

Beyond Physical Movement: A Speech Act Analysis of the German Verb *Gehen* in the Film *Good Bye, Lenin!*

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ABSTRACT

According to pragmatic theory, the meaning of an utterance is determined not only by its linguistic form but also by the context in which it is produced and interpreted. Although the German verb *gehen* is traditionally defined as a verb of physical movement, its recurrent use in authentic communication suggests that it fulfils a much broader range of pragmatic functions. Despite extensive semantic and grammatical research on *gehen*, its role as a speech act resource has received little scholarly attention. This study therefore investigates the pragmatic functions of *gehen* in the German film *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) through the framework of Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969, 1979). Employing a descriptive qualitative design supported by corpus analysis, occurrences of *gehen* and its inflected forms were extracted using AntConc and a regular-expression search, followed by a rigorous corpus audit and audio-video verification. Twenty-eight authentic occurrences were retained for analysis. The findings reveal three illocutionary functions: representative (50.0%), directive (25.0%), and expressive (25.0%), whereas commissive and declarative acts were absent. The inflected form *geht's* emerged as the most frequent construction (35.7%), while 67.9% of all occurrences expressed non-physical pragmatic meanings compared with only 32.1% retaining literal physical movement. Overall, the findings demonstrate that *gehen* functions not merely as a motion verb but as a multifunctional pragmatic resource whose illocutionary force emerges from communicative context rather than lexical semantics alone. Beyond contributing to German pragmatics, this study illustrates how the speech act analysis of a single high-frequency lexical item offers a productive methodological approach for investigating pragmatic extension in authentic discourse.

Keywords: Pragmatics; Speech Acts; *gehen*; Film dialogue; Searle

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with the meaning of language in its context of use. Unlike semantics, which focuses on literal meaning, pragmatics examines how speakers use language to perform communicative actions and how hearers interpret intended meaning on the basis of contextual information (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). A fundamental assumption of pragmatics is that language is not merely a vehicle for conveying information but also a means of performing social actions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

The relationship between language and context becomes particularly evident in the use of high-frequency verbs. Although such verbs typically possess a concrete lexical meaning, their repeated use across different communicative situations often results in pragmatic extension, whereby meanings develop beyond their original semantic functions (Aijmer, 2013).

In German, *gehen* ('to go' or 'to walk') is one of the most frequently used verbs and is traditionally classified as a motion verb (*Bewegungsverb*) denoting physical movement from one location to another (Helbig & Buscha, 2001; Duden, 2016). However, authentic language use demonstrates that *gehen* also fulfils a wide range of pragmatic functions that are no longer directly associated with physical movement.

Expressions such as *Wie geht's?* (greeting), *Das geht nicht* (refusal), *Das geht zu weit* (objection), *es geht um* (topic focus), and *Weiter geht's* (encouragement) illustrate how *gehen* functions as a versatile pragmatic resource in everyday interaction. Di Meola (2003) distinguishes between the deictic and non-deictic uses of *gehen*, while Duden (2016) describes the impersonal construction *es geht*, whose interpretation depends almost entirely on communicative context.

Film dialogue provides a valuable source of linguistic data for pragmatic research. Although scripted, film dialogue is intentionally constructed to resemble naturally occurring interaction and therefore exhibits what Bednarek (2010) describes as *constructed realism*. It enables researchers to observe speaker intention, hearer interpretation and situational context within coherent communicative events, making film dialogue an appropriate source for analysing illocutionary force (Kozloff, 2000).

Although both speech act research and studies of *gehen* have developed considerably, these two strands of research have rarely been integrated. Previous research has largely focused on *gehen* from semantic, grammatical or deictic perspectives, whereas its role as a lexical resource for realising different speech act functions in authentic discourse remains largely unexplored. Furthermore, most speech act studies classify entire conversations or dialogues rather than examining how a single high-frequency lexical item contributes to the realisation of multiple illocutionary functions across different communicative contexts.

The film *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) was selected as the data source because its narrative centres on the construction and maintenance of a social reality. It recounts Alex's efforts to protect his mother from emotional shock after she awakens from a coma during the period of German reunification following the fall of the Berlin Wall. To safeguard her health, Alex maintains the illusion that the German Democratic Republic (GDR) still exists. This unique narrative generates dialogue rich in acts of reporting, explaining, expressing emotion and directing behaviour, thereby providing an appropriate context for investigating the pragmatic extension of *gehen*.

Against this background, the present study pursues three objectives: (1) to identify the usage patterns of *gehen* and its inflected forms in the dialogue of *Good Bye, Lenin!*; (2) to analyse the speech act functions realised by *gehen* based on Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969, 1979); and (3) to explain how *gehen* extends beyond physical movement to function as a pragmatic resource in film dialogue. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks not only to explain the pragmatic behaviour of *gehen* but also to demonstrate how the speech act analysis of a single high-frequency lexical item can contribute to the study of pragmatic extension in authentic discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory originates from Austin's (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*, which argues that utterances are not merely statements that can be judged as true or false, but actions performed through language. Austin distinguished three dimensions of speech acts: the locutionary act (the production of an utterance), the illocutionary act (the communicative act performed through the utterance), and the perlocutionary act (the effect of the utterance on the hearer).

