PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF ORAL DISCOURSE: A CASE OF INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a pragmatic analysis of the oral discourse and the performative and indirect attributes inherent in it. Pragmatic studies on speech act have centred mainly on the speaker's intended message and its effect on the receiver, but little or no attention has been paid to the mannerism employed by both the speaker and the receiver within the context of the speech act, to achieve a mutual understanding of the intended message .Such verbal mannerisms as indirectness, inferences, rational consideration and the like. This work tries to make up for this gap. To this end, four samples of oral interviews were subjected to pragmatic analysis .It was observed that even though the universally accepted sub- speech acts like commissives, directives dominate the oral discourse, other sub-acts like expressive, representatives and indirectednessss featured significantly in the communicative mannerism of the participants in the speech process for the effective conveyance of the speaker's message.

Keywords*: pragmatics, oral discourse, speech acts.*

Introduction

Any act of speech is controlled by the speaker, whose intention for making an utterance is to elicit the right response from the addressee.

Another consideration is the mannerism employed by the speaker to get his message across to the receiver in order that the latter might understand and react where necessary, in consonance with the speaker's intent. These strategies may include use of indirect statements, inferences, paradoxical statements and the like.

A host of theories have been advanced for the actual use of language in particular contexts (the main domain of Pragmatics)ranging from theories of Speech Act ,Conversational Implicature, Relevance, Politeness and others. Charles Morris, to whom the modern usage of the term Pragmatics has been attributed, in his attempt to distinguish between Pragmatics and other fields of Linguistics say,

> *'If in an investigation, explicit reference is made to the speaker, or to the user of the language ,then we assign it (the investigation) to the field of Pragmatics...If we abstract from the user of the language ,and analyse only the expression and their designate, we are in the field of Semantics; and finally if we abstract from the designate also and analyse only the relations between the expressions, we are in Syntax'.(Levinson,1983)*

From the above statement, we can deduce that speech acts situates in the field of Pragmatics.

For a proper understanding of this work, the following keywords must be considered namely: Oral discourse, Pragmatics and Speech Acts.

Oral Discourse

This refers to verbal communication between participants as against the written medium of communication. Oral discourse which is essentially verbal, and usually referred to as natural discourse, qualifies as such with three primary elements namely a speaker, a receiver and an intended message. These elements clearly differentiate speech from any meaningless vituperation or utterance. Oral discourse is usually unplanned and is characterized by false-starts, hesitations, partial statements, incomplete phrases, chuckles, repetitions involving interlocutors. Equally, it exploits physical mannerism, body language and gestures associated with communication which are not easily interpreted with the written medium. The reason for the choice of the oral discourse in this research is based on its applicability to the speech act theory which bothers on verbal communication.

PRAGMATICS

Pragmatics was a reaction to the Structuralism of Ferdinard de Saussure. The Structuralist theory postulates that all human actions and formations are related to language and can be understood as systems of related elements (wiki/pragmatics.org). Pragmatics expanded Saussure's idea that language has an analyzable structure composed of parts that can be defined in relation to others. It covers areas like the study of speaker's intentions, meaning in context, study of implicatures, relative distance and how utterances are made with reference to information, commonly shared between speakers and hearers (wiki/pragmatics .org). The relevance of Pragmatics therefore bothers on the interpretation of utterances, not within the linguistic context alone but in consideration of some extra- linguistic contexts which impose certain order on such interpretation.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act theory is a pragmatic theory built on the foundation of Wittgenstein and J.I. Austin, though often associated with J.R Searle. Wittgenstein began a line of thought called 'ordinary language philosophy' with the view that the meaning of language depends on its actual use. J.I. Austin emphasized the performative attribute of language as against the constative view of the Traditional Grammarians. This contemporary notion of speech act as developed by J.I.Austin, states that in uttering a sentence, a speaker performs three acts namely: the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. According to Brown and Yule((1983),the locutionary act is the uttering of a sentence with some meaning; the illocutionary act is the intention of the speaker in making the utterance while the effect the utterance has on the speaker is the perlocutionary act. However, illocutionary act is central to the concept of speech act. A linguist, Kent Bach opines that virtually all speech acts involve the performance of several acts which are distinguished by the speaker's intention, which could be a request, promise or an act of influence.(web,2014).

