

# Pragmatics of Vocatives –a speech act theoretic analysis of vocatives

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Vocatives are small but rich linguistic phenomena. However, they are underexplored in pragmatics. Most linguists have not only failed to treat properly their illocutionary acts/forces, but have never paid attention to the perlocutionary act that a speaker concomitantly performs with an illocutionary act when he utters an utterance with a vocative. Two complementary perlocutionary acts, namely, *perlocutionary act of association* and that of *dissociation*, are assumed with respect to *in/out-group term* selection. A vocative is classified as either an *in-group* or an *out-group vocative*. The former and the latter are expected to guarantee minimal and maximal distance between participants, respectively.

## 1. purpose

The aim of this paper is to propose a speech act theoretic analysis of vocatives focusing upon their perlocutionary functions within the framework of Current Speech Act Theory developed by Daniel Vanderveken and his research group.<sup>1</sup>

Present paper is structured as follows: in the next section, after sketching the status of vocatives in linguistics, two types of studies of vocatives, namely, Levinson(1983)'s syntactico-pragmatic study and Osenovay & Simov (2002)'s semantico-pragmatic study are introduced. In the third section, I will argue that perlocutionary acts are performed by way of vocatives. In section 4, a new typology of vocatives will be proposed based on analyses of perlocutionary acts. In the last section, a short remark with a generalization of the present analysis will be given.

## 2. preceding studies

In syntax, they can be treated as a kind of sentential adverbs.<sup>2</sup> For instance, just as a sentential adverb like “please” is combined with a matrix sentence to produce a sentence with the adverb, a vocative expression like “daring” is conjoined with a sentence to produce a vocative sentence. In other words, both sentential adverbs and vocatives have the same syntactic combinatory function from a sentence to a sentence as shown in (1).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Outline of this framework will be found in Searle & Vanderveken(1985), Vanderveken(1990, 1994), and Vanderveken & Kubo(2002).

<sup>2</sup> In Osenovay & Simov(2002) , “vocatives are treated as adjuncts and therefore attached to the highest sentential level”.

<sup>3</sup> Syntactic Categories used in (1) are a standard notation of sentential adverb in Categorical Grammar. Thus, “s/s” signifies that an expression with this category takes another expression of the category “s” and produces a combined expression of the category “s”.

(1)

- a. [[*Please*]<sub>s/s</sub> [it's cold in here]<sub>s</sub>]<sub>s</sub>.
- b. [[*Daring*]<sub>s/s</sub> [it's cold in here]<sub>s</sub>]<sub>s</sub>.

This syntactic similarity between sentence adverbs and vocatives, however, does not apply in Pragmatics. In pragmatics, especially in speech act theory, it is a common knowledge that the illocutionary force of a sentence with a sentential adverb is that of the adverb, but not that of the matrix sentence. For instance, the illocutionary force of the sentence in (2b) is that of “please”, namely, “request”, but not that of the matrix imperative sentence, namely, “order”. Roughly, the illocutionary force of a sentence changes if it is modified with a sentence adverb that functions as an independent illocutionary force.

(2)

- a. Pass me the salt. [order]
- b. *Please* pass me the salt. [request]

In contrast, the illocutionary force of a sentence does not change when it is modified with a vocative with an independent illocutionary force, but a vocative agglutinates an additional force to that of the matrix sentence. For instance, in (3a), the speaker commences the utterance with a vocative, “daring”, which functions as an illocutionary act of *calling* and arrests the hearer’s attention to the speaker, then performs the illocutionary act of claiming, informing, or notifying that reflects the illocutionary force of the matrix sentence. There, he does not intend to change the illocutionary point of the matrix sentence in (3a). While, in (3b), the speaker performs the illocutionary act of the matrix sentence first, then performs the illocutionary act of addressing and shares the information expressed in the proposition of the matrix sentence with the hearer.

- (3) a. Darling, I just heard. [EP]
- b. The team is in mourning, darling. [EP]

Levinson(1983, 70) correctly classified vocatives into calls<sup>4</sup> and addresses according to their occurrence position in an utterance. The former usually occurs at the utterance-initial position, and the latter at non-utterance initial positions. For instance, “daring” in (3a) and “Mrs. Clifton” in (4a) are calls, on the one hand. The former in (3b) and the latter in (4b) are addresses.

