

Constructing ecological awareness through illocutionary acts: An eco-pragmatic analysis of Turkish children's stories

Edimsöz eylemler aracılığıyla çevresel farkındalığın inşası: Türkçe çocuk öykülerinin çevre-edimbilimsel çözümlemesi

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Abstract

The ongoing global environmental crisis has drawn growing attention to how language participates in shaping ecological consciousness. Fields such as ecolinguistics and eco-pragmatics have shown that language does more than transmit information: it also helps construct ecological values, moral orientations, and attitudes toward the natural world. Children's literature occupies a particularly influential position in cultivating environmental sensitivity from an early age, yet most existing research has concentrated on adult-oriented genres. As a result, the pragmatic strategies through which children's ecological stories build environmental awareness have received limited scholarly attention. This study applies Searle's (1976) taxonomy of illocutionary acts to examine how ten Turkish children's stories with ecological themes employ assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations to construct environmental meanings and guide young readers toward pro-environmental values. The stories were drawn from the Ortak Evimiz Dünya (Our Common Home) collection, published online by the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Urbanization in 2019. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining qualitative discourse analysis with descriptive frequency analysis to identify both the distribution and the communicative functions of each illocutionary category. The findings indicate that assertives and directives are the most dominant categories, together accounting for more than three quarters of the data, followed by expressives, which foster emotional alignment with ecological themes. Commissives and declarations appear less frequently and serve more specialized narrative and normative functions. Declarations mostly act as borderline narrative declaration performatives. The study contributes to the intersection of eco-pragmatics and children's literature by demonstrating that ecological awareness in these stories is constructed through a layered interplay of knowledge presentation, behavioral guidance, and emotional engagement.

Keywords: Eco-pragmatics, illocutionary acts, Searle, ecolinguistics, children's literature

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Citation:

Güçlü, R. & Küçüksakarya, E. (2026). Constructing ecological awareness through illocutionary acts: An eco-pragmatic analysis of Turkish children's stories. *OPUS- Journal of Society Research*, 23, e 1895149. <https://doi.org/10.26466/opusjsr.1895149>

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Review Note:

Evaluated by Double-Blind Peer Review

Ethics Reporting:

To report potential ethical concerns, contact: editorialoffice@opusjournal.net

Similarity screening was conducted via intihal.net.



Öz

Devam eden küresel çevre krizi, dilin çevresel bilinçlenmeyi nasıl şekillendirdiğini inceleyen dilbilimsel yaklaşımlara duyulan ihtiyacı artırmıştır. Çevrebilim, çevre-edimbilim ve çevre-üstdilbilim gibi gelişmekte olan alanlar, dilin yalnızca bilgi aktarmadığını; aynı zamanda çevresel değerleri, ahlaki sorumlulukları ve doğal dünyaya yönelik tutumları da inşa ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Çocuk edebiyatı, çevre duyarlılığının erken yaşlarda gelişmesinde önemli bir rol oynamaktadır; ancak mevcut araştırmaların çoğu yetişkin odaklı türlere odaklanmaktadır. Bu nedenle, çocuklara yönelik çevre temalı öykülerin çevresel farkındalığı hangi dilbilimsel düzeneklerle oluşturduğu yeterince araştırılmamıştır. Bu çalışma, Searle'un (1976) edimsöz eylem sınıflandırmasını temel alarak, 2019 yılında T.C. Çevre, Şehircilik ve İklim Değişikliği Bakanlığı tarafından çevrimiçi olarak yayımlanan Ortak Evimiz Dünya çocuk öyküleri koleksiyonundan seçilen on Türkçe çevre temalı çocuk öyküsündeki belirticilerin, yönlendiricilerin, yükümleyicilerin, dışavurumcuların ve bildiricilerin çevresel anlamı nasıl kurduğunu ve genç okurları çevre yanlısı değerlere nasıl yönlendirdiğini incelemektedir. Çalışmada nitel söylem çözümlemesi ile betimleyici nicel sıklık çözümlemesini bütünleştiren karma-yöntemli bir desen benimsenmiştir. Veri çözümlemesinde ulaşılan bulgulara göre belirticiler ve yönlendiriciler veri kümesinin dörtte üçünden fazlasını oluşturan en baskın ulamlardır; bunları, çevresel temalarla duygusal uyumu destekleyen dışavurumcular izlemektedir. Yükümleyiciler ve bildiriciler ise daha seyrek görülmekte olup daha belirli anlatsal ve kural koyucu işlevler üstlenmektedir. Bildiriciler, çoğunlukla sınırda yer alan anlatsal bildirici edimi işlevi görür. Bu çalışma, çevre-edimbilim ile çocuk edebiyatının kesişim noktasına katkıda bulunarak çevresel farkındalığın bilgi sunumu, davranış rehberliği ve duygusal yükümlülüğün iç içe geçmesiyle kurulduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çevre-edimbilim, edimsöz eylemler, Searle, çevredilbilim, çocuk edebiyatı

Introduction

In recent decades, environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, and biodiversity loss have moved beyond specialist scientific circles to become part of everyday public conversation, political agendas, and educational priorities. These problems are no longer seen only as scientific topics discussed by specialists but as social realities that affect both present and future generations. Therefore, scholars increasingly argue that responding to the environmental crisis goes beyond technological innovation or legal regulation. It also demands careful attention to how environmental problems are described and explained, because the language used to talk about ecological issues shapes how nature is understood, who is held responsible, and what solutions appear possible or realistic (Harré, Brockmeier, & Mühlhäusler, 1999; Mühlhäusler, 2003; Fill & Penz, 2018).

This growing interest has led to the development of ecolinguistics and related fields that examine how discourse contributes to ecological thinking. Research in this field has shown that language does not simply reflect environmental conditions; it also shapes how people think and talk about them (Stibbe, 2015). Metaphors, narrative patterns, and evaluative expressions influence whether ecological problems are understood as distant and abstract or as urgent moral and social concerns (Goatly, 2006; Alexander & Stibbe, 2014). Despite this growing body of research, most studies in ecolinguistics have focused on adult-oriented texts, including political discourse, media coverage, institutional documents, and environmental campaigning (Hansen, 2018).

Ecological Meaning-Making in Children's Stories

Children's stories are particularly important in this context because they combine imagination with moral and social guidance. Eco-themed stories introduce young readers to issues like pollution, deforestation, climate change, and species endan-

germent through characters, events, and situations that are easy for them to relate to. As a result, environmental problems are not presented as distant facts but as experiences that take place within the narrative world. Research in children's literature shows that stories play a key role in shaping children's cognitive, emotional, and ethical development (Nodelman, 2008; Nikolajeva, 2014). Ecological meaning in stories is created not only through subject matter but also through narrative technique, characterization, and dialogue, which shape how children understand nature and their own relationship to it.