Generally speech acts are commonly taken to include such acts as promising, nominating, sentencing, ordering etc.

Purpose of the Study

This paper aims at examining how utterances are contextually conditioned to achieve communication. It also tries to establish the relevance of what people say, using certain pragmatic strategies such as Indirectness and Inference. Equally, it aims at sensitizing speakers on speech mannerism, inherent in oral discourse and in determining what is not said within an utterance, yet implied.

Theoretical Perspective: Speech Act Theory By J.R .Searle.

J.L. Austin 's work in '*How to do things with words'* (published posthumously in 1962)was further refined and elaborated upon by J.R. Searle. Whereas Austin promoted the conventional interpretation of speech acts, Searle emphasized a psychological interpretation based on beliefs, intentions etc. According to Searle (1969), to understand language, one must understand the speaker's intention and since language is intentional behaviour, it should be treated as a form of action. In other words, every statement is a speech act which is the basic unit of language used to express meaning; an utterance that expresses an intention.(Searle, 1969).

In J.R. Searle's version of the speech act theory, speech act is often used synonymously with the term illocutionary. In his book, *'Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts*' (1975), he set up the following classification of speech acts:

Speech Acts	**Performative Element**
Representatives	Commits a speaker to the truth/ falsity of as statement, for example reciting a creed.
Directives	Enforces the hearer to take a particular action, for example - making request, command and advice.
Commissives	Commits a speaker to some future action such as promises and oaths.
Expressives	Speech acts that are expressive of the speaker's attitude and emotion , such as thanking, congratulating and excuses.
Declarations	Changes the reality in accordance with the proposition of the declaration , for example baptism, legal and marital pronouncements.

Other Speech act theories attributed to J.R. Searle include:

- **Theory of Indirect Speech Act:**

According to J.R. Searle, 'In indirect speech acts, the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says, by way of relying on their mutually shared back ground information, both linguistic and non-linguistic ,together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer.' (Searle, 1975).

He further stated that the primary illocutionary act is the indirect one and is implicit , while the secondary illocutionary act is the direct one .(Searle,1975).In his idea of Indirect speech act ,J.R. Searle attempts to explain how it is possible that a speaker can say something and mean it , but additionally mean something else.

For example:

Mr A: What can you do for us, how can somebody from Education fit into the banking sector?

Mr B : I can fit into the bank, I can.(Appendix 2 ,line 35-39.)

In this conversation in an interview context, the speaker, Mr. A has just contextually conditioned his utterance to show his reservations on the suitability of Mr. B for the job in the bank, while literally seeking clarification in a rhetoric manner on how the speaker would fit into the bank, judging from his Educational background.

In this case, the decoding of the indirectness in the speaker's utterance will depend on the addressee's ability to infer and rationalize on the speaker's ,to achieve the underlying meaning conveyed ,as against the rhetoric question of how the applicant will fit into the bank. However, both direct and indirect speech acts are stylistic devices of conveying messages.

- **Principle of Felicity Condition**:

  This refers to the conditions and criteria that must be in place for a speech act to achieve its purpose. The following Felicity conditions to the speech acts are basic:

a. An essential condition (whether the speaker intends to that an utterance be acted upon by the addresses).
b. A sincerity condition (whether a speech act is being formed seriously and sincerely.
c. A preparatory condition (whether the authority of the speaker and the circumstance of the speech act are appropriate to it being performed,

The Felicity condition was introduced as Presuppositions by the Oxford philosopher, J,L Austin in his book, '*How to Do Things with Words;*' and was developed by J.R. Searle. If any of the above conditions is not fulfilled, the utterance will not function as an order.

Review of Literature

Series of works have been done in the area of Speech Act , in particular Adolf Reinarch (1917), Stainslav Skrabec (1913) , Dore (1975) on children's utterance and Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores (1987) relating speech act to computers and cognition. Other recent works include those of Guy Cook (1983) & (1989) who opined that

'Performatives are utterances in which saying is doing, and they ...are only successful if felicity conditions are fulfilled....A good example is the act of ordering someone to do something, example .I order you to clean your boots...Yet as with declarations, such utterances will only be perceived as orders if certain conditions are in operation by both the sender and the receiver. The felicity conditions for an order are: the sender believes the action should be done; the receiver has the

ability to do the action; and the sender has the right to tell the receiver to do the action. If any of these conditions are not fulfilled, the utterance will not function as an order... (Guy Cook, 1983).

