



Identifying Interpersonal Function in Movie "The Pursuit of Happyness": Job Interview Scene through Functional Linguistics

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Abstract

This research aims to classify the interpersonal meaning in "The Pursuit of Happyness" movie scene, job interview scene. This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method to explore the interpersonal meaning in the language used during a job interview scene from the movie "The Pursuit of Happyness." Utilizing Halliday's framework for functional linguistics, the researchers analyzed 82 clauses from the scene, focusing on mood structures, speech functions, and the use of modality. The analysis revealed that statements were the predominant speech function, consistent with the informative nature of job interviews. The study identified various linguistic elements, such as subjects, finites, predicators, complements, and adjuncts, which are crucial in understanding the characters' use of language to convey their identities, intentions, and social dynamics. The findings contribute to the cross-disciplinary understanding of linguistics, film studies, and communication, offering insights into effective communication strategies in professional settings. The research provides a detailed examination of how language is used to negotiate relationships, express personal attitudes, and enact social roles within the high-stakes communicative situation depicted in the film.

Keywords: Functional Linguistics, Interpersonal Function, Movie Scene, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

July 03, 2025

Revised

September 19,
2025

Accepted

October 30, 2025

Published by

Website

ISSN

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CV. Creative Tugu Pena

<https://attractivejournal.com/index.php/anglophile>

2746-8631

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in human interaction, serving as a tool for constructing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and the social order. As Halliday and Matthiessen (1997) note, "We use language to interact with one another — to construct and maintain our interpersonal relations and the social order that lies behind them; and in doing so, we interpret and represent the world for one another and for ourselves." This underscores the pervasive importance of language in all aspects of life, including its depiction in film.

Dialogue is central to all communication (Bakhtin, 1981). Bakhtin's concept of dialogism emphasizes the dynamic nature of dialogues in shaping meaning and relationships in film scenes. According to Bakhtin, dialogues are not static exchanges of words but are inherently responsive and interactive. In film, dialogues between characters serve multiple functions beyond advancing the plot—they reveal characters' inner thoughts, motivations, and conflicts. Each dialogue interaction creates a relational field where characters negotiate their identities, values, and worldviews. By analyzing dialogues through a dialogic lens, researchers can uncover how characters' perspectives

and relationships evolve throughout the narrative, offering deeper insights into the film's thematic concerns and character development. Speakers and listeners cooperate based on the cooperative principle and conversational maxims (Grice, 1975). Grice's theory of conversational implicature provides a valuable framework for understanding implicit communication in film dialogues. According to Grice, speakers and listeners engage in cooperative communication by adhering to conversational maxims such as relevance, quality, quantity, and manner. In film, characters often communicate indirectly through implicatures, relying on shared knowledge and contextual cues to convey deeper meanings. In the context of linguistics, Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how language operates in different contexts, including film scenes (Sutikno et al., 2025).

According to Halliday (1985), "Language serves three main metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual." This study focuses on the interpersonal metafunction, which is concerned with how language is used to establish and negotiate social relationships, convey emotions, and express attitudes among characters. The significance of studying language within films lies in its ability to reveal character development and narrative progression through dialogue and interaction. In high-stakes situations, such as job interviews, the dynamics of communication become particularly pronounced and provide rich material for linguistic analysis. This mini-research project aims to investigate the interpersonal function of language in a specific cinematic context: the job interview scene from the film "The Pursuit of Happyness."

"The Pursuit of Happyness," a biographical drama produced in 2006, tells the true story of Chris Gardner, a struggling salesperson who eventually becomes a successful stockbroker. The job interview scene is pivotal, showcasing Gardner's determination and resourcefulness. This scene is an excellent subject for linguistic research as it captures the complex interplay of power, solidarity, and identity through language. This study utilizes the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) framework, which views language as a system of meaning potential. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1997), grammar is a resource for creating meaning through wordings rather than a set of rules for specifying structures.