Building on Austin's work, Searle (1969) established the illocutionary act as the fundamental unit of linguistic communication and introduced the concept of felicity conditions, which determine whether a speech act is successfully performed. He subsequently refined Speech Act Theory by classifying illocutionary acts into five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations (Searle, 1979). These categories are distinguished according to three criteria: illocutionary point, direction of fit between words and the world, and the psychological state expressed by the speaker. Because the present study seeks to examine how the verb *gehen* realises different communicative intentions across contexts, Searle's taxonomy provides the principal analytical framework for interpreting the illocutionary functions associated with each occurrence of the verb.

Speech Act Studies in Film

Speech act research has been conducted extensively using film dialogue across different linguistic and cultural contexts. In Malaysia, Aminuddin Saimon (2021) analysed speech acts in the films of Nordin Ahmad and reported that representative and directive acts were the most dominant, reflecting the narrative and didactic characteristics of the films. Similarly, Wan Nor Azlina Abdullah and Mohamad Rozi Kasim (2025), in their analysis of *Yek Icin Mahak*, found a predominance of representative acts together with the absence of declarative speech acts.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that Speech Act Theory provides a productive framework for analysing film dialogue. However, they primarily classify speech acts across entire conversations or narratives rather than examining the pragmatic contribution of individual lexical items. Consequently, the role of a single high-frequency verb in realising different illocutionary functions remains insufficiently understood. The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the German verb *gehen*.

Pragmatic Studies of German

Within German linguistics, *gehen* has been studied from semantic and grammatical perspectives. Di Meola (2003) distinguishes the deictic and non-deictic uses of the motion verbs *kommen* and *gehen*, confirming that *gehen* is frequently used in contexts that do not refer to actual physical movement. The reference grammar Duden (2016) describes the impersonal construction *es geht*, whose meaning is determined entirely by context and which is frequently used in expressions of well-being, possibility and topic focus.

German corpus and lexicographic resources such as DWDS (Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache) and the IDS Mannheim databases also document the diverse uses of *gehen*, including idiomatic and impersonal constructions that do not refer to physical movement. In lexical pragmatics, Aijmer (2013) explains that frequently used lexical items can undergo pragmatic extension through repeated use across communicative contexts. This concept of pragmatic extension provides the theoretical foundation for the study's central argument.

Research Gap

A synthesis of previous research reveals three interconnected gaps. First, although the semantic, grammatical and deictic properties of *gehen* have been widely investigated, its pragmatic functions from the perspective of Searle's Speech Act Theory remain underexplored. Second, studies employing German film dialogue as a source of pragmatic data remain relatively limited compared with research conducted in English and Malay. Third, existing speech act studies generally analyse dialogue at the discourse level, whereas investigations focusing on a single high-frequency lexical item are still rare.

Taken together, these gaps indicate the need for a lexical-level speech act analysis of *gehen* in authentic German film dialogue. Accordingly, the present study examines how the verb *gehen* realises different illocutionary functions and demonstrates pragmatic extension beyond its conventional meaning as a motion verb. In doing so, the study contributes not only to German pragmatics but also to the application of Speech Act Theory in lexical pragmatics.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study (Figure 1) sets out its analytical logic. Beginning from the traditional meaning of *gehen* as a marker of physical movement, the verb is identified in the dialogue of *Good Bye, Lenin!* together with its inflected forms. Each occurrence is analysed using Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969, 1979) and assigned to one of the three illocutionary functions realised in the data — representative, directive or expressive. The analysis then distinguishes whether *gehen* retains a physical meaning or has shifted to a non-physical one. This pattern ultimately demonstrates the pragmatic extension of the verb: how *gehen* moves beyond physical movement to become a multifunctional pragmatic resource. The framework systematically links each stage of analysis to the study's central thesis.

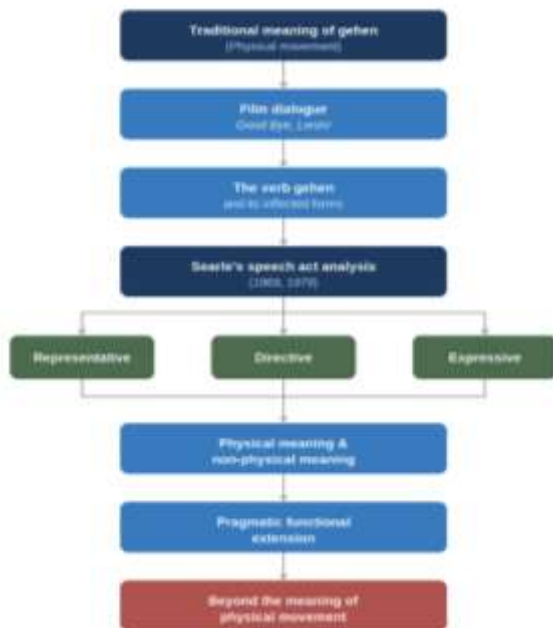


Figure 1 Conceptual framework for the speech act analysis of the verb *gehen*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative research design supported by corpus analysis. A qualitative approach was selected because the primary objective is to interpret the pragmatic functions of *gehen* within naturally occurring communicative contexts rather than to test statistical relationships. Corpus analysis complements this approach by providing a systematic and replicable procedure for identifying all occurrences of *gehen* and its inflected forms within the selected dataset. Descriptive quantitative measures, including frequencies and percentages, are employed solely to illustrate the distribution of speech act functions and inflected forms, thereby supporting rather than replacing qualitative interpretation.

