreversible finality. The phrase "It has happened already" uses the present perfect tense, which connects a past action to its present relevance or consequence. Mahmoud (2025) stated that the present perfect is used to describe actions that are completed in the past but still have effects or significance in the present. The adverb "already" further emphasizes completion and finality. So, this tense construction presents the situation as irreversible and impossible to undo. The expression "Once and for all" is a fixed phrase of finality, showing that no further change is possible. "Here we are" is a deictic expression that places all characters in the same fixed condition, while "forever" is a temporal marker of permanence.

Looking at the conversational structure, Inéz's assertion successfully dominates the interaction and forces a psychological surrender from the other characters. Estelle's reaction, echoing "forever" before nervously adding "how funny!", reveals that she attempts to reduce the seriousness by turning it into humor; yet the very repetition confirms she has fully absorbed the statement's crushing weight. Garcin's repetition of "for ever, and ever, and ever" shows that he accepts the meaning and allows it to overwhelm him mentally. Inéz's statement demonstrates that their situation is completely final: there is no escape and no second choice. This builds the idea of hell as a non-physical condition, where suffering comes from realizing that their existence is permanently fixed. Through this dynamic discourse, the characters are trapped in an endless verbal awareness of their condition, making eternity itself feel like a continuous punishment.

Data 3

GARCIN*:* ***"So this is hell****. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot poker.* ***HELL IS--OTHER PEOPLE****!"*

ESTELLE*: "My darling! Please"*

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> **GARCIN**: *"No, let me be. She is between us. I cannot love you when she's watching."*
>
> (Sartre, 1946, p. 47)

The bold utterance performed by Garcin is assertive in the form of defining and concluding the nature of hell. The clauses "So this is hell" and "HELL IS –OTHER PEOPLE!" both employ the copular structure ("this is," "hell is"), which signals a definitional statement that presents the utterance as a fact or truth rather than an opinion. Delfitto & Fiorin (2024) explain that this linguistic construction, in which the copula "is" establishes an asymmetric identity between two noun phrases, functions as a declaration of fundamental truth rather than a subjective assessment. So, from this structure, Garcin defines "hell" as "other people," presenting it as an absolute understanding instead of a personal interpretation. The discourse marker "so" in "So this is hell" indicates a conclusion drawn from prior experience. The noun phrase "other people" redefines "hell" from a physical place into a social condition, while the capitalization and emphatic repetition of the copular form turn it into a clear and final definition.

In the context of their ongoing conflict, this assertion acts as a severe face-threatening attack that escalates the tension. To Estelle, "other people" indirectly includes her, positioning her as a source of his torment. Her response, "My darling! Please–," shows a desperate attempt to soften his realization and maintain their connection. However, Garcin immediately cuts her off with "No, let me be," showing how an assertion can trigger a chain reaction that severs relationships. Inéz, although she does not respond verbally here, is also positioned by the term "other people" as a part of the source of the suffering, creating a heavy silent tension. Garcin's statement confirms that hell is not a physical place with torture but a condition created through constant interaction with others in one room. By rejecting images of the "fire" and "torture-chambers," he argues that suffering comes from being seen, judged, and unable to escape other people. Language transforms hell into a situation of endless social exposure and emotional pressure, rather than physical pain.

3.1.1 Discussion of the Assertive Findings

The findings indicate that assertive actions in *No Exit* are employed for more than just stating facts or expressing beliefs. In this section, the utterances repeatedly establish identities, confirm irreversible conditions and redefine the meaning of hell through language. This finding supports Searle's (1976) account that assertive acts commit speakers to the truth of what is said. However, instead of merely serving as a tool to identify the types of illocutionary acts in literary or cinematic works (Dewi & Utami, 2022; Hutajulu & Herman, 2019), this study reveals that assertive acts are also used as a linguistic tool to construct psychological suffering. Rather than depicting an existing reality, the characters' assertions slowly create a shared reality in which guilt, judgment, and permanence are inescapable. These findings suggest that assertive acts serve not only to communicate the characters but also to form Sartre's concept of hell as a non-physical condition.

