

PAPER

SPEECH ACT AS A UNIT OF COMMUNICATION AND ITS STRUCTURE

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Abstract

The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by the formation of scientific directions connected with the study of the process of speech formation, that is, the reproduction of linguistic units in the course of communication, which began to be examined largely through comparison with language itself. Language was regarded as a system of signs necessary for storing and transmitting information. Speech, in turn, was perceived as the unique verbal creativity of an individual, possessing a certain communicative and stylistic orientation determined by spheres of human activity. One of the leading directions in the humanities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries became anthropocentrism — the principle according to which the human being is the center and primary point of reference in scholarly research.

Key words: speech act theory; speech act; performative utterance; locutionary act; illocutionary act; perlocutionary act; communicative intention; pragmatics; linguistic personality; communicative situation; anthropocentric approach; pragmatic cliché

Introduction

The anthropocentric principle in science contributed to the emergence of new humanities disciplines such as ergonomics, axiology, heuristics, and others. In linguistics, anthropocentrism led to the development of interdisciplinary fields including ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, linguoculturology, cognitive linguistics, cultural semantics, linguo-country studies, and speech act

theory. The large number of emerging disciplines is connected with the special position of linguistics among the humanities: one of the most important sources of knowledge about humans is language. Within the anthropocentric framework, the human being is studied as an integrated phenomenon. In relation to communicative abilities, a person acquires the status of a linguistic personality.

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Materials and Methods

The anthropocentric idea in language gained broad recognition with the emergence of the concept of the identity between the “spirit of a people” and its language. According to Wilhelm von Humboldt, the creation of language is conditioned by an inner need of humanity. Language is not merely an external means of communication or maintenance of social ties; it is embedded in human nature itself and is essential for the development of spiritual capacities and the formation of worldview — something that can be achieved only when individual thinking is connected with social thinking. Humboldt understood language as a phenomenon reflecting the character of a people and their spiritual creativity. This approach enabled him to formulate an important conclusion: language is not simply a product of activity but an involuntary expression of spirit — not the work of a people but a gift assigned by destiny; language arises within a person from the depths of individuality and from the operation of innate capacities that remain inaccessible to direct investigation.

According to E. S. Kubryakova, the anthropocentric approach represents a tendency to place the human being at the center of all theoretical premises of scientific inquiry, thereby determining its specific perspective. Anthropocentrism, which calls for the study of the human being as an integral phenomenon, made it possible to perceive a person in relation to their language as a linguistic personality. As a result, contemporary linguistics places considerable emphasis on describing linguistic phenomena from the standpoint of an integrated approach — that is, through a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of the features of linguistic structure. Among the areas that attract the greatest interest from linguists is speech act theory.

Human communicative experience is accumulated in speech acts. While the linguistic means of expressing communicative experience may vary across languages and cultures, the essence of communicative experience associated with behavior in a particular communicative situation is condensed into corresponding frames of speech acts.

Speech act theory is one of the directions within

analytic philosophy. Its founder is recognized as the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin, who developed the theory in the late 1940s. Speech act theory explains how actions can be performed through words — in other words, how one can manipulate reality through language. The central premise of speech act theory is that the minimal unit of human communication is not a sentence or an utterance, but the performance of specific types of acts such as questioning, ordering, promising, stating, explaining, thanking, apologizing, greeting, congratulating, requesting, and others.

From a linguistic perspective, the study of speech act theory makes it possible to:

1. provide a detailed description of strategies and goals of verbal influence based on the fundamental concepts of the theory;
2. extend Frege's principle of compositionality to the domain of speech interaction, revealing structures and transformation rules that allow the interpretation of the whole communicative act through the compositional interpretation of its parts;
3. systematize speech means and metalanguage for lexicographic description; for example, the conceptual framework of speech act theory is particularly useful in describing verbs of speech;
4. interpret the interdependence between clarity of expression and effectiveness of communicative impact; by applying a synthetic approach to speech act analysis, it becomes possible to identify aspects that contribute to reliably achieving rhetorical goals;
5. describe and formally demonstrate how a coherent communicative context is formed through individual utterances that may appear externally independent;
6. incorporate into pragmatic theory communicative intentions as well as the psychological and behavioral responses characteristic of the recipient during interaction, and to examine the social consequences of communicative acts in terms of relationships of dependence and equality.
7. extend the domain of truth-value competence to units larger than the sentence, based on the premise that the carrier of meaning in a message is the function performed by the utterance, while

the elements of the situation and the form of the utterance determine the value of this function.

Within speech act theory, the object of study is the act of speech itself, understood as the speaker's production of a sentence in a situation of direct communication with a listener. Thus, speech act theory is characterized by a deliberate narrowing of its research object, which distinguishes it from other theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, this has limited the scope of the theory; on the other hand, it has enabled a focused and detailed description of the internal structure of the speech act. The principal research method in speech act theory is the analytical method in its various forms. A key difference between speech act theory and psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic theories of speech activity lies in the reliance of the former on thought experiments, whereas the latter employ methods of data collection and processing developed in sociology and experimental psychology.

