

SPEECH ACTS AND APOLOGISING

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Abstract: The different perspective investigations (philosophical, linguistic, cultural, and social) of speech acts indicate their significance within the spheres of interlocutors' every-day life and functioning. The aim of this paper is to provide theoretical review of speech acts in general and the speech act of apologising, in particular. The main presupposition about the theory of speech acts is that language is used for communication, and according to this, the theory of speech act focuses on what actually people do when they use the language i.e. what they do in performing social functions in speaking. What do we do when we use the language? Why do we say something in certain way and why not in some other way? What do we actually mean when we say something (directly and indirectly)? All these questions can be answered if we look beyond sentence structure. As speech acts are a consistent part of pragmatics, their appropriate realisation is very important for conveying and maintaining a successful and unthreatening communication between interlocutors from different cultures, and thus, knowing how to use the speech acts appropriately leads to pragmatic failure avoidance. As part of pragmatics, the use of the speech acts generally depends on the communicative situation itself and the context, within which the relationship between the interlocutors, their culture, sex, age, social power and distance, and so on. All these aspects are interconnected and affect the realisation of the speech acts. The speech act of apologising and its importance in everyday communication presents significant facet in maintaining good relationship between the interlocutors, as well as in saving ones face. The speech act of apologising serves as a tool for restoring and maintaining social harmony after some offence or violation of a social norm, or failure in fulfilling interlocutor's expectations has been committed. We will present John Austin and John Searle's theory of speech acts, and the relating concepts: Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four maxims, Goffman's introduction of the term 'face', Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, and Leech's concept of Politeness Principle. Regarding the speech act of apologising, we will depict this speech act, as well as the strategies of its realisation.

Keywords: apologising, politeness, pragmatics, speech acts, strategies

ГОВОРНИ ЧИНОВИ И ИЗВИНУВАЊЕ

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Резиме: Истражувањата на говорните чинови гледано од различни аспекти: филозофски, јазичен, културен и општествен аспект, укажуваат на нивната голема значајност во целокупната сфера на секојдневниот живот и делување на говорителите. Целта на овој труд е да го даде теоретскиот преглед на говорните чинови и да го опише говорниот чин на извинување. Основната претпоставка на теоријата за говорните чинови е дека јазикот се користи за целите на комуникацијата и според тоа, теоријата за говорните чинови се фокусира на тоа што всушност луѓето прават кога го користат јазикот т.е. какви општествени функции се извршуваат кога зборуваме. Што правиме кога кога зборуваме? Зошто кажуваме нешто на овој или оној начин, а не на некој друг начин? Што всушност сакаме да кажеме кога велиме нешто (директно или индиректно)? Сите овие прашања може да се одговорот доколку погледнеме подлабоко во реченицата отколку од самата синтаксичка структура на реченицата. Бидејќи говорните чинови се дел од прагматиката, нивната соодветна реализација е важна за спроведување и одржување на успешна комуникација без загрозување на лицето на соговорниците од различни култури. Познавањето на соодветната употреба на говорните чинови води до избегнување на прагматички неуспех. Како дел од прагматиката, општо употребата на говорните чинови зависи од самата ситуација на комуникацијата и контекстот, како и од односот помеѓу соговорниците, нивната култура, пол, возраст, општествената моќ и растојание, и друго. Овие аспекти се меѓусебно поврзани и влијаат врз начинот на реализација на говорните чинови. Говорниот чин извинување и неговата важност во секојдневната комуникација претставува битен аспект за одржување добри односи помеѓу соговорниците, како и за зачувување на нивното лице. Говорниот чин извинување служи како инструмент за

обновување и одржување на претходно нарушена општествена хармонија во која е направена навреда или прекршување на општествена норма, или пак неисполнување на очекувањата на соговорникот. Ќе ги прикажеме теориите на говорни чинови на Џон Остин и Џон Серл и концептите кои се однесуваат на говорните чинови, како: кооперативниот принцип на Грајс и четирите максими, терминот ‘лице’ претставен од страна на Гофман, теоријата на учтивост на Браун и Левинсон, принципот на учтивост на Лич, воведувањето на терминот ”лице” од страна на Гофман и теоријата на учтивост на Браун и Левинсон. Во поглед на говорниот чин извинување, ќе го опишеме овој чин и стратегиите на неговата реализација.