Data Source

The data source is the dialogue of the German film *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), directed by Wolfgang Becker. The film was selected because its narrative, centred on the construction of a social reality, generates dialogue rich in a variety of communicative functions.

Data Collection

Data were collected in several stages. First, the German subtitles of the film were prepared as a text corpus and loaded into AntConc (Anthony, 2022). Second, occurrences of *gehen* and its inflected forms were identified using the following regular expression:

`\b(gehe|gehst|geht|gehen|ging|gingen|gegangen|geh)(?:['"]s)?(?:=\W|$)`

The use of a regular-expression search ensured that all relevant inflectional forms were retrieved systematically while minimising the risk of manual omission. The expression matches the Präsens forms (*gehe*, *gehst*, *geht*, and *gehen*), the Präteritum forms (*ging* and *gingen*), the Partizip II (*gegangen*), the Imperativ (*geh*), and the clitic construction *geht's*.

Third, a corpus audit was undertaken as a quality-control procedure. During manual screening, prefixed forms and derived verbs with independent lexical status (e.g., *weitergehen*, *rübergehen*, *zugehen*, and *spaziergehen*) were excluded because they fell outside the analytical scope of the study. Fourth, all retained

occurrences were verified against the film's audio and video recordings to ensure transcription accuracy and correct speaker identification. Following this verification process, 28 authentic occurrences of *gehen* were retained for analysis.

Data Analysis

Each occurrence was analysed individually before being compared across the dataset to identify recurring patterns of illocutionary function. Classification was based not on grammatical form alone but on speaker intention, communicative purpose, contextual meaning and illocutionary force, in accordance with Searle's theoretical framework. Table 1 summarises the analytical procedure.

Table 1 Data analysis procedure

Step	Description
1. Extraction	Regex search for <i>gehen</i> in AntConc
2. Corpus audit	Remove prefixed and derived forms
3. Verification	Check audio/video; confirm speaker
4. Coding	Searle category by illocutionary force
5. Meaning analysis	Distinguish physical vs. non-physical

To ensure reliability and validity, the researcher undertook repeated viewings of the film and repeated readings of the transcript, analysing each utterance within the context of a three-utterance sequence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell, 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the speech act analysis of *gehen* in the dialogue of *Good Bye, Lenin!* based on Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969, 1979). The findings are organised according to the distribution of illocutionary functions, followed by separate discussions of representative, expressive, and directive uses. Particular emphasis is placed on explaining how each occurrence illustrates the pragmatic extension of *gehen* beyond its conventional meaning as a motion verb.

A total of 28 authentic occurrences of *gehen* were analysed. Each example is presented with its utterance code, timestamp, original German utterance, and English translation, followed by an interpretation of its communicative context, the relationship between the interlocutors, and its corresponding illocutionary function. The inclusion of timestamps enables other researchers to revisit the relevant scenes and verify the proposed classifications, thereby enhancing the transparency, reliability, and replicability of the analysis.

Table 2 provides an overview of the distribution of speech act functions identified in the corpus. As shown, representative acts constitute the largest category, followed by directive and expressive acts. This overall distribution serves as the basis for the detailed discussion of each speech act category presented in the following sections.

Table 2 Distribution of speech act functions of the verb *gehen*

Speech Act Function	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Representative	14	50.0

Directive	7	25.0
Expressive	7	25.0
Commissive	0	0.0
Declarative	0	0.0
Total	28	100.0

As shown in Table 2, three of Searle's five illocutionary functions are realised in the corpus: representative (50.0%), directive (25.0%), and expressive (25.0%), whereas no commissive or declarative acts were identified. The predominance of representative acts indicates that *gehen* is used primarily to report, explain, and describe states of affairs within the narrative rather than merely to denote physical movement. More broadly, this distribution demonstrates that the pragmatic behaviour of *gehen* is shaped by communicative context rather than by its conventional lexical meaning as a motion verb, providing empirical evidence of its pragmatic extension across multiple illocutionary functions.

Representative Acts

Representative acts constitute the largest category, accounting for 14 of the 28 occurrences (50.0%). According to Searle (1979), representatives commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. This dominance reflects the basic narrative structure of *Good Bye, Lenin!*, which revolves around Alex's efforts to construct and maintain a false reality to protect his mother. In such a context, much of the dialogue serves to report, explain and organise information about states of affairs in the world.