The focus is on the interpersonal metafunction, which includes the system of MOOD—a grammatical resource for expressing speech functions in dialogue, such as giving information (statements), demanding information (questions), and demanding services or goods (commands). Using a qualitative research design and content analysis, the study examines words, phrases, and utterances to uncover descriptive phenomena. Data were sourced from the job interview scene in the movie, with collection methods including detailed transcription and coding of the dialogue. Analysis was conducted through the lens of functional linguistics, identifying key interpersonal functions within the conversation.

By analyzing the linguistic choices made by characters in the job interview scene, this study aims to shed light on how interpersonal meaning is constructed and how it contributes to the overall depiction of a critical moment in Chris Gardner's life. The analysis will examine language features such as mood, modality, evaluation, and the use of direct and indirect speech to understand how these elements work together to portray the characters' intentions, attitudes, and social dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Halliday, views language as a social semiotic system used to make meaning within specific contexts (Halliday, 1985; Guna & Darong, 2023; Sinaga et al., 2023; Husni & Wicaksana, 2024). Unlike traditional structural linguistics, which focuses on grammatical forms, SFL emphasizes how language choices are shaped by social purposes and situations. Halliday proposes that language

operates through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Ngongo et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2022; Hartati, 2023; Istiqomah & Abdurrahman, 2024). These metafunctions work simultaneously in any instance of language use to represent experience, enact social relations, and organize discourse.

The interpersonal metafunction is particularly relevant to this study, as it concerns how speakers use language to interact with others, express attitudes, negotiate roles, and establish power relations (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Shaumiwaty et al., 2024). This metafunction enables speakers to adopt positions such as giving information, demanding responses, offering services, or expressing judgments (Darong, 2024). In spoken interactions, such as film dialogues, the interpersonal metafunction plays a central role in revealing characters' identities, intentions, and social relationships (Silalahi et al., 2024; Silaban et al., 2025).

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) operationalizes the interpersonal metafunction through the system of MOOD, which includes elements such as Subject, Finite, Predicator, Complement, and Adjunct. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (1997), the MOOD system realizes speech functions such as statements, questions, commands, and offers. These grammatical choices are crucial for understanding how meaning is negotiated in interactional contexts, including professional settings like job interviews.

2. Interpersonal Meaning and Mood Structure

Interpersonal meaning refers to the way language is used to establish and maintain social relationships between speakers and listeners (Eggins, 2004). It encompasses speech functions, modality, and evaluative language that reflect speakers' attitudes, judgments, and degrees of certainty or obligation (Herman et al., 2024; Afsari et al., 2025). In SFL, interpersonal meaning is primarily realized through mood types (declarative, interrogative, imperative) and modality (probability, obligation, inclination). Previous studies have shown that declarative clauses are often dominant in institutional and professional interactions, such as interviews and formal meetings, where the exchange of information is prioritized (Biber et al., 1999). Modality, expressed through modal verbs, adjuncts, and metaphors of modality, allows speakers to soften claims, express politeness, or indicate authority (Herman et al., 2022; Simanjuntak et al., 2022; Soegiarto, 2025; Syafitri, 2025). In job interview contexts, modality functions as a strategic linguistic resource to balance confidence and deference, particularly for interviewees who must present themselves positively while respecting institutional power structures.

In film discourse, mood structures and interpersonal resources are carefully crafted to represent social dynamics realistically. By analyzing mood types and speech functions, researchers can uncover how characters position themselves in relation to others and how power, solidarity, and professionalism are linguistically constructed.

3. Dialogue, Interaction, and Film Discourse

Dialogue in films is not merely a reflection of everyday speech but a purposeful construction that conveys character development, social relationships, and narrative progression (Kozloff, 2000; Kislitsyna & Slujbina, 2019; Pavesi, 2020). Bakhtin's concept of dialogism provides a theoretical foundation for understanding dialogue as inherently interactive and responsive. According to Bakhtin (1981), every utterance is shaped by previous utterances and anticipates future responses, making meaning a product of social interaction rather than isolated speech. Film dialogues exemplify dialogism by placing characters in communicative situations where language choices reflect conflicting intentions, values, and identities (Zheltukhina et al., 2023). The interaction between speakers creates a dynamic space in which interpersonal meaning is negotiated. In high-stakes scenes such as job interviews, dialogue becomes a site for the enactment of authority, competence, and self-presentation (Xu & Wijitsopon, 2023). Additionally, Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and conversational maxims offer insights into how