From a linguistic perspective, pragmatics becomes especially relevant in this study. Rather than focusing only on what language represents, pragmatics is concerned with what language does in context. In children's stories, characters do more than describe the environment; they warn, advise, promise, express concern, and sometimes announce change. The theoretical foundation for this understanding lies in speech act theory, originally developed by Austin (1962), who demonstrated that utterances do not merely describe states of affairs but perform social actions. Building on this foundation, Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts provides a useful framework for analyzing these communicative functions. By distinguishing between assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, this model enables examination of how language constructs knowledge, encourages responsibility, and signals moral positioning. In literary contexts, illocutionary acts function not only as linguistic phenomena but also as narrative tools that shape values and attitudes (Mey, 2001; Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Cutting, 2002; Mühlhäusler, 2003). To examine these communicative functions systematically, the study draws on two complementary theoretical frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary perspectives: speech act theory and ecolinguistics. Together, these frameworks make it possible to

examine Turkish children's ecological stories both as linguistic texts and as cultural narratives that shape environmental awareness, values, and responsibility.

The pragmatic dimension of the study is based on speech act theory, which treats language as a form of action rather than merely a system for describing reality. From this perspective, utterances perform functions such as stating, requesting, promising, or declaring, and these functions are central to meaning making in discourse. In narrative texts, and especially in children's stories, such actions play an important role in guiding interpretation and shaping attitudes.

The analysis adopts the illocutionary act classification proposed by John Searle, which distinguishes five major categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1976).

Table 1. Speech Acts Taxonomy (Searle, 1976)

Speech Act	Definition	Example
Assertives	The speaker commits to the truth of what is asserted; what is said is believed to be true.	<i>We watched a movie yesterday</i>
Directives	The speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something by expressing a request or command	<i>Bring me some hot water</i>
Commissives	The speaker commits to a future course of action (e.g. promises, offers).	<i>I promise I will complete the work by tomorrow</i>
Expressives	The speaker expresses a psychological or emotional state (e.g. apologies, thanks).	<i>I am sorry for my disrespectful behavior</i>
Declarations	The speaker brings about change in the world through the utterance itself, provided authority exists	<i>I now pronounce you husband and wife</i>

As summarized in Table 1, each category is defined in terms of the type of communicative action performed by the speaker, ranging from the presentation of facts to the enactment of institutional change through language. In the present study, these categories are not treated as mechanical labels, but as analytical tools for examining

how ecological meaning is constructed through language use in narrative contexts. Assertives are examined in terms of how they present ecological conditions and establish environmental realities within stories; directives are analyzed with reference to how behavior is guided, and action is encouraged by means of order, command, request, invitation or an advice; commissives are considered as expressions of responsibility, commitment and intention to protect, restore the nature; expressives are explored as resources for emotional engagement with ecological issues detected through the expressions of joy, sorrow, gratitude or an apology; and declarations are interpreted as mechanisms through which narrative change is enacted with the performative utterances.

To provide a robust analytical basis, each category is defined not only by its general communicative function but also by specific criteria that guided the coding decisions in this study:

- **Assertives** commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. In this corpus, assertives were identified when narrators or characters presented ecological facts, described environmental conditions, or explained natural processes as if reporting something believed to be true.
- **Directives** attempt to get the hearer to perform an action. They were coded when characters issued commands, made requests, offered advice, gave warnings, or invited others to participate in environmentally relevant activities.
- **Commissives** commit the speaker to a future course of action. They were identified only when characters made explicit promises, stated firm intentions, or undertook obligations regarding ecological behavior — not when they merely expressed wishes or desires.
- **Expressives** convey the speaker's psychological or emotional state. They were coded when characters voiced feelings such as joy, sadness, gratitude, frustration, or admiration in response to ecological situations.

- **Declarations** bring about a change in the state of affairs through the utterance itself, typically requiring some form of institutional or narrative authority. They were identified when a character with recognized authority formally named, designated, announced a rule, or enacted a status change within the story world.

These criteria were applied consistently across all ten stories with attention to their theoretical requirements rather than as loose thematic labels. During the coding process, borderline cases were discussed between the researchers and resolved through consensus. Where an utterance could plausibly satisfy more than one category, the dominant illocutionary force, determined by the speaker's apparent communicative intention within the narrative context, was used as the deciding criterion. This approach follows established practice in pragmatic discourse analysis, where context-dependent interpretation is recognized as essential to accurate classification (Mey, 2001; Verschueren, 1999).

Ecolinguistics provides a wider interpretive framework for understanding why these pragmatic functions matter. It conceptualizes language as a force that actively shapes human relationships with the natural world. A central contribution in this field is made by Arran Stibbe, whose notion of the "stories we live by" highlights how habitual language patterns influence ecological values, emotions, and behavior (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014; Stibbe, 2015). From this perspective, speech acts are not analyzed merely as communicative actions within texts but as elements of broader ecological narratives through which children learn to interpret environmental issues and position themselves in relation to the natural world.

By integrating speech act theory with ecolinguistics, the study connects micro-level analysis of linguistic form with macro-level interpretation of ecological meaning. This combined framework enables a multidimensional reading of children's stories as sites where knowledge, emotion, and responsibility are discursively constructed.

Literature Review

Language research has long demonstrated that meaning is not produced solely through reference to objects or events in the world, but also through the actions speakers perform in communication. Within pragmatics, this understanding has been central since the foundational work of Searle (1976), who argued that utterances function as acts such as asserting, requesting, promising, or declaring, rather than as neutral descriptions. Later developments in pragmatic theory reinforced this view by showing how speech acts contribute to the organization of social relations, the negotiation of responsibility, and the expression of evaluation in discourse (Mey, 2001; Verschueren, 1999). From this perspective, language is inseparable from action, and meaning is always tied to the social and moral work that utterances perform.

In literary discourse, these pragmatic functions become particularly visible. Narratives do not merely depict events; they invite readers to adopt viewpoints, align with characters, and evaluate situations. Studies in literary pragmatics demonstrate that the force of utterances shapes how stories unfold and how readers interpret character intention and narrative tension (Toolan, 1998; Simpson, 2004; Black, 2006). Language in fiction therefore performs a dual function: it constructs fictional worlds while simultaneously guiding interpretation and emotional response. Through assertion, advice, commitment, emotional expression, and declaration, narratives organize not only plot structure but also value systems.

Despite this well-established role of pragmatics in discourse analysis, research on illocutionary acts has focused predominantly on adult-oriented genres, including classroom interaction, institutional talk, political discourse, and everyday conversation (Mey, 2001; Cutting, 2002; Mühlhäusler, 2003). The application of speech act theory to literary texts has remained relatively limited, and within this domain, children's literature has received particularly little attention. Yet children's narratives rely heavily on pragmatic action. Characters warn, explain, promise, comfort, and command in ways

that are central to how young readers are positioned morally and emotionally. The absence of systematic research on illocutionary acts in children's ecological narratives therefore represents a significant gap in pragmatic scholarship.

At the same time, ecolinguistics has developed as a field that explicitly links language to environmental meaning. Ecological discourse analysis has shown that environmental problems are not simply matters of scientific description but are shaped by narrative structures, metaphorical patterns, and ideological assumptions embedded in language (Stibbe, 2015). The concept of the "stories we live by" highlights how recurrent linguistic forms shape everyday ecological reasoning and moral orientation. Ecological discourse, in this sense, is not neutral; it contributes to how nature is valued, how responsibility is distributed, and how future possibilities are imagined.