U1 (00:03:07)

Mit unserer Familie aber ging es an diesem Tag so richtig den Bach runter.

"But as for our family, things really went downhill that day."

At the opening of the film, Alex narrates the moment when his family began to collapse after his father left East Germany. In this context it is classified as representative because Alex reports his family's deteriorating condition. The idiomatic construction *den Bach runtergehen* no longer refers to physical movement but to a decline in life circumstances. Its illocutionary force is therefore the conveying of information and the reporting of experience.

U7 (00:33:07)

Es geht also nur um dieses eine Zimmer.

"So this is just about this one room, then."

Here, Alex explains to Denis, who is helping him restore his mother's room so that it appears as it did before the political changes, that their task is limited to a single room. The utterance is classified as representative because it conveys factual information about the scope of their task rather than attempting to influence the hearer or express emotion. The impersonal construction *es geht um* does not denote physical movement; instead, it introduces the topic under discussion (Duden, 2016). Its illocutionary force therefore lies in clarifying the focus of the conversation, illustrating how *gehen* functions as a pragmatic resource beyond its conventional lexical meaning.

U24 (01:29:43)

Ich bin nicht gegangen.

"I didn't go."

Towards the end of the film, Christiane reveals a long-held secret: rather than following her husband to the West, she chose to remain in East Germany for the sake of her children. Although *gegangen* retains its literal meaning of physical movement, its illocutionary force is representative because Christiane discloses and confirms the truth of a significant past event. Beyond recounting a previous action, the utterance resolves one of the film's central narrative tensions surrounding Robert's departure, demonstrating that even a literal use of *gehen* can perform an important representative function.

Beyond these examples, representative uses are also found in narrative utterances such as *Und Mutter ging es immer besser* (U19) and *Am gleichen Abend ging es Mutter plötzlich schlechter* (U25), both of which report changes in Christiane's health and mark key transitions in the narrative. Notably, nine of the fourteen representative occurrences express non-physical meanings, indicating that pragmatic extension is not confined to expressive or directive contexts but is also characteristic of representative speech acts. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that representative uses of *gehen* encompass both literal and non-literal meanings. What unites them is not the verb's lexical meaning but its illocutionary purpose: in every case, the speaker commits to the truth of a proposition. This finding supports Searle's (1979) argument that speech act classification depends primarily on communicative intention rather than linguistic form.

Expressive Acts

Expressive acts express the speaker's psychological state (Searle, 1979) and account for seven of the 28 occurrences (25.0%). Notably, all expressive occurrences convey non-physical meanings, making this category the strongest evidence of the pragmatic extension of *gehen* in the corpus. The absence of literal movement meanings indicates that pragmatic extension is particularly prominent when *gehen* is used to express interpersonal attitudes, emotional states, and social concern. In these contexts, the verb's communicative function is determined by contextual interpretation rather than by its conventional lexical meaning.

U3 (00:12:05)

Geht's wieder?

"You okay again?"

This utterance is spoken by Lara, a nurse who later becomes Alex's girlfriend, while she is tending to a patient. Although it takes the form of a question, its dominant illocutionary force is expressive — conveying concern rather than requesting precise clinical information. It is an instance of an indirect speech act (Searle, 1975): its surface form is interrogative, but its function is to express emotion. Its classification as expressive can only be determined through context — Lara's caring tone and her relationship with the patient.

U16 (00:53:18)

Das geht zu weit!

"This is going too far!"

This utterance is spoken by Ariane as an objection to Alex's behaviour, which she considers excessive in maintaining the illusion of East Germany for their mother, in a scene charged with emotional tension between the siblings. On the surface it might appear to be a statement of fact, but in context its dominant illocutionary force is the expression of disapproval, and it is therefore classified as expressive. The construction *das geht...* demonstrates that one and the same form can convey negative emotion depending on context.

The expressive function also appears in *Geht's?* (U4, Lara's concern), *Bald geht's dir wieder besser* (U13, Ariane's emotional support), *Das geht nicht!* (U18, Alex's emotional refusal), *Siehst du? Bei mir geht's auch* (U23, Christiane's self-assurance) and *Wie geht's euch?* (U27, Robert's greeting). The repeated use of the *geht's*

construction in contexts of well-being and emotion shows how a single lexical construction becomes a consistent marker of emotion throughout the film. Collectively, these examples illustrate that the expressive force of *gehen* is derived from interactional context rather than lexical semantics, further supporting the claim that the verb functions as a multifunctional pragmatic resource.

Directive Acts

Directive acts are the speaker's attempts to get the hearer to do something (Searle, 1979) and account for seven of the 28 occurrences (25.0%). Although less frequent than representative acts, directive uses demonstrate the versatility of *gehen* in influencing hearer behaviour across a wide range of communicative situations. These occurrences show that *gehen* functions not only to issue commands but also to encourage, suggest, prompt action, and grant permission, illustrating another important dimension of its pragmatic extension.

U15 (00:51:53)

Na, dann geh doch.

“Well then, go ahead.”