meaning is conveyed implicitly in film dialogues. Characters may observe or deliberately flout conversational maxims to imply meanings beyond what is explicitly stated. Such implicatures enrich the interpersonal dimension of dialogue, revealing underlying tensions, humor, or strategic communication.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research method. According to Doe et al. (2023), this approach involves systematically collecting, organizing, evaluating, and interpreting data to draw conclusions without making sweeping generalizations. This methodology was chosen to allow for a detailed examination of the selected movie scene, focusing on the interpersonal function of language. The primary data source for this research is the job interview scene from the movie "The Pursuit of Happyness." Specifically, the data was obtained from a YouTube video titled "The Pursuit Of Happiness - Job interview - Inspirational Movie Scenes Ep. 6," which covers the scene from 42:50 to 46:55 in the full movie. This particular scene was selected due to its rich content illustrating interpersonal communication in a high-stakes scenario. The instruments used for data collection in this study include: 1) Video Recording: The specific scene from the movie was watched and analyzed; 2) Transcript: A detailed transcript of the dialogue in the selected scene was created; and 3) Analytical Framework: Halliday's framework for functional linguistics was used to categorize and analyze speech functions and mood types.

Data collection involved several steps in this study. First, the selected job interview scene from the film "The Pursuit of Happyness" was seen several times to obtain a thorough knowledge of the background and conversation. This was followed by the compilation of an accurate transcript of the conversation, including any important nonverbal signs. The transcribed data was then processed and classified using Halliday's functional linguistics paradigm to identify speech functions such as questions, statements, instructions, and offers, as well as mood kinds such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Furthermore, the usage of modality in the discussion was investigated to determine indications of willingness, obligation, and certainty. Finally, secondary sources and theoretical frameworks were consulted to supplement and support the analysis, ensuring a rigorous and methodologically sound approach to the study of interpersonal communication in the film scene.

The data analysis strategy for this study was based on two fundamental linguistic theories: speech act theory, proposed by Searle (1969), and discourse analysis, detailed by Stubbs (1983). The use of speech act theory enabled the researchers to categorize the numerous speech acts in the discussion, such as affirmations, inquiries, and directives, which was critical for understanding each utterance's functional role in the interaction. In contrast, discourse analysis offers a framework for investigating how language is used to form social identities and connections. This entailed a thorough investigation of the discourse, with a particular emphasis on the structure and function of sentences and utterances within the conversational context. This dual-theoretical approach allowed for a thorough investigation of interpersonal interactions and the construction of meaning in the job interview scene from "The Pursuit of Happyness".

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Mood Structure Types

This study's analysis of mood structures is broken down into two categories: elements and residues. Subject and finite comprise the mood element, whereas predicator, complement, and addition comprise the residual element. There are four categories of adjuncts as well: additional moods, additional conjunctions, additional comments, and additional circumstances presented in Table 1 below

Table 1. Mood structures used in the movie

No	Mood Structures	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Subject	64	22,2
2	Finite	64	22,2
3	Predicator	46	16
4	Complement	40	14
5	Mood Adjunct	54	18,7
6	Circumstantial Adjunct	2	0,6
7	Comment adjunct	1	0,3
8	Conjunctive Adjunct	17	6
	Total	288	100

From Table 1 above, it can be concluded that to find the percent of mood structure types is the appearing number of types divided by the total number of data and multiplied by one hundred so that the results will be found. The Mood structures found in Scene Movies The Pursuit of Happiness based on Yule theory found that there were 64 (22,2%) subjects and 64 (22,2%) finites, 46 (16%) predicators, 40 (14%) complements, 54 (18,7%) mood adjuncts, 2 (0,6%) circumstantial adjuncts, 1 (0.3%) comment adjuncts and 17 (6%) conjunctive adjuncts presented in the following bar chart.