Trudgill Peter (2000) contributed on the Indirectness of speech Act thus:

> *'It is possible that indirectness is used more in societies which are ,or which have been until recently ,heavily hierarchical in structure, If you want to avoid giving offences to people in authority over you, or if you want to avoid intimidating people lower in the social hierarchy than yourself ,then indirectness may be important....'.*

However these cited works have dwelt on topical issues with respect to speech acts but none has tried to adequately do justice to the psychological/contextual stance of speech act, as far as direct /indirect utterances are concerne. As Adrain Akmajian(2001) puts it,

> *'We sometimes speak indirectly ,that is, we sometimes tend to perform one communicative act by means of performing another communicative act...How does a hearer know if the speaker is speaking indirectly as well as directly?.The answer is contextual appropriateness. It will be inappropriate to be only reporting a flat tire at the gas station. In contrast, if a police officer asks why a motorist's car is illegally parked, a simple report of a flat tire would be contextually appropriate; but a gas attendant will not take the same report from a speaker to mean a request to fix the tire...A speaker can use the very same sentence to convey different messages depending on the context. This is the problem with Indirection'.*

This work therefore tries to address this problem as well as determine instances of direct and indirect utterances and the extent of the enforcement of speech acts, using samples of oral interviews as data for analysis.

Methodology

This is a descriptive survey using data from samples of oral interviews to determine the extent to which speech acts (direct and indirect utterances)convey meaning and elicit appropriate responses and actions from interlocutors within a speech context, in this case in a job interview setting.

Analysis of Data

Four samples of oral interview were used. The data covered the various speech act theories according to J.R. Searle (1979).

The summary of the findings on the distribution of each speech act in the data is provided in the table below:

Speech Acts	**Frequency distribution**	**Average**	**Sub-acts**
Representatives	10	21.7	Proposing, concluding
Directives	19	41.3	Inviting ,requesting ,directing
Commissives	5	10.8	Promising, committing
Expressives	11	23.9	Feeling, condoling ,emotional
Declaratives	1	2.1	Appointing, conferring

Table 6: Speech Act Types.

The Speech Acts contained in the data can be represented on statistical chart as follows:

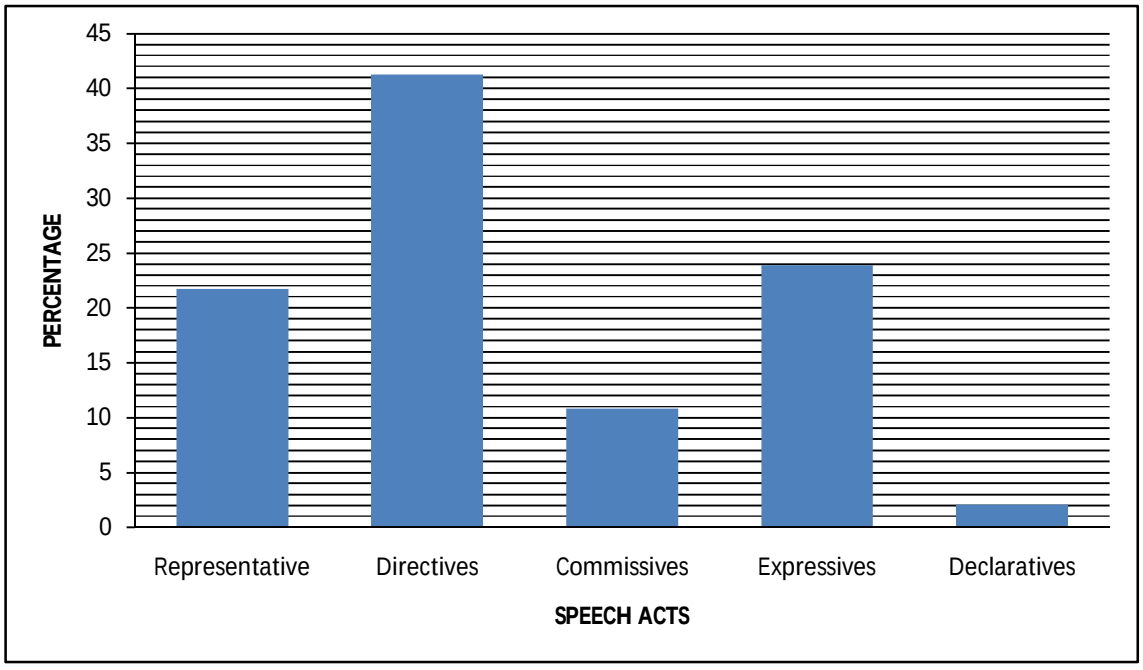


Figure 1:Percentage Distribution of Speech Acts.