3.2 Directive

Directive acts were identified as the second most frequent type of illocutionary act in this study. According to Searle (1976), directive acts are used to encourage or request the hearer to perform a particular action. In No Exit, however, these utterances rarely achieve their intended purpose. Instead, failed requests, commands, and prohibitions increase tension among the characters and strengthen the idea of hell as a non-physical condition. The following analysis explains how directive acts contribute to this process through interpersonal interaction.

Data 1

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GARCIN: *"...For pity's sake,* ***keep your mouths shut****. Now* ***let's all sit down again quite quietly****; we'll look at the floor and each* ***must try to forget the others are there."***

INEZ*: "To forget about the others? How utterly absurd! I feel you there, in every pore…"*

(Sartre, 1946, p. 21)

The bold utterance performed by Garcin is a directive in the form of commanding silence and enforcing mutual avoidance. The phrase "keep your mouths shut" is a clear imperative form, directly ordering silence and displaying strong authority. The expression "let's all sit down again quite quietly" uses the inclusive directive "let's" (let us), functioning as a suggestion-command that involves all characters while still guiding their behavior. Holvoet (2023) explains that first-person plural imperatives such as "let's" are used to propose actions that are carried out collectively by both the speaker and the hearer, which makes the form both inclusive and directive. The clause "must try to forget the others are there" contains the modal "must,'' which signals obligation and makes the action non-optional.

Viewed as a dynamic battle of discourse, this imperative creates a severe face-threatening act toward Inéz. Her response, "How utterly absurd!" shows explicit resistance, actively rejecting the authority of his command. Her denial, "I feel you there, in every pore..," demonstrates that the directive to "forget" completely fails because it demands control over internal perception, which she refuses to grant. Garcin's directives reveal that the presence of others is unbearable, prompting him to use language to enforce distance and mental denial. However, the use of "must try to forget" introduces an impossible task, since awareness of others cannot simply be turned off. This interactional failure reveals the core of their situation: the characters cannot escape each other, even mentally. This is how hell is constructed as a non-physical condition of forced coexistence; the more Garcin tries to impose silence through commands, the clearer it becomes that their suffering is fueled by the inescapable awareness of one another.

Data 2

INEZ*: "In hell! Damned souls-- that's us, all three!"*

ESTELLE*:* ***"Keep quiet! I forbid you to use such disgusting words."***

INEZ*: "A damned soul-- that's you, my little plaster saint. And ditto our friend there, the noble pacifist…."*

(Sartre, 1946, p. 16)

The bold utterance performed by Estelle is a directive in the form of commanding silence and prohibiting offensive language. The phrase "keep quiet" is a direct imperative form, clearly functioning as a command to stop speaking. The clause "I forbid you to use such disgusting words" contains the performative verb "forbid," which explicitly signals prohibition. Shohida (2025) explains that performative verbs such as "forbid" are used to directly express the speaker's intention to stop the hearer from carrying out a particular action. Through this performative structure, Estelle attempts to prevent Inéz from using language that she considers offensive or unacceptable. The pronoun "you" directly targets the hearer, making the directive more forceful, while the phrase "disgusting words" is an evaluative expression that justifies the prohibition.

In the context of their ongoing discourse battle, the perlocutionary effect is the exact opposite of what Estelle intends. The imperative "keep quiet" and the prohibition "I forbid you" directly threaten Inéz's freedom to speak, but instead of obeying, she resists and aggressively keeps talking. The phrase

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"disgusting words" exposes Estelle's emotional vulnerability, which actually empowers Inéz further, as she sees that her words successfully hurt Estelle. Although Estelle uses strong performative commands, she possesses no institutional power, so her words fail and only escalate the conflict instead of forcing Inéz to obey. Estelle's directive demonstrates that certain words like "damned souls" are too disturbing to be spoken aloud, as they force her to face an unwanted truth. The failure of this directive highlights that language cannot be controlled in this room; each character is continuously subjected to verbal confrontation, making the interaction itself a form of eternal punishment.

