

Interpretation of Speech Acts Theory

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Abstract. During communication people use different forms of speech to express their thoughts according to their intents. Types of speech make the speaker's speech to be understandable and more colorful. With different meaning speeches can do a lot of functions such as: informing, persuading, entertaining and inspiring the audience. Also, using proper types of speech increases the aesthetic impact of the speech.

Keywords: speech acts, locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act, utterance, declaration, assertive, expressives, directives, commissives.

Introduction

Language is a means of communication for people. People form their speech by using sentences including different words. We prepare our speech based on various purposes. Our speech is created according to the situation we are in. For example, when we want to apologize, we politely communicate using positive words. But when we want to complain, we use relatively rude and negative words and the most important thing is that we create a speech process through it. In this period, we perform the act of speaking. This is exactly what is called a speech act in linguistics.

That is, as defined in the Oxford dictionary:

Speech act (noun) is "something that somebody says, considered as an action"¹. Speech act is the speech people use in different contexts. Speech acts are created when we apologize to someone, complain, compliment or make an offer.

Speech act theory

When we learn about speech acts, we also come across speech acts theory. What is speech act theory? When people speak, they do more than describe or convey information. When we speak, we create action. Our words influence the people around us, prompt them to act or think, cause something to happen. Speech act theory was introduced to the science for the first time in 1975 by the British philosopher of language J.L. Austin².

Types and levels of speech act

There are 3 levels of speech act and it was introduced in "How to Do Things With Words" by J.L.Austin³:

¹<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/speech-act>

²Richard Nordquist "Speech acts in Linguistics", 2019

³Austin, J.L. "How to Do Things With Words." 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975

1. Locutionary act (making meaningful and understandable speech)
2. Illocutionary act (saying something to inform or any kind of purpose)
3. Perlocutionary act (saying something that effects someone and causes to act)

Locutionary act is an utterance that has verbal, social and rhetorical meaning. This act is divided into two types:

1. Utterance act (may be incomprehensible and consist of some sounds).
2. Propositional act (should refer to literal meaning). Example:

After cleaning, Jenny says, “A tidy room looks really nice.” This is an example of the act of speaking.

Literal meaning: Jenny loves cleanliness.

Illocutionary act is the result of the meaning expressed in the sentence, and the listener can use the intended meaning. Example:

After cleaning, Jenny says, “A tidy room looks really nice.”

In the illocutionary act, the listener can know that Jenny does not like untidiness and tries to put things in order.

Perlocutionary act represents the effect of locutionary and illocutionary acts on the listener. Through this, the listener can change thoughts and actions. Example:

After cleaning, Jenny says, “A tidy room looks really nice.”

From the context, the listener understands that Jenny likes to keep her room tidy and the listener should not make her room messy.

After J.L. Austin, the scientist did many other works on speech act theory. John Searle also played a significant role in the development of Speech Acts in linguistics. J. Searle divides Speech Acts into 5 categories based on their use for different purposes⁴:

1. Declaration
2. Assertive
3. Expressives
4. Directives
5. Commissives

Declaration. The speaker declares something and the speech cause to some changes. Example:

“We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by the authority of the good people of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved; and that as free and independent States, they have full power to levy war, conclude peace, contract alliances, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which independent States may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honour.”⁵

⁴J. R Searle, “Speech Acts”, 1969.

⁵John Hancock, THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE,in Congress, July 4, 1776.

Assertive. This type of speech should be clear and concise, and the speaker states facts, asserts, and asserts ideas, opinions, and viewpoints. Example:

“In December 2001 school standards minister Stephen Timms announced a £500,000 scheme for partnerships between 28 grammar schools and nearby secondary moderns and comprehensives. It was the first time a Labour government had given extra money to grammar schools as a group and the scheme met with widespread criticism.”⁶

The author provides facts from the history of British schools.

Expressive. People express their own psychological attitudes. This could be gratitude or apology. Example:

“My dear friend Anna,

I am writing this letter to express my gratitude to you. I thank you for your help, support and time. Your help made me get a good result in the exam. I am grateful to you for everything.

With love,

Sara”

In this letter author express gratitude to her friend.

Directives. This type of speech is aimed at encouraging the listener to do something by requesting, advising or commanding. Example:

“I told my friend that his decision was wrong and that the matter should be resolved in consultation with his parents. I advised not to make an independent decision on this topic, but to solve the problem by agreeing with relatives.”

In this example, the speaker gives advice to friend and effect friend's decision.

Commissive. This type means making an obligation to do something in the future, i.e. making a promise, planning something. Example:

- “Rose, can you go with me to the gift shop on Monday to buy a present for my mom?”
- “Well, of course I will go with you.”

The second person make obligation to go to the store with a friend.

Conclusion

Speech act play an important role in communication. Speech acts help us establish social relations, influence people around us, express our state, intentions, and there are several reasons why they are important:

- Expression of intentions. With the help of speech acts, people convey their feelings and desires to their partner through requests, compliments, apologies, etc.
- Formation of social relations. Speech acts help to establish and maintain a relationship with people, to be in constant contact. We can strengthen our relationship through apologies and compliments.
- Exposure. Through various promises, requests and advice, we can influence people around us and change their minds.
- Authority management. Speech acts help us to control relationships and manage people. Leadership in communication can be achieved through commands, instructions or various requests.

In conclusion, speech acts help to establish relationships with people and express their thoughts through actions. Studying this field helps to improve communication skills and establish the right attitude in different situations.

⁶Derek Gillard, Labour and the grammar schools: a history, 2017.

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