Recent research illustrates that ecolinguistics has moved beyond theoretical foundations toward application in areas such as education, media, and public communication. Studies show that environmental perspectives in language teaching enrich learning processes and deepen awareness rather than disrupting instruction (Novawan et al., 2022; Li, 2021). Other research adopts cognitive frameworks to model language as an ecological system shaped by perception, conceptualization, and embodiment (Inoue, 2023). Large-scale analyses further indicate that ecolinguistics is no longer marginal but increasingly integrative across linguistics, education, and policy (Goswami & Singh, 2025).

Alongside pedagogical research, ecolinguistics has also examined public discourse. Analysis reveals how journalistic framing and metaphor influence environmental responsibility and, in some cases, enable discourses such as greenwashing (Ashraf et al., 2025). Editorial discourse has also been explored as a site where environmental meaning is constructed through framing strategies that shape public perception and response (Naureen & Janjua, 2024). Collectively, this body of research demonstrates that ecolinguistics has established itself as an applied and socially engaged field.

Parallel to these developments, children's literature has been increasingly recognized as a primary medium for value formation and emotional development. Stories introduce children to social responsibility, empathy, and moral reflection through narrative rather than instruction. Scholars argue that children's literature functions as a cultural tool through which shared values are transmitted and internalized (Nodelman, 2008; Nikolaeva, 2014). In ecological contexts, this function becomes particularly significant, as narratives provide children with their early conceptual frameworks for understanding nature and environmental responsibility.

Existing research has approached ecological children's literature mainly through thematic and ideological analysis. Studies illustrate how narratives embed environmental philosophy (Cao, 2021), how poetic language reflects ecological sensitivity (Wu & Zhang, 2020), and how storytelling can either empower or confuse ecological learning (Greenhalgh-Spencer, 2019). The ethical dimensions of storytelling have also been discussed in relation to multispecies perspectives and nonhuman agency (Haraway, 2019). Other studies emphasize the importance of emotional engagement, showing that narratives which foster connection rather than fear are more likely to encourage responsibility (McKnight, 2010). Comparative research additionally reveals that anthropocentric orientations remain dominant in many cultural contexts (Massey, 2009; Adugna, 2015), although recent pedagogical projects demonstrate the potential of narrative-based education to promote ecological awareness (Bufalino & D'Aprile, 2024).

Although these studies provide valuable insights into ecological content and ideology, they pay little attention to how ecological meaning is constructed linguistically at the pragmatic level. Language is often treated as a carrier of themes rather than as an active mechanism through which narratives guide interpretation, evoke emotion, and model responsibility. This neglect becomes particularly visible when examined through the lens of speech act theory, which offers tools for analyzing precisely how texts *do* things with language.

Ecological Discourse and Children's Literature in the Turkish Context

In Türkiye, environmental concerns have been widely addressed in fields such as education, policy, and sustainability studies (Demir & Yalçın, 2014; Sencar, 2007). However, research that examines environmental issues through the lens of discourse-based linguistic analysis remains scarce. Where ecolinguistics has been addressed directly, the focus has largely been on language endangerment and the loss of linguistic diversity rather than on the discursive construction of ecological meaning (Boz, 2013; Miçooğulları, 2021). Tahir and Şahin (2025) provide one of the few systematic discussions of ecolinguistics within the Turkish academic context, calling for greater integration of ecolinguistic perspectives into educational practice; in Turkish academic discourse, this integrated field is referred to as *çevre-edimbilim* “eco-pragmatics”, a term that captures the intersection of ecological inquiry and pragmatic analysis and reflects the growing institutionalization of ecolinguistic research within Turkish linguistics.

Within the Turkish context, research on ecological themes in children's literature has developed primarily along thematic and value-based lines. Early work by Kuzu (2008) examined how the stories of children's author Aytül Akal foster environmental consciousness in young readers, while Aslan (2015) conducted a broader survey of how Turkish children's literary texts represent environmental problems, finding that ecological content tends to be addressed in didactic rather than dialogic terms. More recently, two studies have examined the same *Ortak Evimiz Dünya* collection that constitutes the corpus of the present study, approaching it from eco-critical and stylistic perspectives. Akyüz (2025) analyzed all ten nature-themed stories in the collection through an eco-critical stylistics lens, demonstrating how some narratives position nature as a passive backdrop while others construct it as an active meaning-making element, and underlining the potential of Turkish children's literature for cultivating ecological sensitivity. In a

related study, Akyüz and Karakuş Aktan (2025) examined *Geri Sayım*, one of the ten stories in the collection through an eco-critical framework, showing how the narrative constructs ecological subjectivity through its thematic and stylistic choices. While both studies foreground content and style rather than pragmatic function, they confirm the analytical richness of the corpus and provide a complementary perspective on ecological meaning-making in Turkish children's literature. At the level of discourse analysis, Güçlü (2026) introduces the concept of eco-metadiscourse in the context of children's nature-themed educational videos, showing how interactive and interactional resources jointly construct ecological knowledge, responsibility, and ethical positioning in young audiences. Overall, these contributions indicate that Turkish scholarship has begun to engage seriously with the ecological dimensions of children's and educational discourse. Nevertheless, the pragmatic mechanisms through which children's literary narratives specifically guide interpretation, evoke emotion, and model responsibility through illocutionary acts remain largely unexplored, and it is precisely this gap that the present study addresses.

Research Gap and Study Rationale

In addition to its theoretical contribution, the study has educational relevance. Children encounter ecological ideas for the first time through stories rather than formal instruction. Narrative discourse, therefore, plays an important role in introducing environmental concerns, shaping affective responses, and guiding moral reasoning (Nikolajeva, 2014; Krashen, 2004). Understanding how language encourages care, responsibility, and emotional engagement can inform educators and authors seeking to promote ecological awareness without generating fear or resignation.

The analysis further explores how different types of illocutionary acts are distributed across ecological themes such as forests, animals, water, recycling, and climate. In accordance with these

objectives, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are illocutionary acts (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations) used in Turkish children's ecological stories to construct ecological awareness?
2. What is the frequency and distribution of these illocutionary act categories across the corpus?
3. In what narrative and thematic contexts do these illocutionary acts occur, and what communicative functions do they serve in presenting ecological knowledge, encouraging responsible behavior, expressing emotions, and shaping ecological values?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide a systematic account of how illocutionary acts function as ecological meaning-making resources in children's literature, shaping not only the representation of environmental problems but also the moral, emotional, and behavioral positioning of child readers within ecological discourse.

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative discourse analysis with a basic descriptive quantitative analysis and draws on an integrated theoretical perspective that combines speech act theory and ecolinguistics. The two components are not treated as parallel but as complementary: the frequency analysis establishes the distributional landscape of illocutionary acts, while the discourse analysis explains how and why these distributions matter for ecological meaning-making. The aim is not only to identify the presence of illocutionary acts in the narratives but also to understand how they function in constructing ecological meaning. In this way, the study offers a more comprehensive account of how ecological discourse is constructed in children's literature.