Data 3

GARCIN: *"...I stuck my fingers in my ears, but your voices thudded in my brain. Silly chatter.* ***Now will you leave me in peace, you two****? I'm not interested in you."*

INEZ: *"Not in me, perhaps--but how about this child? Aren't you interested in her?"*

(Sartre, 1946, p. 21)

The bold utterance performed by Garcin is a directive in the form of requesting isolation and urging others to withdraw. The clause "Now will you leave me in peace, you two?" uses an interrogative form, but it functions as a directive request rather than a genuine question. Simboteanu (2025) explains that interrogative structures are frequently used as indirect speech acts to make requests instead of simply asking for information. In this utterance, the modal expression "will you" functions as a polite request marker used to encourage the hearer to perform an action. Giannakidou & Mari (2025a) state that modal constructions such as "will you" are commonly used to express requests directed toward the hearer's response or action. The phrase "leave me in peace" explicitly expresses the desired action, which is withdrawal and non-interference. The vocative "you two" directly identifies the targets, making the request more personal and forceful.

Analyzing the structure of the conversation, the phrase "leave me in peace" acts as a direct rejection, which immediately triggers opposition. Instead of complying, Inéz responds by dragging him back into the interpersonal conflict. Because Garcin lacks the actual power to enforce this request, it completely fails and instead fuels further engagement, increasing his discomfort. Garcin's request establishes that peace can only exist if others leave him alone, proving that their very presence is the source of his torment. However, the fact that Inéz immediately counters his request proves that this kind of escape is impossible. This highlights the idea of hell as a non-physical condition where individuals cannot avoid interpersonal tension even if they try. The failure of his directive proves that language cannot create distance, leaving the characters trapped in constant verbal interaction and forced awareness, which serves as their main form of suffering.

3.2.1 Discussion of the Directive Findings

The findings show that directive acts in *No Exit* are used as attempts to control other characters or change the ongoing interaction. However, unlike the usual function of directives, the utterances in this play rarely achieve the speaker's intended goal. Requests, commands, and prohibitions are repeatedly ignored or resisted, causing the conflicts to continue rather than be resolved. This finding supports Searle's (1976) explanation that directive acts are intended to get the hearer to perform an action. However, the present study shows that, in *No Exit*, directive acts function differently because they fail to change the hearers' behavior. Instead of creating cooperation, they reinforce the characters' inability to escape one another. This finding extends previous studies that mainly

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classified directive acts according to their communicative functions by showing that unsuccessful directives also contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition through continuous interpersonal conflict.

3.3 Expressive

Expressive acts were identified as one of the illocutionary act types that contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition in *No Exit*. According to Searle (1976), expressive acts communicate the speaker's psychological state or emotional response to a particular situation. In this play, expressive acts do not function to relieve emotions or restore interpersonal relationships. Instead, they expose the characters' emotional vulnerability and strengthen the psychological tension that develops through their interaction. The following analysis explains how expressive acts contribute to this process.

Data 1

INEZ*: "Can't you keep your mouth still? You keep twisting it about all the time. It's grotesque.''*

GARCIN*: ''**So sorry.** I wasn't aware of it.''*

INEZ: *"That's just what I reproach you with. There you are! You talk about politeness, and you don't even try to control your face. Remember you're not alone; you've no right to inflict the sight of your fear on me.''*

(Sartre, 1946, p. 7)

The bold utterance performed by Garcin is expressive in the form of apologizing and expressing a lack of awareness. The phrase "so sorry" functions as an expression of apology that directly states regret. Dua et al. (2022) explain that the expression "sorry" is commonly recognized as a conventional apology formula used to acknowledge discomfort or wrongdoing toward another person. In this utterance, the adverb "so" functions as an intensifier that strengthens the emotional force of the apology. Harutyunyan & Azaryan (2025) state that intensifying adverbs such as "so" are used to increase the emotional intensity of an expression, including apologies. Although it is brief, the expression is sufficient to perform an act of apologizing. The following clause, "I wasn't aware of it," further softens the apology by presenting the behavior as unintentional rather than deliberate misconduct.