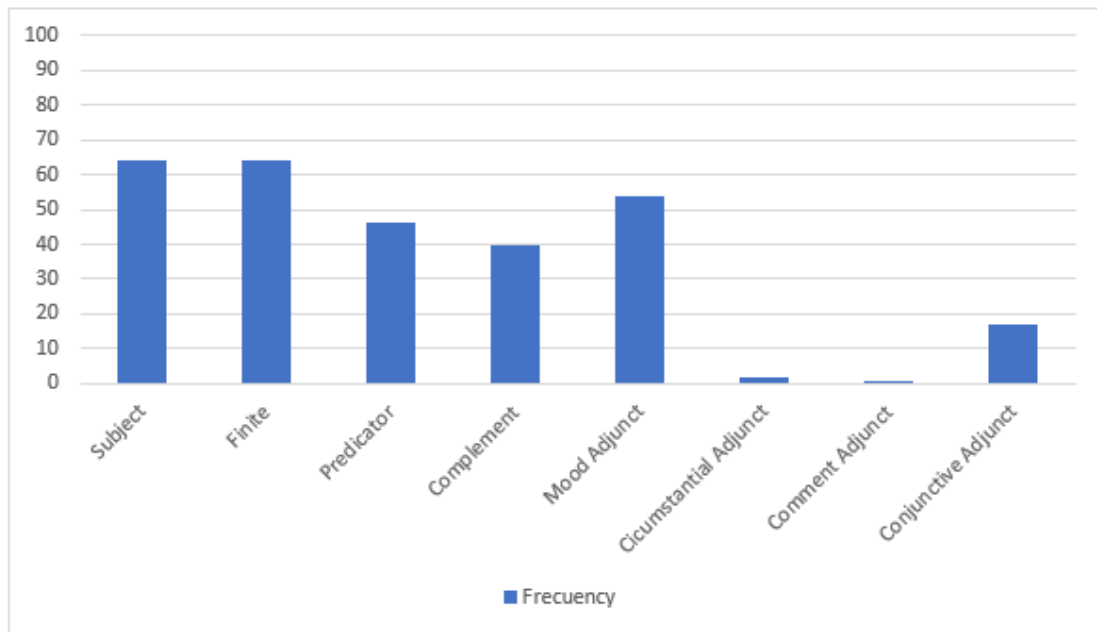


Figure 1. Mood Structures in Scene Movies The Pursuit of Happiness

2. Speech Functions Types

Clauses were also analyzed in this research. The speech function types included Statement, Question, Offer, and Command presented in Table 2

Table 2. Speech Function Types Found in Scene Movies The Pursuit of Happiness

No	Speech Function	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Statement	63	76,83
2	Question	16	19,51
3	Offer	0	0
4	Command	3	3,66
	Total	82	100

Table 2 above shows a total of 82 speech function data. Where the speech function data consists of statements, questions, offers, and commands. We can see the numbers and percentages in the table, namely the number of statements is 63 with a percentage of 76.83%, the number of Questions is 16 with a percentage of 19.51%, the number of offers is 0, and the number of commands is 3 with a percentage of 3.66%. So the film *The Pursuit of Happiness* has the most speech functions, namely statements. Moreover, the implicature types findings are displayed in the chart below.