Corpus Selection

The corpus consists of 10 Turkish children's ecological stories published in 2019 as part of the *Ortak Evimiz Dünya* (Eng. Our Common Home) story collection commissioned by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization (Kılıç, 2019a-b; Kuzucu, 2019a-b; Ölçer Özünel, 2019a-b; Takıl, 2019a-b; Teker, 2019a-b). The stories were selected based on three interrelated criteria. First, only publicly available online texts were purposefully included. For a pragmatic analysis of how environmental meaning is created for a digital-native audience, their online availability ensures that they represent widely accessible, public-facing ecological discourse. In addition, the selected stories have undergone editorial processes, which means they are structured through communicative acts and are suitable for analyzing intentional language use in ecological contexts. The year 2019 was chosen deliberately as a pre-pandemic period to avoid the influence of pandemic-related discourse on the language of the texts. Second, the selected stories explicitly address ecological values and practices rather than merely describing natural settings. Typical ecological themes include forests, recycling, water preservation, climate awareness, and animal protection. These books, written to inspire child protagonists to protect nature and develop a sense of environmental responsibility, are designed as stories aimed at developing the perspectives and imaginations of tomorrow's adults. Consequently, environmental awareness is embedded in the texts through communicative practices that actively engage the reader. Third, all texts are written in an age-appropriate style, using simple vocabulary, a didactic tone, and clear moral messages from an illocutionary perspective. The linguistic suitability of the selected stories for illocutionary analysis is evidenced by their extensive use of dialogic structures, including direct speech, imperative constructions, and first-person future commitments, which serve as the primary syntactic vehicles of directive, commissive, and declarative speech acts. Thematically, all selected stories explicitly foreground human-nature relationships and

ecological responsibility, ensuring that the pragmatic functions identified in the analysis are directly relevant to ecological meaning-making rather than incidental to the narrative. Story lengths range from 72 to 80 pages, allowing sufficient narrative development while maintaining readability for young audiences. The inclusion of 10 stories ensures thematic breadth and methodological robustness. This dataset enables the identification of consistent pragmatic patterns across ecological themes, sources, and narrative contexts, while allowing for a detailed and context-sensitive analysis that might be diluted in a larger corpus.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, both researchers independently read each story and identified all instances of illocutionary acts, coding each instance according to Searle's taxonomy using the operational definitions outlined in the Theoretical Framework section. After independent coding, the researchers compared their classifications and discussed all cases of disagreement. Disagreements were resolved through deliberation, with reference to the narrative context and the speaker's apparent communicative purpose. To ensure consistency, a subset of three stories (approximately 30% of the corpus) was double-coded, yielding an inter-coder agreement rate of 89%. Discrepant cases were reviewed jointly and resolved before the final classification was applied to the remaining stories.

In the second stage, the coded instances were examined in relation to the ecological vocabulary and thematic contexts they co-occurred with, including terms and topics such as forest, water, animal, recycling, pollution, and environment. The analysis focused on how each type of illocutionary act contributed to the construction of ecological meaning within the narrative. Assertives were interpreted in terms of their role in presenting ecological knowledge and establishing environmental realities. Directives were examined for how they encouraged action and guided behavior. Commis-

sives were analyzed for how they modeled personal commitment and future-oriented responsibility. Expressives were explored as resources for fostering emotional connection with ecological themes. Declarations were interpreted as mechanisms through which narrative or social change was formally enacted.

Through this procedure, the study not only documents the distribution of illocutionary acts but also explains their communicative significance in shaping ecological awareness, responsibility, and agency in young readers.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative analyses and discusses how illocutionary acts function as ecological meaning-making resources in Turkish children's stories. First, the distribution of illocutionary acts is presented to provide an overall picture. These patterns are then interpreted in relation to their communicative functions. Table 2 presents the frequency of illocutionary acts in the dataset.

Table 2. Distribution of Searle's illocutionary acts

Illocutionary Act	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Assertives	412	48.7%
Directives	245	28.9%
Expressives	128	15.1%
Commissives	51	6.0%
Declarations	10	1.2%
Total	846	100%

As shown in Table 2, assertives constitute nearly half of all identified illocutionary acts (48.7%), making them the single most dominant category. Directives account for approximately 29% of the data, while expressives represent about 15%. Together, these three categories make up more than 92% of the total dataset, confirming that ecological storytelling in this corpus relies primarily on presenting environmental information, guiding behavior, and evoking emotional responses. Commissives (6.0%) and declarations

(1.2%) occur far less frequently, indicating that explicit future commitments and formal status-changing utterances play a more limited, though not insignificant, role in these narratives. The story-based distribution of categories is presented in Table 3.

guidance, which in turn precedes affective expression. These categories appear with comparable frequency because they help organize pedagogical communication between characters, for instance teachers and their students.

Table 3. Story-based distribution of illocutionary act categories

Story	Assertives, n (%)	Directives, n (%)	Expressives, n (%)	Commissives, n (%)	Declarations, n (%)	Total, n
Akıllı Ada (<i>Smart Island</i>)	39 (4.6%)	21 (2.5%)	12 (1.4%)	6 (0.7%)	2 (0.2%)	80
Anadolu Leoparı (<i>Anatolian Leopard</i>)	43 (5.1%)	24 (2.8%)	13 (1.5%)	6 (0.7%)	1 (0.1%)	87
Atıkdağ Şehri (<i>City of Waste Mountain</i>)	35 (4.1%)	18 (2.1%)	9 (1.1%)	4 (0.5%)	1 (0.1%)	67
Geri Sayım (<i>Countdown</i>)	38 (4.5%)	22 (2.6%)	11 (1.3%)	5 (0.6%)	1 (0.1%)	77
Gerçek Zenginlik (<i>Real Wealth</i>)	40 (4.7%)	23 (2.7%)	12 (1.4%)	5 (0.6%)	1 (0.1%)	81
Kuyruklu Yıldız (<i>The Comet Legend</i>)	37 (4.4%)	20 (2.4%)	11 (1.3%)	4 (0.5%)	1 (0.1%)	73
Kayıp Haritalar (<i>Lost Maps</i>)	41 (4.8%)	25 (3.0%)	14 (1.7%)	5 (0.6%)	1 (0.1%)	86
Su Yolcuları (<i>Water Travelers</i>)	45 (5.3%)	28 (3.3%)	15 (1.8%)	6 (0.7%)	1 (0.1%)	95
Umut Yüklü Balon (<i>Balloon Filled with Hope</i>)	32 (3.8%)	18 (2.1%)	10 (1.2%)	3 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)	63
Yeşil Kasaba (<i>Green Town</i>)	62 (7.3%)	46 (5.4%)	21 (2.5%)	7 (0.8%)	1 (0.1%)	137
Total	412 (48.7%)	245 (29.0%)	128 (15.1%)	51 (6.0%)	10 (1.2%)	846 (100.0%)

It can be inferred from Table 3 that *Yeşil Kasaba* (Eng. Green Town) represents the most heavily annotated story with higher counts of assertives ($n = 62$), expressives ($n = 21$) and directives ($n = 46$). In addition, *Atıkdağı Şehri* (Eng. City of Waste Mountain) shows a noticeable imbalance between assertives ($n = 35$) and directives ($n = 18$) as the latter is significantly lower compared to the other stories. The most frequent category varies across individual stories, although both assertives and directives remain among the top-ranked speech acts across the corpus. These variations also suggest that while the overall distribution is stable across the corpus, individual stories highlight different pragmatic strategies depending on their themes.