In this dynamic exchange, the apology "so sorry" may briefly seem to reduce tension, but the phrase "I wasn't aware" instantly weakens Garcin's position because it shows a lack of control. Rather than accepting the apology and ending the conflict, Inéz exploits this vulnerability to continue criticizing him. Instead of stopping the clash, the expressive act gives Inéz more ammunition to attack him, proving that his own body and reactions are not fully under his control. This demonstrates that in this room, even personal, involuntary emotions cannot be hidden from others. He is constantly exposed, and the others can see and judge even his unintentional reactions. This builds the idea of hell as a non-physical condition where suffering comes from being permanently seen, evaluated, and verbally attacked by others, with absolutely no means of concealment.

3.3.1 Discussion of the Expressive Findings

The findings show that expressive acts in *No Exit* do more than express personal feelings or

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emotions. Instead, they reveal the characters' psychological vulnerability and expose emotions that cannot be hidden from others. This finding supports Searle's (1976) view that expressive acts reflect the speaker's psychological state. However, unlike previous studies that mainly identified expressive acts as expressions of emotions such as apology, gratitude, or regret, the present study shows that expressive acts also contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition. In the play, expressing emotions does not reduce conflict or improve relationships. Instead, it creates more opportunities for judgment and emotional pressure, making the characters increasingly aware of one another's presence and reinforcing their psychological suffering.

3.4 Commissive

Commissive acts were identified as one of the illocutionary act types that contribute to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition in *No Exit*. According to Searle (1976), commissive acts commit the speaker to carrying out a future action or promise. In this play, however, commissive acts do not create trust or strengthen relationships. Instead, they reflect the characters' attempts to avoid abandonment and emotional isolation, even though those attempts ultimately fail. The following analysis explains how commissive acts contribute to the construction of psychological suffering through interpersonal interaction.

Data 1

GARCIN: *"...Go away. You're even fouler than she. I won't let myself get bogged in your eyes. You're soft and slimy. Ugh! Like an octopus. Like a quagmire."*

ESTELLE: *"I beg you, oh, I beg you not to leave me.* ***I'll promise not to speak again****, I won't trouble you in any way-- but don't go. I daren't be left alone with Inéz, now she's shown her claws."*

GARCIN: *"Look after yourself. I never asked you to come here."*

(Sartre, 1946, p. 42)

The bold utterance performed by Estelle is a commissive in the form of promising silence to prevent abandonment. The clause "I'll promise not to speak again" contains the modal "will" (contracted as 'll), which functions as a marker of future intention and commitment (Kumar & Satyanathan, 2025). In commissive speech acts, as Giannakidou & Mari (2025b) further explain, modal constructions expressing future action are used to indicate the speaker's commitment to a particular course of action. The negative infinitive "not to speak again" clearly specifies the behavior that Estelle commits herself to avoid, reflecting self-restraint. Furthermore, the clause "I won't trouble you in any way" expands the scope of the commitment by minimizing her own presence in an attempt to gain Garcin's acceptance.

In this dynamic conversational exchange, the modal "will" in "I'll promise" shows Estelle's desperate attempt to use language as a bargaining tool to secure her safety. However, Garcin's harsh response, "Look after yourself, I never asked you to come here," acts as a complete rejection that strips her of any control. This abrupt dismissal indicates a profound lack of trust in her promise. The emotional intensity of her appeal attempts to create pressure, but it fails to force his compliance. Estelle's promise reveals that she is willing to completely erase her own presence by not speaking or troubling him, just to avoid being left alone, exposing her deep fear and dependence on someone

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else. However, Garcin's blunt rejection proves that in this discourse battle, such commitments do not guarantee connection or safety. This highlights the idea of hell as a non-physical condition: individuals cannot secure comfort even when it is desperately promised. The need for others, combined with the failure of language to establish trust, creates a state of constant emotional insecurity, where interpersonal dependence itself becomes the origin of suffering.