- (4) a. Mrs. Clifton – (this is) Count Almasy. [EP]
- b. This is not worth eight pounds, Mrs. Clifton. [EP]

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<sup>4</sup> In Levinson(1983, p.70), “summonses” is used in place of “calls”.

It means that the same vocative expression plays different roles at different places. The problem in Levinson(1983) is that he failed to analyze adequately their speech act functions. He only claims that the former “can be thought as independent speech acts” without touching upon the illocutionary function of the latter. As we have seen above, both calls and addresses are used to perform speech acts.

In Osenova & Simov (2002)<sup>5</sup>, they introduced Ivanova and Nitsolova(1995)’s classification of vocatives that classified vocatives according to whether they nominate the hearer: when vocatives do not nominate, they only refer to. In other words, they classified vocatives into *referential* and *non-referential* ones. For instance, “Mrs. Clifton” in (3a, b) are referential vocatives, on the one hand. “Daring” in (4a, b) are non-referential vocatives.<sup>6</sup> Osenova & Simov (2002), however, shared the same problem with Levinson(1983), namely, they failed to analyze adequately their speech act functions. Following Nitsolova(1984), Osenova & Simov (2002) held that when vocatives nominate the hearer, “it is assumed that there is a hidden proposition with the performative verb ‘consider somebody to be of some property’” without examining the speech act functions of other vocative types.

Even if preceding studies of vocatives are defective in their analyses of their speech act functions, their syntactico-pragmatics and semantico-pragmatic classifications are complementary and sound. Consequently, vocatives are classified into four types as shown in (5), each of which is assumed to represent an illocutionary act type.

- (5) a. referential calling
- b. referential addressing
- c. non-referential calling
- d. non-referential addressing

For instance in (3a), the speaker performs a complex illocutionary act of *introduction* by commencing the utterance with an utterance initial vocative, “Mrs. Clifton” that has the illocutionary force of *calling* in order to attract the hearer’s attention to the speaker without any assignment of properties to the hearer. Similarly, in (3b), the speaker performs the complex illocutionary act of *evaluation* by adding to the illocutionary act of the matrix sentence an illocutionary force of *addressing* without any assignment of properties to the hearer by way of an utterance final vocative, “Mrs. Clifton”. In contrast, in (4a), the speaker performs a complex illocutionary act of “*notification*” by commencing the utterance with an utterance initial vocative, *daring* that has the illocutionary force of *calling* in order to attract the hearer’s attention to the speaker with some

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<sup>5</sup> Their classification is based on Ivanova K. and Nitsolova R. (1995) *Nie, govoreshtite hora*. Sofia, Bulgaria, and Nitsolova R.(1984) *Pragmatichen aspekt na izrechenieto v balgarskiia ezik*. Narodna prosveta. Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>6</sup> “Referential vocatives” and “non-referential vocatives” are my terminology but not theirs.

assignment of properties to the hearer such as *speaker's attachment* to the hearer. Lastly, in (4b), the speaker performs the complex illocutionary act of *notification* by adding to the illocutionary act of the matrix utterance an illocutionary force of *addressing* with some assignment of properties to the hearer such as *speaker's attachment* to the hearer by way of an utterance final vocative, “daring”.

### 3. Vocatives and Perlocutionary Acts

In the last section, we have examined preceding studies of vocatives with respect to illocutionary acts or illocutionary forces. In this section, in addition to them, their perlocutionary functions are scrutinized. By definition, a person's performance of an illocutionary act entails her performance of a perlocutionary act. In other words, whenever a speech act is performed, at least an illocutionary act and its concomitant perlocutionary act are performed at the same time.<sup>7 8</sup>

Brown & Levinson(1978) has never been brought up in relation to issues regarding perlocutionary acts, on the one hand. They themselves neither mention nor use the jargon of speech act theory in their book. They, however, stated that “by using any of the innumerable ways to convey *in-group membership*, S can implicitly claim the common ground with H that is carried by that definition of the group (p.107, my underline).”<sup>9</sup> This implicit claim is interpreted as a perlocutionary act performed concomitantly with the illocutionary act by using vocatives that belong to *in-group terms of address*<sup>10</sup>. For simplicity, we name the perlocutionary acts performed concomitantly with an illocutionary act via *in-group terms perlocutionary acts of association*. Similarly, there are innumerable ways to convey *out-group membership* as well. *In-group terms* and *out-group terms* are expected to guarantee minimal and maximal distance between participants, respectively. Thus, we name the perlocutionary acts performed concomitantly with an illocutionary act via *out-group terms perlocutionary acts of dissociation*. Consequently, we have two types of perlocutionary acts.