The descriptive quantitative results do not indicate a strict hierarchy in the use of illocutionary speech acts. The dominance of the assertives and directives is evident, as the function of instruction is characteristic for all the stories under discussion. While assertives constitute by far the largest share of the data, directives and expressives follow at notably lower rates, reflecting a descending hierarchy of pragmatic functions in which knowledge presentation takes precedence over behavioral

Expressives are also highly frequent since they play a key role in shaping emotional engagement but do not propel the plot itself. However, this numerical dominance alone is insufficient to explain the contextual depth of these expressions and the emotional exchange between characters. At this point, the analysis moves from “how much” to “how.” While the quantitative findings show overall patterns, they do not explain how these categories function in context. In the qualitative analysis section below, these dominant categories identified in the quantitative analysis, will be examined within the thematic fabric of the narratives. How these speech act types shape knowledge, encourage engagement, and structure interaction among peers and across generations will be analyzed in depth (thick description) through selected examples from the corpus.

Use of Assertives in Constructing Ecological Reality

As shown in Table 4, assertives make up a substantial part of the dataset, which points to their central role in ecological storytelling. In the stories, they

are mainly used to present information, describe environmental settings, and build a sense of ecological reality within the narrative world. Through these speech acts, ecological knowledge is framed as something factual, observable, and understandable. The examples below illustrate typical uses across the ten stories.

Table 4. Assertive illocutionary acts in Turkish ecological children's stories

Ecological children's story	Assertive example
Akıllı Ada (<i>Smart Island</i>) (Kuzucu, 2019b)	"Köyümüz, üzerinde yüz otuz evin bulunduğu minik bir adaydı." "Our village was a tiny island with 130 houses on it." (Description)
Anadolu Leoparı (<i>Anatolian Leopard</i>) (Kılıç, 2019a)	"Kuzenim Kağan'la yaz tatili heyecanı içindeydik. Bu yaz en çok kimin deniz kabuğu bulacağı konusunda iddialaşıyorduk." "My cousin Kağan and I were excited about our summer vacation. We were arguing about who would find the most seashells this summer." (Narrative statement)
Atıkdağı Şehri (<i>City of Waste Mountain</i>) (Ölçer Özünel, 2019b)	"Ev halkı uyandığında camı açıp güneşi içeri almak isterdi ama bu her zaman mümkün olmazdı... Bu şehirde hava pek temiz sayılmazdı." "When the household woke up, they wanted to open the window and let the sun in, but this was not always possible... The air in this city was not exactly clean." (Environmental condition)
Geri Sayım (<i>Countdown</i>) (Takıl, 2019b)	"Uzmanlar bu ağacın yaklaşık 1230 yaşında olduğunu söylüyorlardı." "Experts said that this tree was approximately 1,230 years old." (Factual information)
Gerçek Zenginlik (<i>Real Wealth</i>) (Ölçer Özünel, 2019a)	"Balıklarla birlikte suda yaşıyorum ancak suda yaşayan bir memeliyim..." "I live in the water with fish, but I am an aquatic mammal..." (Explanation)
Kuyruklu Yıldız Efsanesi (<i>The Comet Legend</i>) (Takıl, 2019a)	"Her beş yüz yılda bir gökyüzünden bir kuyruklu yıldız geçer." "Once every five hundred years, a comet passes through the sky." (General fact)
Kayıp Haritalar (<i>Lost Maps</i>) (Kılıç, 2019b)	"Sude, Beyşehir Gölü'nün Türkiye'nin üçüncü büyük gölü olduğunu söyledi." "Sude said that Lake Beyşehir is Türkiye's third-largest lake." (Factual statement)
Umut Yüklü Balon (<i>Balloon Filled with Hope</i>) (Teker, 2019a)	"Doğa, her mevsim bize farklı bir hikâye anlatır." "Nature tells us a different story every season." (Expression of a universal truth of nature)
Su Yolcuları (<i>Water Travelers</i>) (Teker, 2019b)	"Üstelik sadece su altında değil, suyun geçtiği her yerde başka bir dünya vardır." "Moreover, there is another world not only underwater but everywhere water flows." (General statement)
Yeşil Kasaba (<i>Green Town</i>) (Kuzucu, 2019a)	"Videoda neler yapılacağını biz anlattık." "We explained what to do in the video." (Explanation)

As Table 4 shows, assertives play a key role in shaping ecological reality in these stories. They are used to describe places, report information, and explain environmental conditions. All examples

were selected on the basis of their direct contribution to establishing ecological reality within the narrative, rather than serving purely descriptive or character-introductory functions. At first glance, these statements may seem simply descriptive. However, they do more than describe, they make issues such as pollution or biodiversity feel real and present within the story world. In this way, ecological problems are not distant or abstract; they become immediate and tangible for the reader.

In speech act theory, assertives involve a commitment to the truth of what is said (Searle, 1976). In these stories, this commitment helps anchor ecological knowledge before any advice or warning is introduced. This is important because, as Stibbe (2015) notes, repeated factual framing shapes how readers understand ecological issues. More recent studies also show that such framing can influence how responsibility and agency are perceived in environmental discourse (Li, 2021; Ashraf et al., 2025). In this sense, assertives prepare the ground for other speech acts. By first establishing what is real, the stories make later suggestions, warnings, and commitments more meaningful and persuasive.

Use of Directives in Encouraging Ecological Responsibility and Action

As shown in Table 2, directives form one of the major illocutionary categories in the corpus and play a key role in encouraging ecological responsibility and action. While assertives establish ecological reality, directives focus on guiding behavior. They do this by urging, advising, inviting, or warning characters and, indirectly, young readers.

In these stories, directives often appear in everyday interactions, such as conversations between parents and children, teachers and students, or elders and community members. In this way, guidance is embedded naturally in dialogue rather than presented as abstract instruction. Table 5 presents directive examples identified across the corpus.

Table 5. Directive illocutionary acts in Turkish ecological children's stories

Ecological children's story	Directive example
Akıllı Ada (<i>Smart Island</i>) (Kuzucu, 2019b)	"Sakin olun... Doğamıza zarar vermeyelim!" "Calm down... Let's not harm nature!" (Suggestion)
Anadolu Leoparı (<i>Anatolian Leopard</i>) (Kılıç, 2019a)	"Annelerimiz, 'Dayınızın sözünden çıkmayın, üşürseniz montunuzu giyin,' diye sıkı sıkı tembihlediler bizi." "Our mothers sternly warned us: 'Do not disobey your uncle. If you get cold, put on your coat.'" (Warning)
Atıkdağı Şehri (<i>City of Waste Mountain</i>) (Ölçer Özünel, 2019b)	"Farklılıklar bizi biz yapar Aziz, bunu sakın unutma!" "Differences make us who we are, Aziz; never forget that!" (Advice)
Geri Sayım (<i>Countdown</i>) (Takıl, 2019b)	"Yerlere çöp atmayınız! Camları ve plastikleri ayırınız!" "Do not litter! Separate glass and plastic!" (Warning/Instruction)
Gerçek Zenginlik (<i>Real Wealth</i>) (Ölçer Özünel, 2019a)	"Elif, kızım, haydi gel! Biraz da yanımızda otur." "Elif, come on! Sit with us for a while." (Invitation)
Kuyruklu Yıldız Efsanesi (<i>The Comet Legend</i>) (Takıl, 2019a)	"Sorunları çözmek için cesur olmalısın." "You have to be brave to solve problems." (Advice)
Kayıp Haritalar (<i>Lost Maps</i>) (Kılıç, 2019b)	"Sokağa inmeye ne dersiniz?" "How about going down to the street?" (Suggestion)
Su Yolcuları (<i>Water Travelers</i>) (Teker, 2019b)	"Haydi! Ebrumuzu tamamlayalım." "Come on! Let's finish our ebru." (Invitation/Suggestion)
Yeşil Kasaba (<i>Green Town</i>) (Kuzucu, 2019a)	"Ayhan Bey'in de yardımını rica ettik." "We asked Mr. Ayhan for his help." (Request)

As shown in Table 5, directives move the narrative from description to action. All examples were selected for their explicit behavioral orientation and, where possible, their direct connection to environmentally responsible action or ecological guidance within the narrative. They appear as warnings, advice, invitations, suggestion and requests. Some of them directly address environmental practices, such as recycling or avoiding littering. Others focus on cooperation and responsibility in everyday situations. Together, they present action as something both necessary and achievable.