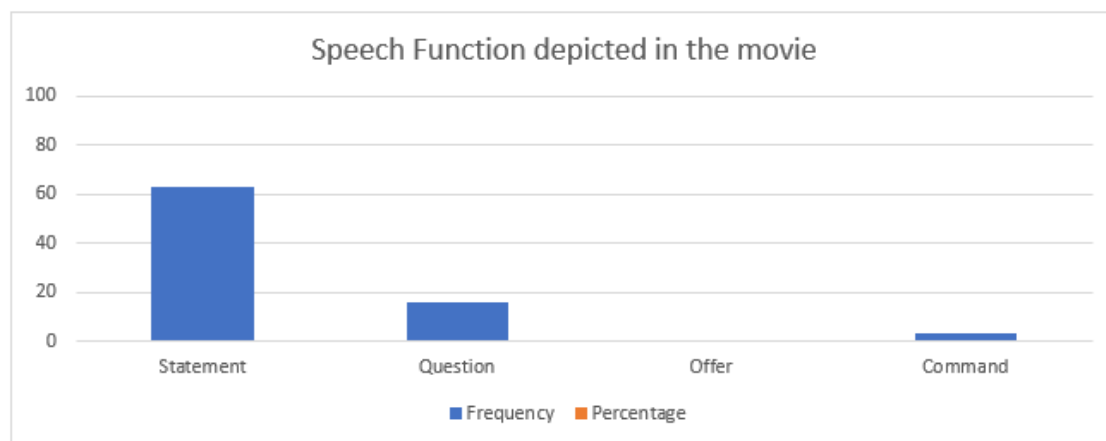


Figure 2. Speech Function found in Scene Movies *The Pursuit of Happiness*

Four types of data were discovered by the researchers to be contained in common conversational implicatures: statement, question, offer, and command. Naturally, these four implicatures match the needs or environment of a communication that has a certain goal in mind. In the setting under analysis—a job interview scene in a movie—the goal is to get information about the object or applicant about himself in order to evaluate and accept the object or applicant who tries to present and introduce intriguing aspects about himself. Thus, the audience can infer from this context that the object makes a lot of statements during a job interview.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to identify how interpersonal meaning is realized in the job interview scene of *The Pursuit of Happiness* through the lens of Systemic Functional Linguistics. The findings demonstrate that interpersonal meaning in the scene is predominantly constructed through declarative clauses functioning as statements. This dominance reflects the communicative demands of a job interview context, where the primary goal is the exchange of information rather than negotiation of actions or services. The prevalence of statements confirms Halliday's view that declarative mood is central to situations involving information-giving and self-presentation, particularly in institutional and professional interactions.

The analysis of individual clauses reveals that the main character, Chris Gardner, frequently positions himself as an information provider. Clauses such as "I've been sitting out there for the last half hour" and "I was arrested for failure to pay parking tickets" show how the declarative mood allows him to narrate his experiences and justify his circumstances. Through these linguistic choices, Gardner constructs an identity of honesty, perseverance, and accountability. The interpersonal function here goes beyond simply conveying facts; it also works to establish credibility and rapport with the interviewers, which is crucial in a high-stakes evaluative setting like a job interview.

The mood structure analysis further supports this interpretation. The high frequency of Subject and Finite elements indicates that clauses are grammatically complete and interactionally clear, reinforcing the informative and formal nature of the exchange. The significant presence of mood adjuncts suggests that speakers also use interpersonal resources to express attitudes, probability, and emphasis. These adjuncts contribute to subtle interpersonal meanings, such as politeness, hesitation, or confidence, which shape how utterances are interpreted by the interlocutors. In contrast, circumstantial and comment adjuncts occur far less frequently, indicating that the interaction prioritizes direct information exchange over personal commentary or elaboration.

Speech function analysis shows that statements overwhelmingly dominate the scene, followed by questions and a minimal number of commands, with no offers identified. This distribution aligns with the institutional structure of job interviews, where interviewers primarily ask questions to elicit information, and interviewees respond with statements. Commands appear infrequently, reflecting the limited need for directive language in this context. The absence of offers further highlights that the interaction is evaluative rather than transactional. These findings support previous SFL-based studies that emphasize how speech functions are shaped by communicative purpose and social roles. The presence of interrogative clauses, particularly from the interviewers, illustrates power asymmetry within the interaction. Questions such as “What were you doing before you were arrested?” function as tools for assessment and control, positioning the interviewers as evaluators and Gardner as the respondent. However, Gardner’s responses consistently return to declarative statements, reinforcing his role as a cooperative and informative participant. This interactional pattern reflects Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism, where meaning emerges from responsive exchanges shaped by social roles and expectations.