3.4.1 Discussion of the Commissive Findings

The findings show that commissive acts in No Exit do not function to strengthen trust or maintain interpersonal relationships. Instead, the promise made by the character fails to change the situation or prevent further conflict. This finding supports Searle's (1976) explanation that commissive acts commit the speaker to a future action. However, unlike previous studies that mainly describe commissive acts as expressions of commitment or intention, the present study shows that promises can lose their intended function when mutual trust no longer exists. In *No Exit*, the commissive act reflects the character's emotional dependence and desperation rather than a genuine ability to influence others. As a result, the promise does not reduce psychological suffering but instead reinforces the characters' helplessness and contributes to the construction of hell as a non-physical condition.

3.5 The Construction of 'Hell' through Illocutionary Acts

The analysis shows that hell in *No Exit* is constructed not through physical torture, but through continuous and inescapable verbal interaction between the characters. The four types of illocutionary acts actively utilized in the play create a condition in which the characters feel trapped, judged, and unable to escape from one another's psychological grip. Assertive acts play a significant role in establishing identity and truth. Statements such as "we are criminals" and "Hell is other people" present judgments as permanent facts. Through these utterances, the characters define themselves and others in ways that cannot be denied or changed. The use of copular structures such as "we are" and "Hell is" transforms personal judgments into fixed truths, causing the characters to become trapped within the identities constructed through language.

Furthermore, directive acts reinforce this condition by revealing the characters' complete inability to control one another. Commands and requests such as "keep your mouth shut" and "leave me in peace" function as desperate attempts at resistance against the torment of others. However, they repeatedly fail to achieve their intended effects, creating additional conflict and escalating the tension. At the same time, expressive acts expose emotions that cannot be concealed. Apologies, fear, and frustration make the characters' inner vulnerabilities visible to others, allowing those emotions to become objects of ruthless observation and judgment. As a result, emotional exposure becomes an essential mechanism of their suffering.

A similar pattern can be seen in commissive acts, which demonstrate the inability of promises to create safety or connection. Estelle's promise not to speak again represents a futile attempt to keep Garcin close as a defense mechanism, yet the promise ultimately fails. This failure demonstrates that language cannot provide comfort or establish trust within the confined room. Ultimately, the absence of declarative acts confirms that none of the characters possess the genuine authority to alter their cursed reality. Taken together, these illocutionary acts construct hell as a dynamic, non-physical condition. Through language, the characters continuously judge, expose, and trap one another. In this way, suffering in *No Exit* emerges strictly from communication and forced human relationships rather than from physical punishment.

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4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the illocutionary acts in Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, this research shows that hell in this drama is constructed as a non-physical condition through continuous interpersonal conflict. The analysis found four types of illocutionary acts: assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive. Instead of merely categorizing these utterances, the findings reveal that these speech acts actively function as a means for the characters to protest, complain, and resist the torment caused by the presence of one another. Assertive acts create fixed identities and truths used as psychological weapons, directive acts are desperate but failed attempts to control and push others away, expressive acts involuntarily reveal emotions to the judging gaze of others, and commissive acts are futile tactics to secure real safety or connection. Furthermore, the absence of declarative acts confirms that hell in the play is not created by institutional or divine authority, but strictly through the characters' own inescapable interactions and language.

These findings support Sartre's idea that suffering comes from constant judgment and interaction with other people. From a pragmatic perspective, the study shows that illocutionary acts do not only communicate meaning but also construct social and psychological realities. In *No Exit*, hell is an active state created through repeated verbal interaction between characters who cannot escape one another. For future research, it is recommended to further explore the pragmatic construction of "Hell" or similar psychological spaces in other literary works, perhaps by examining how Searle's speech acts operate alongside other linguistic frameworks to build existential themes.

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