In speech act theory, directives aim to influence the hearer's behavior (Searle, 1976). In these stories, this influence often extends beyond the characters and reaches the reader. Environmental responsibility is not only described but also framed as something that can be acted upon. Studies on environmental discourse show that behavior-oriented language strengthens perceptions of

agency (Li, 2021; Naureen & Janjua, 2024). Inclusive expressions such as "let's" also play an important role. They frame ecological care as a shared activity rather than an imposed duty. This tone supports earlier findings that narrative engagement can strengthen ethical involvement in young readers (Bufalino & D'Aprile, 2024). Overall, directives turn ecological awareness into concrete and shared forms of action. In this sense, they help bridge the gap between knowing and doing.

Use of Commissives in Modeling Ecological Commitments and Obligations

Commissives are less frequent in the corpus, but they remain important in representing ecological commitment and future-oriented responsibility. While assertives present ecological reality and directives guide behavior, commissives focus on intention. In these stories, they signal personal responsibility, commitment, and environmentally-oriented plans. Table 6 presents representative examples from the corpus.

Table 6. Commissive illocutionary acts in Turkish ecological children's stories

Ecological children's story	Commissive example
Kuyruklu Yıldız Efsanesi (<i>The Comet Legend</i>) (Takıl, 2019a)	"Bu ağacı koruyacağız, ne olursa olsun." "We will protect this tree, no matter what." (Expression of intention)
Anadolu Leoparı (<i>Anatolian Leopard</i>) (Kılıç, 2019a)	"Onun izini bulup güvenliğini sağlayacağımıza ant içeriz." "We swear that we will track him down and ensure his safety." (Oath)
Kayıp Haritalar (<i>Lost Maps</i>) (Kılıç, 2019b)	"Sonra birlikte hazırlanırız, olmaz mı?" "Then we'll prepare together, won't we?" (Collective intention/Plan)
Umut Yüklü Balon (<i>Balloon Filled with Hope</i>) (Teker, 2019a)	"Ben verandanın üst kısmına da güneş enerjisi paneli yaparım." "I will also install solar panels on the upper part of the veranda." (Future commitment)
Yeşil Kasaba (<i>Green Town</i>) (Kuzucu, 2019a)	"Gelişmiş bina teknolojilerini buraya uygulayacağım..." "I will apply advanced building technologies here..." (Future commitment)

Utterances that expressed wishes, hopes, or desires without a clear commitment to action were excluded from this category. Although the tag question *Olmaz mı?* (Eng. Wouldn't it be nice?) softens the utterance, the core of the statement, *Sonra birlikte hazırlanırız* (Eng. Then we'll get ready

together), commits the speaker to a shared future action. In the context of the narrative, this functions as a commissive because the speaker takes on the obligation of joint preparation, even if the phrasing invites rather than imposes that commitment.

This careful distinction matters because the line between wanting to do something and pledging to do it carries significant ecological implications. When a child character says "I will install solar panels," the utterance does more than describe a preference; it models the kind of personal agency and forward-looking responsibility that environmental educators seek to cultivate. Research on pro-environmental behavior consistently shows that perceived agency and stated intention are among the strongest predictors of actual environmental action, despite the well-documented gap between intention and behavior (Wang & Mangmeechai, 2021; de Matos et al., 2025). In this light, commissives, however infrequent, serve as narrative anchors where ecological responsibility becomes personal and forward-facing. This function is observable in concrete textual terms: when Ayhan Bey states *Gelişmiş bina teknolojilerini buraya uygulayacağım* (Eng. I will apply advanced building technologies here), the first-person future construction marks a clear shift from the descriptive register of the preceding assertives to an agentive, forward-oriented commitment. The character's role in the story world changes at this moment from observer to actor, a transition that is linguistically encoded in the volitional force of the utterance itself rather than inferred from context.

Use of Expressives in Evoking Emotional Engagement with Ecological Issues

Expressives reflect the emotional dimension of ecological storytelling. While assertives establish ecological reality and directives guide action, expressives show how characters feel about events, environments, and changes within the story world. Table 7 presents representative examples from the corpus.

Table 7. Expressive illocutionary acts in Turkish ecological children's stories

Ecological children's story	Expressive example
Akıllı Ada (<i>Smart Island</i>) (Kuzucu, 2019b)	"Nihayet adaya doğru yaklaşan tekneyi gördük, alkışlamaya başladık." "Finally, we saw the boat approaching the island and began to cheer." (Excitement/Joy)
Anadolu Leoparı (<i>Anatolian Leopard</i>) (Kılıç, 2019a)	"Haberin sevinciyle yaz tatili hazırlıklarını bile unuttuk." "We were so excited by the news that we even forgot to prepare for our summer holiday." (Happiness)
Gerçek Zenginlik (<i>Real Wealth</i>) (Ölçer Özünel, 2019a)	"Çok teşekkür ederim ancak bu ayakkabıyı giymem mümkün değil." "Thank you very much, but I cannot wear these shoes." (Gratitude)
Kuyruklu Yıldız Efsanesi (<i>The Comet Legend</i>) (Takıl, 2019a)	"Tamam, birazdan gelirim!" "Fine, I'll be there in a minute!" (Impatience/Irritation)
Kayıp Haritalar (<i>Lost Maps</i>) (Kılıç, 2019b)	"Bu haksızlık! 'At çıkabilir!' yazısı neden yok? O olsaydı korkmazdım." "This is unfair! Why isn't there a sign saying, 'Horse may exit'? If there were, I wouldn't have been scared." (Negative evaluation/Frustration)
Umut Yüklü Balon (<i>Balloon Filled with Hope</i>) (Teker, 2019a)	"Mademki şapkam çok beğeniliyor, o zaman buyurun bakalım." "Since my hat is so popular, here you go." (Appreciation/Pride)
Yeşil Kasaba (<i>Green Town</i>) (Kuzucu, 2019a)	"Ne güzel bir şiir!" "What a beautiful poem!" (Admiration)

As shown in Table 7, expressives appear in moments of surprise, appreciation, complaint, or evaluation. They do not introduce new ecological information. Instead, they shape how that information is experienced. In this sense, they add an emotional layer to the narrative.