This utterance occurs when a minor male character expresses a wish to go to the Pollnick family's home to watch a football semi-final because the awaited television broadcast is disrupted, and a minor female character responds to his suggestion. Although imperative in form, the utterance does not function as a firm command; rather, the speaker grants the hearer permission to proceed. The particle *doch* softens any coercive element and brings the utterance closer to agreement and permission — that is, a permissive directive.

U21 (01:10:00)

Meine Mutter wird sich freuen, gehen Sie durch.

“My mother will be glad — do go on in.”

This utterance is spoken by Alex to invite a guest in to meet his mother, using the polite form *Sie*. *Gehen Sie durch* is a courteous permissive directive: Alex directs the hearer to enter, but in an inviting rather than a commanding tone. Here *gehen* retains its physical-movement meaning, yet its function is directive because it prompts the hearer to perform an action.

U12 (00:43:05)

Es ist nur so, du kannst ja nicht mehr selber zur Bank gehen.

“It's just that you can't go to the bank yourself anymore.”

This utterance is spoken by Alex to his mother about managing the family's finances. On the surface it appears to be a statement about Christiane's condition — that she can no longer go to the bank herself — but in the context of the scene Alex is in fact gently suggesting that she allow someone else to manage her finances. Its actual illocutionary force is a suggestion of action, and it is therefore classified as an indirect directive. This is a clear example of how speech act classification requires contextual analysis rather than sentence form.

The directive function is also realised in *Weiter geht's* (U2, Christiane's encouragement), *Still halten! Sonst geht's nicht* (U22, Lara's conditional insistence), *Wohin soll's denn gehen?* (U26, a taxi driver's question about direction) and *Auf 3 geht's los* (U28, Denis's cue to start). In most of these examples, the *geht's* construction functions as a marker prompting action, far removed from the literal meaning 'to go'. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that directive force is determined primarily by communicative intention rather than by the lexical meaning of *gehen*. Whether expressing permission, encouragement, suggestion or instruction, the

verb functions as a pragmatic resource for influencing the hearer's behaviour, thereby illustrating another dimension of its pragmatic extension.

The Role of Narrative Context in Interpreting *gehen*

The analysis of the 28 utterances illustrates an important pragmatic principle: speech act classification cannot be determined on the basis of linguistic form alone; narrative context plays a decisive role in determining illocutionary function. The utterance *Na, dann geh doch* (U15) can only be interpreted as a permissive directive once the visual context shows that permission is being granted to the minor male character to watch football at the Pollnicks'. Without the scene context, the utterance could be interpreted as an ordinary command or an expression of irritation. It is the particle *doch* and the situation of granting permission that render it a permissive directive.

The same principle applies to pairs of utterances that share the same linguistic form but realise different illocutionary functions. The *geht's* construction appears in expressive uses (*Geht's?*, Lara's expression of concern) as well as directive uses (*Auf 3 geht's los*, Denis's cue to begin filming). The difference lies not in lexical form but in speaker intention, the relationship between the interlocutors, and the communicative goal of the scene. This finding is consistent with Searle's (1975) account of indirect speech acts and further supports the view that film dialogue cannot be analysed independently of its visual and narrative context (Kozloff, 2000; Bednarek, 2010). More broadly, these findings reinforce one of the central assumptions of pragmatics: illocutionary force emerges from the interaction between linguistic form, communicative intention, and contextual interpretation rather than from lexical meaning alone. This contextual dependence provides the basis for interpreting the distribution of inflected forms discussed in the following section.

Inflected Forms of *gehen* and Pragmatic Function

Table 3 summarises the distribution of inflected forms, while Table 4 summarises the distribution of physical versus non-physical meaning. The frequency distribution indicates that the most common inflected forms are also those most strongly associated with non-literal communicative functions.

Table 3 Distribution of inflected forms of *gehen*

Form	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>geht's</i>	10	35.7
<i>geht</i>	6	21.4
<i>ging</i>	4	14.3
<i>gehen</i>	4	14.3
<i>geh</i> (imperative)	3	10.7
<i>gegangen</i>	1	3.6
Total	28	100.0

The dominance of *geht's* (35.7%) is highly significant because this construction most frequently realises non-physical pragmatic functions — whether concern, well-being, encouragement or a cue to act. The high frequency of *geht's* reinforces the thesis that, in actual speech, *gehen* more often functions as a pragmatic resource than as a marker of physical movement. This pattern also explains why the pragmatic extension of *gehen* is most clearly reflected in highly conventionalised constructions, where interactional meaning has become more salient than literal motion.

Table 4 Distribution of uses of *gehen* by physical and non-physical meaning

Meaning Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical	9	32.1
Non-physical	19	67.9
Total	28	100.0

Of the 28 utterances, 19 (67.9%) express non-physical meanings, whereas only 9 (32.1%) retain the literal meaning of physical movement. The predominance of non-physical uses provides strong quantitative evidence supporting the central argument of this study: that *gehen* has developed beyond its conventional role as a motion verb into a multifunctional pragmatic resource. Rather than serving primarily to denote physical movement, the verb functions as a flexible linguistic resource whose illocutionary force is shaped by narrative context, communicative intention, and interpersonal interaction. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that lexical meaning alone is insufficient to account for the pragmatic behaviour of *gehen*. Instead, its illocutionary functions emerge through the interaction between linguistic form, communicative context, and speaker intention.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the speech act functions of the verb *gehen* in the dialogue of *Good Bye, Lenin!* using Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969, 1979). Based on an analysis of 28 utterances, the study addresses all three of its stated objectives.