Now, let me pick out the cases of the perlocutionary act of association and that of dissociation, respectively.

In (6), LOCO addresses the SECOND CAPTAIN as “Philip”. In other words, she treats him as if he were a member of the group she belongs to under the given circumstance. Actually, “Philip” is Second Captain of the restaurant but is not a member of her social group. In this utterance, she behaves like a regular customer of an elegant restaurant, viz to address captain by the first name.

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<sup>7</sup> Austin(1962) assumed that three types of speech acts are performed simultaneously when a speech act is performed. They are locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. However, Searle(1968) argued against the ontology of locutionary acts maintaining that illocutionary acts are kind of semantic acts that constitute a subset of locutionary acts, thus there is no distinction between locutionary acts and illocutionary acts. Searle proposed utterance acts and propositional acts instead.

<sup>8</sup> Davis(1979) is only one that attracted philosophers' as well as linguists' attention in the analysis of perlocutionary acts.

<sup>9</sup> In their theory, to claim common ground is one of the three important mechanism involved in the strategies of positive politeness. S's claiming 'common ground' with H indicates that “S and H belong to some set of persons who share specific wants, including goals and values. (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 103)”

<sup>10</sup> Brown & Levinson(1978, 107-108) classified vocatives such as “mate, buddy, pal, honey, dear, Mom, brother, sister, cutie, sweetheart, guys, fellas, and so forth” as members of *in-group terms of address*.

This is a common speech act performed in an elegant-restaurant-situation. There, the speaker intends to *associate* the hearer by performing illocutionary act of *addressing* via an *in-group vocative*, “Philip” in order to bring about *resonance* between them. In speech act theory, the speaker’s *act of association* is a perlocutionary act, and the *resonance* between the participants is a perlocutionary effect.

(6) Loco: Oh, a table for two, *Philip*? [as-if in-group]

Second Captain: Certainly, Madame. Will you come this way? [HMM]

In contrast, in the following cases, the referent of the vocative is treated as if she is not a member of the group the speaker belongs to. In (7), Harry is calling Dana as “young lady” that is a *out-group vocative*. In this utterance, the speaker *dissociates* the hearer suppressing his *dad-to-kid sentiment*. There, the speaker expects certain perlocutionary effect such that the hearer notices her fault and feels sorry.

(7) HARRY: *Dana*, Mr. Hardy called. Why weren't you in class today?

DANA: He lies! I was there! I was in the nurse's office, cause I had a headache.

HARRY: You seem fine now.

DANA: Great! You're going to believe that fat dweeb Mr. Hardy over your own daughter.

HARRY: I'm not sure what to believe anymore, *young lady*. You never used to lie to me. But lately you don't seem to know the difference between right and wrong. [TL]

Generally speaking, in performing an illocutionary act of *addressing* or *calling* a person in a status as a person in another status, the speaker is presumed to be intentionally performing a *perlocutionary act of association* or *dissociation* according to the given relation between the speaker and the hearer in the given circumstance.

## 4. Typology of Vocatives in Speech Act Theory

### 4.1 Eight and only eight sub-type of vocatives

As we have seen above, from a perspective of illocutionary acts, vocatives are classified into four sub-types. Then, by adding *the perlocutionary act type distinction* just seen above, we will get the following eight and only eight sub-types of vocatives.