In speech act theory, expressives communicate the speaker's psychological state (Searle, 1976). In these stories, this emotional dimension strengthens the impact of environmental themes. Research in environmental psychology shows that emotions such as admiration for nature or concern about environmental harm can influence pro-environmental attitudes and intentions (Brosch, 2021; Schneider et al., 2021). Studies on children's literature also suggest that emotional engagement with characters supports ethical development and value internalization (Nikolajeva, 2014).

In the present corpus, expressives act as a bridge between knowledge and action. When characters show appreciation, concern, or excitement, readers are more likely to connect with the ecological message. This connection helps deepen environmental awareness and makes the narrative more meaningful.

Use of Declarations in Enacting Narrative and Normative Ecological Change

Declarations are the least frequent illocutionary category in the corpus. In speech act theory, they are distinctive because they bring about a change in social or narrative reality through the utterance itself (Searle, 1976). In children's ecological stories, such speech acts usually appear in moments where names are assigned or decisions are formally expressed. Table 8 presents representative examples from the corpus.

Table 8. Declarative illocutionary acts in Turkish ecological children's stories

Ecological children's story	Declarative example
Akıllı Ada (Smart Island) (Kuzucu, 2019b)	"Seni adanın lideri ilan ediyoruz." "We hereby declare you the leader of the island." (Creating a change in status and hierarchy)
Atıkdağı Şehri (City of Waste Mountain) (Ölçer Özünel, 2019b)	"Yeşilvadi artık Karanlıkvadi olarak anılmaya başlamıştı." "Green Valley had begun to be called Dark Valley." (Borderline narrative declaration—collective symbolic renaming)
Kayıp Haritalar (Lost Maps) (Kılıç, 2019b)	"Böylece kaptan, gezi grubunun adını bu sözlerle belirledi." "Thus, the captain designated the name of the tour group with these words." (Borderline narrative declaration—official naming by an authority)
Umut Balon (Balloon Filled with Hope) (Teker, 2019a)	"Köyde bize 'Bereket Dede ve Bereket Nine' derler." "In the village, they call us 'Grandpa Prosperity and Grandma Prosperity.'" (Borderline narrative declaration—communal naming)
Yeşil Kasaba (Green Town) (Kuzucu, 2019a)	"Toprak ağabey, tüm uygulamaları insanların yerinde görmesi için duyuru yaptı." "Toprak announced that people should come and see the projects in person." (Borderline narrative declaration—institutional announcement)

As shown in Table 8, declarations tend to appear at points where a social or narrative shift is clearly marked. In this respect, they are closely tied to naming practices and the expression of shared identity. However, *Akıllı Ada* (Eng. Smart Island) seem to be the only strict Searlean declaration that brings about the change it describes, and the speaker identified communal authority while, the four remaining examples are labelled as borderline narratives. For example, the shift from *Yeşilvadi* (Eng. Green Valley) to *Karanlıkvadi* (Eng. Dark Valley) reflects a change in how the environment is perceived and evaluated within the narrative. In a similar vein, names such as *Bereket Dede* (Eng.

Grandpa Prosperity) and *Bereket Nine* (Eng. *Grandma Prosperity*) carry symbolic meanings associated with sustainability and abundance. In such cases, language does more than describe reality; it actively contributes to redefining it.

It should be acknowledged that applying Searle's declaration category to fictional narrative presents inherent challenges. In Searle's original framework, declarations require a specific institutional or social context in which the speaker possesses the authority to alter reality through the utterance itself, as when a judge pronounces a sentence or an official declares a policy. Children's stories rarely construct such formal institutional settings, which limits the occasions on which genuine declarations can occur. Among the examples identified in this study, the clearest case is the declaration of leadership in *Akıllı Ada*, where the community formally appoints a new leader through a collective speech act that satisfies the core Searlean requirement: the utterance itself brings about the change it describes. Other examples, such as the renaming of *Yeşilvadi* as *Karanlıkvadi*, function somewhat differently. Strictly speaking, this renaming is reported by the narrator rather than performed through a single authoritative utterance, which places it at the boundary between declaration and narrated social practice. However, within the story world, the name change carries genuine performative weight: it redefines how a place is understood and evaluated, signaling a collective shift in ecological perception. In this sense, the example functions as what might be called a narrative declaration, an act that, while not issued by a single institutional authority, nevertheless accomplishes a real change in how characters and readers understand the ecological situation. This observation points to an important limitation of applying Searle's taxonomy to fictional narrative: in literary contexts, authority is distributed differently than in everyday institutional discourse, sometimes residing in community consensus, sometimes in the narrator's voice, and sometimes in symbolic acts that reshape the story world without a single identifiable speaker. Future research may benefit from developing a more nuanced typology of declarative

acts suited to fictional and narrative contexts. The case of Toprak's announcement in *Yeşil Kasaba* (Eng. Green Town) similarly functions as an institutional declaration within the story world. Although the utterance is reported by the narrator rather than voiced directly by Toprak, its illocutionary force is declarative in effect: by making the announcement, Toprak formally initiates a public event and thereby transforms a private project into a recognized community act. The narrative authority vested in Toprak as an organizer provides the institutional grounding that Searle's framework requires, even if this authority operates within fictional rather than formal-institutional terms.

Although declarations occur less frequently than assertives and directives, their role in the narrative is still important. They often appear at moments where ecological awareness becomes explicit and is framed as a shared value. Previous research also suggests that acts of naming and formal expression help stabilize social meaning and collective understanding (Verschueren, 1999; Cheng, 2022). In these stories, declarations mark points where ecological ideas become clearly recognized and socially meaningful.

Overall Discussion

The present analysis demonstrates that all five illocutionary categories identified in Searle's (1976) taxonomy, namely, assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, contribute to ecological meaning-making in systematically distinct yet interrelated ways. Rather than treating these categories as parallel but independent descriptors, the analysis reveals that they function as an integrated eco-pragmatic sequence: assertives establish the epistemic grounding through which ecological conditions are made credible and knowable; directives translate that grounding into behavioral orientation, framing environmental care as both urgent and achievable; expressives mediate the transition from knowledge to action by anchoring ecological themes in affective experience, admiration, concern, joy, and frustration thereby rendering environmental responsibility personally

meaningful rather than abstractly imposed; commissives mark the moments when characters move from awareness to commitment, modeling the kind of intentional agency that environmental educators seek to cultivate; and declarations formalize shifts in ecological status, translating shared awareness into recognized social and narrative reality. Together, these categories constitute what might be called an eco-pragmatic architecture: a structured sequence through which ecological storytelling textually positions young readers to move from knowing, to feeling, to intending, and potentially to acting though whether this textual positioning translates into actual behavioral change in child readers remains a question for future empirical research.

This eco-pragmatic architecture has implications for how the field understands the didactic function of children's ecological literature. Unlike direct instruction, which positions the child as a passive recipient of environmental knowledge, the interplay of assertives, directives, and commissives in these narratives textually constructs an active reader position: one oriented toward knowing, feeling and ultimately acting. This finding aligns with Kahn's (2010) argument that ecological education is most effective when it integrates cognitive, affective, and volitional dimensions simultaneously, precisely the integration that the five illocutionary categories enact when read as an integrated system rather than as isolated pragmatic forms.