With respect to the first objective, the study found that *gehen* appears in a variety of inflected forms, with the construction *geht's* (35.7%) most dominant, followed by *geht* (21.4%), *ging* and *gehen* (14.3% each), *geh* (10.7%) and *gegangen* (3.6%). The dominance of *geht's* is closely tied to non-physical pragmatic functions, since this impersonal clitic construction is most frequently used to express concern, well-being and encouragement.

The second objective showed that *gehen* realises three illocutionary functions: representative (50.0%), directive (25.0%) and expressive (25.0%), with no commissive or declarative acts. The dominance of representatives relates to the film's narrative structure, which centres on the construction and maintenance of a social reality and thus calls for many utterances that report, explain and organise information. The absence of declaratives is consistent with the findings of Wan Nor Azlina Abdullah and Mohamad Rozi Kasim (2025), while the notable presence of directives shows that *gehen* also functions actively to influence the hearer's behaviour.

The final objective demonstrated that 67.9% of uses of *gehen* are pragmatic and non-physical, compared with only 32.1% that retain a physical-movement meaning. This finding, together with the analysis of narrative context, clearly demonstrates that *gehen* has moved beyond physical movement to become a multifunctional pragmatic resource. The verb is used to convey information (representative), to manage emotion (expressive) and to influence the hearer's behaviour (directive), depending entirely on its context of use.

In theoretical terms, the study provides empirical support for the concept of pragmatic extension by demonstrating that a single high-frequency motion verb can realise multiple illocutionary functions depending on communicative context. More broadly, the findings illustrate that speech act analysis at the lexical level offers a productive approach for investigating how meaning develops beyond conventional lexical semantics in authentic discourse.

In terms of methodological implications, the study demonstrates the value of combining corpus extraction (AntConc), a rigorous corpus audit and audio-video verification in ensuring data accuracy. Overall, the

analysis demonstrates that *gehen* has developed into a multifunctional pragmatic resource whose communicative value is shaped by context, speaker intention, and interpersonal interaction. More importantly, the findings demonstrate that Speech Act Theory can be applied productively at the lexical level to explain how a single high-frequency verb realises multiple illocutionary functions beyond its conventional semantic meaning. This perspective extends the application of Speech Act Theory beyond utterance- and discourse-level analyses, highlighting its potential for investigating the pragmatic behaviour of individual lexical items. In doing so, the study contributes to German pragmatics while providing a replicable methodological framework for future lexical-pragmatic research.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The analysis is based on 28 occurrences of *gehen* and its inflected forms identified in a single German film; therefore, the findings are context-specific and are not intended for statistical generalisation to German discourse more broadly. In addition, the interpretive coding was conducted by a single researcher without an independent inter-coder reliability assessment, which may limit external validation of the speech act classifications. The study is also restricted to *gehen* and does not compare its pragmatic functions with other German motion verbs or naturally occurring spoken discourse. Furthermore, although pedagogical implications are discussed, the study does not develop or empirically evaluate specific teaching materials based on the findings. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of the study.

Future research could extend the present study by examining larger datasets comprising multiple German films, television series, genres, or naturally occurring spoken corpora. The inclusion of independent coders and the reporting of inter-coder reliability measures, such as Cohen's kappa, would further strengthen the methodological rigour of speech act classification. Comparative analyses involving other German motion verbs, such as *kommen* and *fahren*, could determine whether the pragmatic patterns identified for *gehen* are lexically distinctive or shared more broadly across motion verbs. Future studies could also compare film dialogue with spontaneous spoken German corpora and develop pedagogical materials or classroom activities based on the pragmatic uses identified. Finally, further research may engage with alternative perspectives from conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and related pragmatic approaches to broaden the theoretical interpretation of lexical-level speech act phenomena.

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APPENDIX

Speech Act Analysis of the Verb *gehen* in *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003)

Framework: Searle's Speech Act Theory (1969, 1979). Meaning Code: L = Literal (physical movement); P = Pragmatic (non-physical meaning). N = 28 occurrences.