(8) Vocatives

(i) associative referential calling

(ii) dissociative referential calling

- (iii) associative referential addressing
- (iv) dissociative referential addressing
- (v) associative non-referential calling
- (vi) dissociative non-referential calling
- (vii) associative non-referential addressing
- (viii) dissociative non-referential addressing

Their examples are as follows:

- (i) Associative referential calling

(9) KIP : *Hana.*

*She turns to the voice. He steps out of the darkness.*

HANA : (happy) *Kip.*

*And he goes to her.* [EP]

In (9), each speaker performs a perlocutionary act of *association* by performing an illocutionary acts of *calling* the other by his/her first name that is a member of *in-group terms* to express his/her emotion to each other.<sup>11</sup>

- (ii) Dissociative referential calling

In (10a), KATHARINE, Mr. Clifton's wife, wants ALMASY to come into her room. ALMASY however does not accept her asking. He expresses his refusal to her invitation by commencing his reply with a *call*, "Mrs. Clifton" that implies that he is emotionally detached from her, which causes KATHARINE to feel disgusted.

(10) a. KATHARINE[Mr.Clifton's wife; Almasy's lover]: Will you not come in?

ALMASY No.

KATHARINE Will you please come in?

ALMASY (a beat) *Mrs. Clifton.*

*Katharine turns, disgusted.* [EP]

Similarly, in (10b), Sydney rejects Shepherd's plea by commencing her words with "Mr. President" that means she does not consider him her lover anymore.

b. SHEPHERD[American President]: (stopping) Sydney. Please. I don't want to lose you over this.

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<sup>11</sup> In this case, each speaker's positive faces is enhanced by the positive politeness strategy adequately chosen by his/her partner.

SYDNEY[President's lover]: *Mr. President*, you got bigger problems than losing me. You just lost my vote. [AP]

In (10), each speaker expresses his/her refusal to the words issued from his/her partner by performing an illocutionary act of *calling* his/her partner by a *formal referential term* that is a member of *out-group terms*, namely, "Mrs. Clifton" and "Mr. President", respectively. The illocutionary act, then, entails his/her performance of a *perlocutionary act of dissociation*, which brings about a perlocutionary effect that displeases the hearer.<sup>12</sup>

(iii) Associative referential addressing

In (11), after the discovery of large number of jugs in a cave, MADOX is calling D'AGOSTINO by a *contracted name*, "D'Ag" that implies his intention to share the pleasure with D'AGOSTINO. Here, the speaker performs a *perlocutionary act of association* by performing an illocutionary act of *addressing* the hearer by an *in-group term*, "D'Ag", which satisfies the hearer's sense of identity.<sup>13</sup>

(11) D'AGOSTINO : I can't guarantee the vintage, my friends. I just dug it out of the hill.

*Madox and Almásy have seen many such jugs.*

MADOX: Excellent. That's terrific, D'Ag.

(to Almásy, of a tool) Toss that up, would you.

D'AGOSTINO: (mischievously) There are some others. [EP]

(iv) Dissociative referential addressing

In (12), feeling disgusted with TED's recent incompetent works, O'CONNOR does not address him TED any more but sardonically addresses him as "Mother Kramer" instead. Here, the speaker expresses his negative feeling to the hearer by performing an illocutionary act of *addressing* him by his family name with a *pejorative adjective nominal*, "Mother". The illocutionary act, then, entails his performance of a *perlocutionary act of dissociation*, which causes a perlocutionary effect that the hearer feels mortified.<sup>14</sup>

(12) The room is filled with executives in three piece suits and O'Connor who is doing a lot of backing and filling.

TED: (as he enters) Yes. Remind me to pick up a "Crying Chrissie" doll at lunch on Tuesday.

*ON O'CONNOR--Clearly he is very irritated at this.*

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<sup>12</sup> In these cases, each speaker humiliates his/her partner, thus the latter loses his/her positive face.

<sup>13</sup> In this case, the speaker maintains the hearer's positive face.

<sup>14</sup> In this case, the speaker threatens the hearer's positive face.

O'CONNOR[TED's boss]: (sardonic) If it's all right with you, *Mother Kramer*, can we get down to work now? [KVK]

(v) Associative non-referential calling

In (13), Clifton excuses himself for the postponement of his return by commencing his words with a *non-referential calling*, “Daring” and “Okay my precious” that extend his affection to his wife. Here, the speaker performs a *perlocutionary act of association* by performing an illocutionary act of *calling* the hearer by those *in-group terms*, which bring about a perlocutionary effects on the hearer such that the hearer feels relieved.<sup>15</sup>

(13) CLIFTON: (into the phone) *Darling*, it's me, I'm sorry, something's come up.