At present, one of the active directions in speech act theory and pragmatology is the study of communication postulates — that is, the principles or rules governing everyday human interaction. The strength of theoretical approaches to communication rules lies in their identification of previously unexplored mechanisms for organizing communicative interaction in a coherent sequence. These mechanisms contribute to the formation of utterance semantics and significantly influence the communicative situation as a whole.

It is important to note that the contemporary stage of language development is characterized by speakers' command of a vast repertoire of linguistic resources and extensive experience in their use. Consequently, the primary concern is no longer merely how to express a thought process, but how to do so in the most effective manner — solving communicative tasks quickly and with maximum impact on the addressee.

Researchers emphasize different linguistically significant aspects within the concept of the speech act. British linguist M. Halliday views the speech act as a choice among numerous interwoven alternatives that constitute the “semantic potential” of language. In communication, we select among forms such as questioning, asserting,

generalizing, clarifying, adding new information, or repeating. Rather than seeing language as a fixed set of formal prescriptions, this perspective conceptualizes it as a system of choices that may be interpreted differently by individuals. In this sense, the speech act is closely connected with speech planning and represents a complex entity in which cognitive and interpersonal functions interact with varying degrees of prominence depending on the situation.

Results and Discussion

The outcomes of comprehensive linguistic analysis of speech may include the identification of so-called pragmatic clichés, which help reveal the structural patterns of particular types of speech acts. The selection of a pragmatic cliché from the available linguistic repertoire is guided by the speaker's communicative experience and goals. Mastery of diverse pragmatic clichés enables speakers of a foreign language to present information in a manner characteristic of natural and expressive native speech.

Pragmatics and speech act theory constitute an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of linguistics, psychology, and sociology. This field analyzes the general principles of an individual's communicative activity and contributes to the concrete formation of the logical foundation of dialogic interaction. In summary, speech act theory can be described as a framework that is logical-philosophical in its origins and linguistic in its outcomes. It examines the structure of the elementary unit of speech communication — the speech act — understood as the actualization of a sentence, while speech communication itself is viewed primarily as a manifestation of interpersonal relations. As a consequence of introducing this perspective into scholarly discourse, any communicative event may be characterized primarily as speaker-centered. Every utterance is regarded as inherently egocentric. Linguists have highlighted that through a speech act, the speaker constructs a communicative-pragmatic space defined by three coordinates: I versus non-I, now versus not-now, and here versus not-here.

Accordingly, the structure of a speech act

includes:

- the speaker;
- the addressee;
- the utterance;
- the subject matter of the utterance;
- the time of the communicative act;
- the place of the communicative act;
- the situation in which the communicative act is initiated.

The core of speech act theory is formed by the ideas developed by the English logician J. Austin, who introduced the terms “performative sentence” and “performative utterance,” or simply “performative,” referring to a particular type of sentence or utterance, such as the word “Yes” spoken during a marriage ceremony. The term proposed by Austin emphasizes that producing an utterance constitutes the performance of an action, since in such situations speaking is not merely descriptive but itself an act. Austin was the first to identify a group of actions that a person performs when saying something.

First, he distinguished the locutionary act, which involves producing a sentence with a specific sense and reference, corresponding to what is traditionally understood as meaning. Second, he pointed out that speakers perform illocutionary acts, such as informing, ordering, warning, initiating, and similar actions — that is, the utterance reflects the communicative intention of the speaker. Third, Austin identified perlocutionary acts, which are aimed at achieving particular effects through speech, such as persuading, compelling, intimidating, surprising, or misleading. Thus, the foundation of speech act theory lies in Austin’s research, which was later developed and systematized by J. R. Searle.

Today, numerous sources offer definitions of the concept of a speech act. A linguistic encyclopedic dictionary defines a speech act as a purposeful speech action carried out in accordance with the principles and rules of speech behavior accepted in a given society; it is considered a unit of normative socio-speech behavior analyzed within a pragmatic situation. The primary characteristics of a speech act include intentionality, goal orientation, and conventionality. According to a dictionary of linguistic terms, a speech act is an

individual segment of speech that has a specific communicative purpose under given conditions; it is an articulatory and acoustic unit that both speaker and listener associate with the same meaning in a particular communicative situation.

A comprehensive linguistic dictionary interprets a speech act as a distinct purposeful action involving both speech production and perception, presupposing the presence of an addressee and a specific speech situation. A speech act is performed in accordance with socially established rules of speech behavior. Every speech act contains particular goals and intentions of the speaker, on the basis of which different types may be distinguished, including presentational, informative, directive, interrogative, affirmative, negative, declarative, verdictive, and others. According to N. M. Vakhtel, a speech act is an utterance produced with a definite purpose and directed toward an interlocutor in order to achieve a desired result.

Conclusion

As can be seen, each of these definitions contains a rational core and may be applied within scientific research. Since the present study examines speech acts that involve not only a certain number of participants in a communicative situation but also a culturally determined context, the most suitable definition for our research purposes is the one provided by the linguistic encyclopedic dictionary. This interpretation views a speech act as a purposeful speech action performed in accordance with socially accepted principles and rules of speech behavior and considered as a unit of normative socio-speech behavior within a pragmatic framework. It should be noted that selecting this definition as the primary one does not diminish the value of other interpretations, which remain applicable in various theoretical developments of speech act theory discussed in the subsequent section of the study.

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