ID	Speaker	Time	German Utterance	English Translation	Speech Act	Code	Meaning Type	Explanation of Meaning	Justification for Classification
U 1	Narrator (Alex)	00:03:07	<i>Mit unserer Familie aber ging es an diesem Tag so richtig den Bach runter.</i>	But on that day, things really went down the drain for our family.	Representative	P	Idiomatic expression	“ <i>ging</i> ” here is part of the idiom “ <i>den Bach runtergehen</i> ” (to go to ruin); it denotes the deterioration of a situation, not physical motion.	Alex states a past condition of his family as a fact, committing the speaker to the truth of the described state of affairs.
U 2	Christiane	00:10:52	<i>Es wird sich nicht ändern, wenn alle abhauen. Weiter geht's.</i>	Nothing will change if everyone runs away. Things go on.	Directive	P	Idiomatic / social function	“ <i>Weiter geht's</i> ” expresses the continuation of an activity or effort rather than literal movement through space.	Used as an exhortation to keep going, intended to get the hearers to act, which is the defining feature of a directive.
U 3	Lara	00:12:05	<i>Geht's wieder?</i>	Are you okay again?	Expressive	P	State / condition (well-being)	“ <i>Geht's</i> ” refers to the addressee's physical or emotional state, not to going anywhere.	The utterance conveys the speaker's concern for the hearer's condition, expressing a psychological state, which characterises an expressive.
U 4	Lara	00:12:09	<i>Geht's?</i>	Are you okay?	Expressive	P	State / condition (well-being)	“ <i>Geht's</i> ” again inquires about the addressee's state of being rather than any displacement.	It expresses the speaker's attitude of care toward the hearer, the hallmark of an expressive act.
U 5	Alex (Narrator)	00:22:31	<i>Wenn ich nicht persönlich da sein kann, dann geht's</i>	If I can't be there in person, then it works out	Representative	P	Ability / possibility (“it works”)	“ <i>geht's</i> ” means “it is possible / it works,” denoting feasibility rather than motion.	Alex asserts a belief about what is possible, presenting it as a true state of affairs, which is

			<i>auch so, dachte ich mir.</i>	anyway, I thought to myself.					representative.
U 6	Alex	00:31:24	<i>Ich glaub, du wolltest einkaufen gehen.</i>	I think you wanted to go shopping.	Representative	L	Physical movement (purpose of motion)	<i>“einkaufen gehen”</i> describes actually going out to a shop, i.e. physical displacement to do shopping.	Alex asserts his belief about the addressee's prior intention, committing to the truth of that proposition, hence representative.
U 7	Alex	00:33:07	<i>Es geht also nur um dieses eine Zimmer.</i>	So it's only about this one room.	Representative	P	Topic reference (“it's about”)	<i>“es geht um”</i> is the idiom “to be about / concern,” referring to the topic at issue, with no physical movement.	Alex states a conclusion about what the matter concerns, asserting its truth, which is representative.
U 8	Alex	00:33:11	<i>Bis es ihr wieder besser geht.</i>	Until she feels better again.	Representative	P	State / condition (health)	<i>“es geht ihr besser”</i> denotes an improvement in health or well-being, not motion.	Alex asserts a future condition as a factual outcome to be reached, committing to its truth, hence representative.
U 9	Doktor	00:35:02	<i>Ihre Mutter geht auf eigene Verantwortung. Sie wissen ja, was ich davon halte.</i>	Your mother is leaving at her own risk. You know what I think of that.	Representative	P	Process / circumstance (discharge against advice)	Although framed with <i>“geht,”</i> the focus is on the circumstance of leaving (at her own responsibility) as a stated fact, not the act of walking out itself.	The doctor asserts the factual situation and his evaluation of it, committing to the truth of the described arrangement, which is representative.
U 10	Doktor	00:35:10	<i>Dr. Wagner ging nach Düsseldorf.</i>	Dr. Wagner went to Düsseldorf.	Representative	L	Physical movement (relocation)	<i>“ging nach Düsseldorf”</i> reports an actual change of location to a place.	The doctor reports a past event as a fact, committing to the truth of the proposition, hence representative.
U 11	Alex	00:40:26	<i>Ich geh noch kurz was einkaufen, aber Ariane ist noch da.</i>	I'm just going to buy something quickly, but Ariane is still here.	Representative	L	Physical movement (purpose of motion)	<i>“Ich geh ... einkaufen”</i> describes Alex physically leaving to shop.	Alex asserts his intended action as a true statement of what he will do, which is representative.
U 12	Alex	00:43:05	<i>Es ist nur so, du kannst ja nicht mehr selber zur Bank gehen.</i>	It's just that you can't go to the bank yourself anymore.	Directive	L	Physical movement (motion to a place)	<i>“zur Bank gehen”</i> refers to physically going to the bank.	The utterance functions to redirect the hearer's action regarding going to the bank, attempting to influence behaviour, which is directive.
U 13	Ariane	00:45:21	<i>Bald geht's dir wieder besser.</i>	You'll feel better again	Expressive	P	State / condition (well-being)	<i>“geht's dir besser”</i> refers to an improvement in the addressee's condition,	Ariane expresses reassurance and concern for the hearer's state,