(Katharine responds)

Don't sulk - I'll be back tomorrow evening. I promise.

(Katharine responds)

Okay my precious, I love you. [EP]

(vi) Dissociative non-referential calling

In (14), feeling disgusted with HARMSWAY's false greeting, SYDNEY is calling him “You bastard” to show her resistance to him. Here, the speaker performs a *perlocutionary act of dissociation* by performing an illocutionary act of *calling* the hearer by an *out-group term*, “You bastard”, which brings about a perlocutionary effects on the hearer such that his honor is disgraced.<sup>16</sup>

(14) HARMSWAY: Do come in Mr. Bond, Sidney...

You're just in time for a nuclear meltdown!

*Coming closer, Sidney struggles against her cuffs, swinging at him -*

SIDNEY: *You bastard* – [TND]

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<sup>15</sup> In this case, the speaker maintains the hearer's positive face.

<sup>16</sup> In this case, the speaker threatens the hearer's positive face.

(vii) Associative non-referential addressing

In (15), in reply to Colonel Henry Brake's stirring remarks, Captain DUKE Forest friendly *addresses* Brake, as "pal" to show his confidence as a professional chopper. Here, the speaker performs a *perlocutionary act of association* by performing an illocutionary act of *addressing* his superior as "pal" that is an *in-group term*. He does not have any intention to disgrace the superior's honor, but intends to bring about a perlocutionary effect such that the speaker relieves the mind.<sup>17</sup>

(15) HENRY[Colonel]: ... We have our slack periods but when the action starts, you'll have more work in twelve hours than a civilian surgeon does in a week.

HAWKEYE[Captain]: Colonel Blake, have no fear. Hawkeye and Duke are here.

DUKE[Captain]: (to Henry) That's right, *pal*. You just sit up front and sign the mail, and leave the cutting to us. [MASH]

(viii) Dissociative non-referential addressing

In (16a), NICK addresses his daughter's boy friend as "stud" to let him know that he is not welcome.

(16)a. NICK: How old are you?

CAMERON[ NICK's daughter's boyfriend]: I just turned 18.

NICK: Well, she's 15. She was 10 five years ago. You know what I'm saying, *stud*?

Now get out. [WWW]

Similarly, in (17b), LEWIS addresses the person at the other end of the line as "chicken-shit", "lame-ass" in anger.

b. LEWIS: (into phone) Vote your conscience, *you chicken-shit, lame-ass--*

*LEWIS hangs up the phone. He takes a deep breath, slumps down in the nearest chair, and looks up at ROBIN and KODAK.* [AP]

In (16a) and (16b), in each case, the speaker performs a *perlocutionary act of dissociation* by performing an illocutionary act of *addressing* the hearer with an *out-group term*. Each act offends the hearer and brings about a perlocutionary effect such that the hearer feels disgusted to the speaker.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.2 Some further issues

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<sup>17</sup> In this case, the speaker enhances the hearer's positive face.

<sup>18</sup> In this case, the speaker threatens the hearer's positive face.

In this section, I will sketch three relevant issues for the further studies of vocatives in pragmatics. They are *insincere perlocutionary acts*, *exploitation of group term distinction* and *inconsistent vocative phrases*.

#### 4.2.1 Insincere perlocutionary acts

Now, let's start with the case such that a perlocutionary act is insincere and even if its illocutionary act is successful. For instance, in (17), SHEPHERD performs a *perlocutionary act of association* by performing an illocutionary act of *addressing* to a groundkeeper by the first name, "Charlie", that is a member of *in-group terms*. He does not have any intention to associate him personally since he is not acquainted with him, but intends to bring about a perlocutionary effect such that his illocutionary act of *addressing* lets him believe that the president knows even a groundkeeper like him. Thus, his perlocutionary act does not satisfy the *conditions of success*, since it violates sincerity condition, even if his illocutionary act satisfies it.