The assertives category reveals how factual framing functions as a primary ecological meaning-making resource. Consistent with Alexander and Stibbe (2014), the stories deploy references to natural elements such as the sun, lakes, and trees alongside explanatory statements about ecological processes, thereby, constructing environmental conditions as shareable, credible truths. Certainty markers including village description, observation on environment, propositional claims, for example, the statement that "Beyşehir Lake is the third largest lake in Türkiye" reflect what Fill & Penz (2018) describe as truth-claiming language that ac-

tively encodes ecological reality. This pattern confirms Stibbe's (2015) observation that repeated factual framing is among the most pervasive mechanisms through which ecological understanding is constructed in narrative texts.

Directives constitute the second most frequent category and reveal how behavioral guidance is embedded within narrative dialogue. Appearing in the forms of advice, warnings, invitations, and requests, they orient characters and textually positioned readers toward environmentally responsible action. This finding is consistent with Mühlhäusler's (2003) eco-pragmatic perspective and corroborates Fill and Mühlhäusler's (2001) claim that directive discourse is central to the normative dimension of ecological communication. The prevalence of dialogic rather than monologic directive forms in the corpus further supports the view that behavioral guidance achieves greater rhetorical force when embedded in interaction rather than delivered as instruction.

The use of commissives highlights how ecological responsibility is framed as a future-oriented commitment to protect the environment and inspire action toward a sustainable future by triggering young readers toward environmentally responsible futures. In parallel to the relevant literature (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Mey, 2001; Stibbe, 2015), findings of the current study also reveal that children narrating plans for future, intentions and promises observed through the modality markers indicate collective accountability and trigger ecological reform. Expressives, by contrast, construct an affective bridge between the self and the natural world through emotional description (Stibbe, 2015). The emotional expressions used in stories reflect the internal states of characters and may textually position young readers to develop sympathetic attitudes toward nature, although empirical confirmation of this effect would require reader-response research.

Declarations, as the least frequent category, contribute to the construction of ecological reality by marking moments of formal or symbolic change within the story world — whether through naming, designation, or the formal enactment of a status

change. Even where examples qualify only as borderline narrative declarations rather than strict Searlean declarations, they perform a recognizable function: formalizing the shift from ecological awareness to ecological norm. In this respect, declarations mark the point at which shared understanding hardens into recognized social reality within the narrative.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that ecological children's stories do not operate through a single communicative strategy. Rather, they deploy an integrated range of illocutionary functions that collectively move young readers from ecological knowledge toward emotional engagement and, ultimately, toward the kind of responsible agency that environmental education seeks to cultivate. From an eco-pedagogical perspective, all speech acts, commissives in particular, model a moral understanding of future action through utterances expressing plans, promises, or intentions with a sense of personal responsibility. Emotional expressions such as gratitude, joy, admiration, and concern are textually designed to invite affective engagement with environmental issues and a sense of connection to nature, in alignment with Fill and Mühlhäusler's (2001) view of the affective dimensions of ecological discourse; the extent to which these expressions actually shape children's perceptions remains a question for empirical reader-response research. In addition, the act of naming, the renaming of a degraded space, the formal designation of a leader, the conferral of a community title, functions within these narratives as a declaration of ecological intent, signaling that language itself can be a vehicle for social transformation. As Cook (2001) notes, the act of renaming does not merely alter social status; it enacts the possibility of change, offering young readers a model of the world as something that can be reshaped through deliberate, purposeful language use.

Conclusion

This study examined how illocutionary acts function as eco-pragmatic resources in Turkish children's stories with ecological themes. Employing Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts with a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study shows that ecological awareness in these narratives is constructed through a structured interplay of pragmatic functions. Assertives establish ecological realities by presenting environmental conditions and explanations as credible and shareable knowledge. Directives translate this knowledge into practical guidance by encouraging, warning, advising, and inviting action in ways that are accessible to child readers. Expressives contribute an affective dimension by voicing admiration, gratitude, frustration, or criticism, which supports emotional engagement with nature and strengthens moral alignment. Commissives, when clearly expressed as promises or future-oriented undertakings, contribute by framing ecological responsibility as personal intention and willingness to act. Declarations, though limited in scope, mark moments in which ecological norms become explicit through naming, decisions, or rule-like formulations, thereby formalizing change within the story world.

Specifically, the dominance of assertives (48.7%) confirms that ecological storytelling in this corpus is primarily knowledge-constructing: stories first establish environmental realities before inviting any form of action or commitment. The high frequency of directives (28.9%) demonstrates that behavioral orientation is the second major function, suggesting that these narratives are designed not merely to inform but to guide. The presence of expressives (15.1%) as the third most frequent category indicates that emotional alignment is treated as a necessary mediating step between knowledge and behavior. The relative scarcity of commissives (6.0%) and declarations (1.2%) reflects the inherent constraints of the fictional mode, where institutional authority and binding commitment are structurally more difficult to construct than in everyday spoken interaction.

The findings suggest that Turkish eco-stories do not rely solely on information. Instead, they are structured to construct ecological consciousness through a layered combination of knowledge presentation, emotional engagement, and action-oriented guidance embedded within narrative interaction. While this study does not examine how child readers actually respond to or internalize these structures, the analysis demonstrates that the textual architecture is deliberately designed to invite such a response. This eco-pragmatic perspective offers a linguistically grounded explanation of how children's literature may support environmental education without reducing narratives to mere instruction.

The findings carry practical implications for authors, educators, and curriculum designers working in the field of environmental education. Understanding which pragmatic strategies are most prevalent, and which are underrepresented, in existing ecological stories can inform the design of narratives that more deliberately balance knowledge, emotion, and commitment. For instance, the relative scarcity of commissives in the corpus suggests an opportunity for future stories to model personal ecological pledges more explicitly, potentially strengthening the link between narrative engagement and real-world behavioral intention.

Future research should expand the analytical scope in several directions. Larger and more diverse corpora, including stories from commercial publishers, translated works, and digital storytelling platforms would test whether the patterns identified here hold across different publishing contexts and cultural orientations. Cross-linguistic comparisons, particularly between Turkish and English ecological stories, could reveal how different cultural and linguistic traditions construct environmental responsibility through pragmatic means. Most importantly, empirical studies examining how children actually process and internalize the illocutionary patterns found in ecological narratives would move the field from textual analysis toward a fuller understanding of how stories contribute to the formation of ecological citizens.

Declarations

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: Ethical committee approval was not required for this study because Ethics committee approval was not required because this study is based solely on the analysis of publicly available published children's stories. It did not involve human participants, animals, personal data, interviews, surveys, experiments, or any intervention requiring ethical approval.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was not applicable because the study did not involve human participants.

Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, R.G. (100%); introduction and conceptual analysis, R.G. (50%), E.K. (50%); investigation and data analysis, R.G. (50%), E.K. (50%); writing – original draft preparation, R.G. (50%), E.K. (50%); writing – review and editing, R.G. (50%), E.K. (50%).

AI Disclosure: Claude (Claude Sonnet 4.6) was used for Language editing, grammar checking, improving clarity and readability, and editorial support. The AI tool was not used to generate, analyze, or interpret the research data or draw scientific conclusions. All outputs were critically reviewed, verified, and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript. The authors reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs and take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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