				soon.				not movement.	conveying a psychological attitude, which is expressive.
U 14	Man (minor character)	00:51:50	<i>Halbfinale! Ich geh zu Pollnicks.</i>	Semi-final! I'm going to the Pollnicks'.	Representative	L	Physical movement (motion to a place)	“Ich geh zu Pollnicks” states an actual move to another location.	The speaker asserts his intended movement as a fact about what he is doing, hence representative.
U 15	Woman (minor character)	00:51:53	<i>Na, dann geh doch.</i>	Well, then go.	Directive	L	Physical movement (motion away)	“geh” commands actual departure / physically going.	The imperative directly attempts to get the hearer to perform the action of leaving, which is the defining property of a directive.
U 16	Ariane	00:53:18	<i>Das geht zu weit!</i>	That's going too far!	Expressive	P	Idiomatic expression (exceeding limits)	“zu weit gehen” is figurative, meaning to overstep limits, not literal distance covered.	Ariane voices indignation and disapproval of a situation, expressing her emotional reaction, which characterises an expressive.
U 17	Christiane	00:56:53	<i>Draußen geht's voran und ich fühl mich hier so nutzlos.</i>	Things are progressing out there and I feel so useless here.	Representative	P	Process / progress	“geht's voran” denotes things making progress, an abstract process rather than physical motion.	Christiane asserts a state of affairs about the world outside and her own feeling as facts, which is representative.
U 18	Alex	01:06:14	<i>Das geht nicht!</i>	That won't work! / That's not possible!	Expressive	P	Possibility / impossibility	“Das geht nicht” denotes impossibility or unacceptability, not physical movement.	The utterance expresses Alex's strong objection and dismay at a proposal, conveying his attitude, which is expressive.
U 19	Alex (Narrator)	01:08:03	<i>Und Mutter ging es immer besser.</i>	And Mother kept getting better and better.	Representative	P	State / condition (health)	“ging es ... besser” describes improving health, not motion.	Alex reports his mother's improving condition as a factual development, which is representative.
U 20	Frau Schäfer	01:09:14	<i>Hier ein paar kleine Änderungen und der geht heute noch zum OTTO-Versand.</i>	A few small changes here and it goes off to OTTO mail-order today.	Representative	P	Process (dispatch / sending off)	Here “geht ... zum OTTO-Versand” refers to a document or order being sent, a procedural dispatch rather than a person moving.	She asserts the planned procedural outcome as a statement of fact about what will happen, which is representative.
U 21	Alex	01:10:	<i>Meine Mutter wird sich freuen,</i>	My mother will be pleased,	Directive	L	Physical movement (motion)	“gehen Sie durch” instructs the hearer to physically walk	The polite imperative attempts to get the hearer to perform the

		00	<i>gehen Sie durch.</i>	go on through.			through)	through or in.	action of entering, which is directive.
U 22	Lara	01: 13: 56	<i>Still halten! Sonst geht's nicht.</i>	Hold still! Otherwise it won't work.	Directive	P	Possibility / feasibility	“ <i>geht's nicht</i> ” means the task won't succeed, denoting feasibility, not movement.	Paired with the command “hold still,” the utterance functions to make the hearer comply with a required behaviour, which is directive.
U 23	Christiane	01: 16: 22	<i>Siehst du? Bei mir geht's auch.</i>	See? It works for me too.	Expressive	P	Ability / capability	“ <i>geht's</i> ” means “it works / I can manage,” denoting capability, not motion.	Christiane expresses pride and satisfaction in demonstrating her own ability, conveying her feeling, which is expressive.
U 24	Christiane	01: 29: 43	<i>Ich bin nicht gegangen.</i>	I didn't go / I didn't leave.	Representative	L	Physical movement (departure)	“ <i>gegangen</i> ” refers to the physical act of leaving (the country), a movement that did not occur.	Christiane asserts a fact about her past (non-)action, committing to the truth of the proposition, which is representative.
U 25	Narrator (Alex)	01: 31: 12	<i>Am gleichen Abend ging es Mutter plötzlich schlechter.</i>	That same evening, Mother suddenly got worse.	Representative	P	State / condition (health)	“ <i>ging es ... schlechter</i> ” describes a worsening of health, not motion.	Alex reports the deterioration as a factual event, committing to its truth, which is representative.
U 26	Taxi driver	01: 35: 28	<i>Wohin soll's denn gehen?</i>	Where to, then?	Directive	L	Physical movement (destination of travel)	“ <i>Wohin soll's gehen</i> ” asks about the intended destination of an actual journey.	The question prompts the hearer to specify a destination, functioning to elicit a directive response, which is directive.
U 27	Robert	01: 37: 51	<i>Hallo. Wie geht's euch?</i>	Hello. How are you (all)?	Expressive	P	Social function (greeting)	“ <i>Wie geht's</i> ” is a conventional greeting inquiring about well-being, with no physical movement.	The phatic greeting expresses social acknowledgement and goodwill toward the hearers, a social attitude, which is expressive.
U 28	Denis	01: 44: 51	<i>Ja? Kamera läuft. Auf 3 geht's los.</i>	Yes? Camera's rolling. On 3 we start.	Directive	P	Idiomatic (commencement of an action)	“ <i>geht's los</i> ” means an action begins, denoting commencement, not literal motion.	Denis cues the hearers to begin acting on the count, attempting to coordinate and prompt their behaviour, which is directive.