(17) *They walk past a GROUNDKEEPER who's at work at a patch of grass.*

GROUNDKEEPER: 'Morning, Mr. President.

*Before he's even completed the last syllable of the greeting,*

*JANIE quickly and quietly said--*

JANIE[President personal assistant]: Charlie.

SHEPHERD[American President]: 'Morning, *Charlie*. [AP]

#### 4.2.2 Exploitation of Group-term distinction

As we have seen in (14), "You bastard" is an *out-group term* used to dissociate the hearer from the speaker. Interestingly, we have a case where the same vocative is used to associate the hearer to the speaker as you see in (18). Such use of an *out-group term* is more effective than simple use of an *in-group term* to cause perlocutionary effect upon the hearer. We call the case like this *exploitation of group-term distinction*.

(18) ALMÁSY: (as if interpreting) It's a long song - Szerelem means love...and the story - there's a Hungarian Count, he's a wanderer, a fool. For years he's on some kind of quest, who knows what? And then one day he falls under the spell of a mysterious English woman – a harpy - who beats him and hits him and he becomes her slave. He sews her clothes, he worships the hem of -

*Katharine had thought for a few seconds he was serious, then she catches on and starts to beat him.*

ALMÁSY: (laughing) Ouch! See - you're always beating me..!

KATHARINE: *You bastard*, I was believing you! [EP]

#### 4.2.3 Inconsistent vocative phrases

A vocative phrase is inconsistent whenever a head noun and its modifier of a vocative phrase belong to inconsistent group terms. In (19), for example, the speaker performs a *perlocutionary act of dissociation* by performing an illocutionary act of *addressing* via *inconsistent vocative phrases*. There, she addresses the hearer as “my little droppings” or “my little prune pit” that are the combinations of a diminutive in-group adjective phrase “my little” and the out-group terms “droppings” or “prune pit”, then express perlocutionarily her hatred to the hearer.

- (19) a. You have to do the kitchen and the bedroom before lunch, *my little pig droppings*, and if you skip the corners, there will be no lunch. [AN]  
b. You’re asking for it, *my little prune pit*. [AN]

### 5. Summary

A vocatives is really a small linguistic unit in an utterance, however, it is quite useful for a speaker to perform both an illocutionary and a concomitant perlocutionary act, and to bring about perlocutionary effects on the hearer. In section 2, after introducing syntactic and semantic classifications of vocatives in preceding studies, I have pointed out their defects from the perspective of speech acts. In the following sections, I have proposed a new analysis of vocatives in which vocatives are assumed to have perlocutionary functions with which the speaker either associates or dissociates the hearer, which also enable presentation of a new typology of vocatives. In the previous section, more general issues such as insincerity, exploitation and inconsistency are discussed with respect to illocutionary/ perlocutionary acts of vocatives.

Lastly, present study of vocatives or *perlocutionary act analysis* is generalized so that it may be put under verification cross-theoretically:

- a. S intentionally performs a *perlocutionary act of association* expecting that H understand S’s intention such that the *least psychological distance* between S and H will guarantee the *most solidarity or emotional “agreement” or “fit”* between them.
- b. A *perlocutionary act of dissociation* is the reverse act of the perlocutionary act of association.
- c. *In-group terms* support the *less psychological distance* between S and H with the *least effort*. (selection of optimal action)

#### **Data Sources:**

- [AP] American President, The (Screenplay by Aaron Sorkin).  
[EP] English Patient, The (Screenplay by Anthony Minghella, based on the novel by Michael Ondaatje), 1996.

- [HMM] How to Marry a Millionaire (Screenplay by Nunnally Johnson; Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), 1953.
- [KVK] KRAMER VERSUS KRAMER (Screenplay by Robert Benton, based on the novel by Avery Corman), 1978.
- [MASH] M\*A\*S\*H (Screenplay by Ring Lardner, Jr. based on the Novel by Richard Hooker) O.S.P. Publishing, Inc, 1994.
- [TL] True Lies (Screen play by James Cameron)
- [TND] Tomorrow Never Dies (Screenplay by Bruce Feirstein)
- [WWW] What Women Want (PARAMOUNT PICTURES and ICON PRODUCTIONS)

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