The primary finding of this study is that interpersonal meaning in the job interview scene of *The Pursuit of Happiness* is predominantly constructed through declarative clauses functioning as statements, which account for approximately 76.83% of all speech functions observed. The frequent use of declarative mood reflects the informational and self-presentational goals of interview discourse, where speakers primarily provide facts and justify personal circumstances rather than negotiate services or issue directives. This pattern supports previous research on professional and institutional discourse, where declarative mood and statement functions are typically dominant in evaluative and formal communication settings (Wang, 2021; Li & Hu, 2022; Nguyen, 2023; López, 2024; Hassan & Karim, 2020). The analysis of mood elements such as Subject and Finite further confirms that clauses are interactionally complete and grammatically structured to maintain clarity in institutional interaction, aligning with findings from recent SFL-based discourse studies (Rahman, 2022; Oliveira & Cunha, 2023). The presence of mood adjuncts in this study also illustrates how speakers linguistically encode stance, certainty, and interpersonal positioning, as similarly observed in contemporary analyses of spoken and media discourse (Kaur & Lee, 2024; Ibrahim, 2021).

Unlike many SFL studies conducted in educational and pedagogical contexts where interrogative and imperative moods tend to appear more frequently, particularly in teacher–student interaction and instructional discourse (Cheng, 2024; Getdah Pah, 2025; Yanto & Pravitasari, 2023), the job interview dialogue in this research demonstrates a markedly stronger dominance of declarative clauses. This difference may be attributed to the evaluative and institutional nature of interview settings, in which participants are primarily engaged in providing and assessing information rather than directing actions or managing classroom behavior. Additionally, research on promotional and persuasive discourse indicates that imperative and offer functions are more prominent in texts

designed to influence or attract audiences (Zhang & Ge, 2023; Susianti et al., 2025). These contrasts highlight how variations in communicative purpose and situational context shape the distribution of mood types and speech functions across different genres, distinguishing the evaluative and formal exchange observed in the job interview scene from other discourse settings. These findings demonstrate that SFL's interpersonal metafunction is an effective framework for analyzing professional spoken interactions, even in scripted media like film. By illustrating how speakers use mood and speech functions to negotiate identity, credibility, and power relations, this study contributes to both theoretical linguistics and practical communication research, particularly in training environments where effective information exchange is critical, such as job interview preparation and professional discourse training. The integration of mood adjuncts and modality elements further enriches our understanding of how interpersonal stance is linguistically constructed. This has implications for developing language pedagogy that prepares learners for real-world professional communication.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis is based on a single scene from one film, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other job interview contexts or genres of media discourse. Additionally, the use of a scripted movie scene raises questions about the extent to which interpersonal patterns reflect naturally occurring dialogue in real interviews. Methodologically, while SFL provides a robust framework for clause-level analysis, the study did not incorporate interactional sociolinguistic or multimodal analysis, which could provide deeper insights into turn-taking, non-verbal cues, and contextual meaning beyond clause structure alone.

Future research could extend this investigation to multiple films and real-world interview transcripts to test the consistency of interpersonal patterns across different contexts. Incorporating multimodal discourse analysis or conversation analysis could also provide richer insights into non-verbal and pragmatic features that interact with clause-based interpersonal meanings. Expanding the scope to include other SFL metafunctions, such as ideational and textual, would provide a more holistic picture of meaning-making in spoken and scripted discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the interpersonal function of language in the job interview scene of *The Pursuit of Happyness* using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. By analyzing mood structures and speech functions, the research revealed how interpersonal meaning is constructed through grammatical choices in cinematic dialogue. The findings show that declarative clauses functioning as statements dominate the interaction, reflecting the primary communicative purpose of job interviews as contexts for information exchange and self-presentation. The analysis of mood structures indicated that Subjects and Finites were the most frequent elements, demonstrating that the dialogue is grammatically complete and interactionally clear. The frequent use of mood adjuncts further contributes to the expression of attitudes, certainty, and interpersonal stance. In terms of speech functions, statements were most prominent, followed by questions and a small number of commands, while offers were absent. This distribution highlights the asymmetrical roles between interviewers and interviewee and illustrates how power and professionalism are linguistically negotiated. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how interpersonal meaning operates in film discourse, particularly in professional and institutional settings. By applying the interpersonal metafunction of SFL to a job interview scene, the research shows that language plays a crucial role in constructing identity, credibility, and social relationships. Future studies may extend this analysis to other scenes or films, or incorporate additional metafunctions to provide a more comprehensive account of meaning-making in cinematic communication.

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