The examples of **Directives** below, suggest requests and directives issued to the hearer from the speaker. In this case, an action or request is meant to be performed by the hearer in conformity to the speaker's directive. Examples:

Don't go emotional or feel intimidated (line 9)

Let's meet you, please (line 10)

Make that brief, so we can go to other things, (line 12)...in the simplest way, tell us how you can fit into the bank (line 14). It's ok Mr Balogun, that will be for it (line 18).

Please we don't want any barriers to telling us what you have for us here (line 27)....But just go straight to the point and be brief (line 31) . Please do sit down, make yourself comfortable (lines 44-45).

Commissives are speech acts that commit the speaker to perform a future action, or a promise. The examples of commissives below, from the data express commitment from the interviewers with respect to the interview process:

We will try to make this as interactive as possible , ok?(Line 6).

We shall update you outcome of this when.... (line 18). I can fit into the bank**.** I can **(** line 39).

...Mr Emmanuel, you will hear from us... (line 40)...My friend ,you will hear from us (line 79).

Expressives represent feelings and phatic expressions, sentiments etc.

The sentence -You are welcome; expresses a positive feeling of the speaker towards the listener as seen in the extract above. Other examples- Ok. Thank you sir (lines 7&11) ; Ok, thank you ma .(Line 15 &19). You are welcome (line 20&23). Thank you very much for the insight... (line 28). Good morning. You are welcome.(line 43&65) . Thank you (line 45). Thank you very much again (line 80).

Declaratives are more of appointing or conferring .A case of this speech act was seen in the title **Prof** , accorded the interviewee by the interviewer in the data - So Prof....(line 76).

There are also instances of indirect speech acts used in the data which give room for inference on the speaker's statement to realise the implied message conveyed to the receiver. These include:

Indirect speech acts: You know people are too much outside waiting (line 57). They don't pay us big money. At times they owe us for 3 or 4 months self (line 56). Please sir, your range is far, far much more than the bank needs at the moment (line 56). So do you want to call in the next person for us (line59).

The above examples of Indirectedness need the addressee to read in between the utterances to get the implied messages. The first sentence for example is an indirect statement to the receiver to be brief and a polite warning not to waste the interviewer's time since there are a lot of people waiting to be interviewed. The second expression suggests a lack of job satisfaction on the part of the interviewee while the third expression implies that the interviewee has over negotiated with the interviewer and has exceeded the expected margin for the bank, which is unacceptable. Whereas the last expression is a subtle way of dismissing the interviewee by the interviewer.

Findings

From the above data, the indices show that speech acts that are directive in nature are more prevalent in oral communication than other types of speech acts. This goes to support that speaking is doing which is the essence of performatives - using words to do things. Other speech acts were also used in the interview process.

Conclusion

It is evident that there is a significant correlation between utterance (direct & Indirect)and the actions performed in a communicative context .The Speech Act theory has contributed to the rules perspective in communication because it provides a basis for examining what speakers do with words. By analyzing the rules used by each speaker, it is possible to understand conversational misunderstanding and proffer solutions. Other indirect forms of speech acts such as Indirectedness, use of Context; rely on the receiver's insight and ability to make inferences to capture the speaker's intended message. Additionally, interpretation of such speech acts could resort to certain verbal mannerisms and gestures to decode the message. This indirect act is sparingly used in the interview process, compared to the direct speech acts.

However, indirectedness contributes significantly to the speech process, though not as much as direct utterances. Indirect speech acts are largely used in contexts where the interlocutors have a shared understanding of both the language used and certain body expressions and gestures to ensure confidentiality in the speech process. By and large, the synergy between the direct and indirect speech acts in communication ensures the representation of both the implicit and explicit nature of human communication in natural discourse.

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Samples of Oral Interviews