Клучни зборови: говорни чинови, извинување, прагматика, стратегии, учтивост

1. INTRODUCTION

On everyday basis we use language in order to communicate some information, or to negotiate, complain, discuss, promise, thank, apologise, refuse, predict, describe, and so on. We perform these functions of the language through carefully adjusted words and sentences or *speech acts*, for example: promising, complaining, refusing, apologising, etc. Pragmatics deals with the meaning of what people actually want to convey when they use the language and regarding the speech acts as closely related to pragmatics, the main presupposition is that the language is used for the purposes of communication, and according to this, the theory of speech act is focusing on what actually people do when they use the language i.e. with the functions of the language itself.

2. SPEECH ACT THEORIES

There are two theories of the speech acts, the one of James Austin, and the other is the theory of John Searle, which is a re-organisation of Austin’s ideas. Their theories are based on the main presupposition that the language is used for performing certain kinds of acts.

2.1. The theory of John Austin

Austin was the initiator of the belief that language is not considered only as an instrument for the description of the reality, but that it can also contribute to creation of reality (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). According to Austin (1962), many utterances are not used only to state something, i.e. are not considered only as statements. They may look like statements, but what they carry beyond the surface may be something else. The main interest of his are the performatives, for which the derivation of the word ‘performative’ itself “indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action – it is not normally thought of as just saying something” (Austin, 1962, in Coupland and Jaworski, 2006, p. 56). He makes a distinction between *performative* and *constative* utterances (e.g. It’s sunny outside. *my example*) in that that for the former a truth value can be denoted, and for the latter it cannot. The uttering of performatives does not describe the act, but the utterance itself is the act, or the performance of the act. He further divides the performatives in explicit and implicit performatives. The explicit performatives employ “some highly significant and unambiguous expression such as ‘I bet’, ‘I promise’, ‘I bequeath’” which names the act itself. The implicit performatives, on the other hand, express the action of the verb in another way. For example: “There is a bull in the field” may or may not be comprehended as warning or may be seen as a description of a scene (Austin, 1962, in Coupland and Jaworski, 2006, p. 59).

According to Austin, there are three kinds of acts that are performed simultaneously:

Locutionary act - the act of saying something, or the literal meaning of the utterance itself;

Illocutionary act – what is done in uttering words or expressions or the force related to the utterance in a given context;

Perlocutionary act – the effects produced on the speaker’s feelings, thoughts, or actions.

He introduces the *felicity conditions*, i.e. the conditions required for a successful realisation of the speech acts: there must be a conventional procedure with conventional effect and appropriateness of the circumstances as well as the participants, complete and correct execution of the procedure, and sincerity of the performance of the action.

Austin classifies the speech acts into the following classes: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, bahabitives, expositives, “more as a basis for discussion, not as set of established rules” (as cited in Searle, 1975, p. 7) which were later elaborated by Searle, who makes his own contribution to the theory of speech acts.

2.2. The theory of John Searle

Searle believes that the illocutionary speech acts are “the basic unit of human linguistic communication” (Searle, 1975, p. 1) and as such they are the main interest of his work. He finds several lapses that led him to further

develop Austin's theory by systematising his ideas and grouping the illocutionary speech acts considering the illocutionary point (purpose), direction to fit (words to world and world to words), and sincerity conditions (psychological state expressed in the performance of illocutionary act). He notes that Austin's classification does not classify the illocutionary acts, but the illocutionary verbs, and criticises the taxonomy due to: not all of the listed verbs are illocutionary verbs; there is no principle followed for the formulation of the classification; there is overlap of the categories, as well as some of the categories consisted of distinct kinds of verbs, and the verb examples do not correspond to the classes' definitions. Regarding this critics, Seale proposes an alternative classification that consists of the following classes of speech acts (Searle, 1975, pp. 10-13):

1. **Representatives** – acts that commit the speaker to something he/she believes to be the case or the truth of the expressed proposition (describing, predicting, claiming);
2. **Directives** – acts with which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something, i.e. to make a future action (inviting, suggesting, requesting, advising, begging);
3. **Commissives** – acts that commit the speaker to some future actions (promising, vowing, guaranteeing);
4. **Expressives** – acts that express the speaker's psychological state employing verbs expressing feelings (thanking, apologising, congratulating, deploring, condoling);
5. **Declarations** – acts which the uttering itself brings about a change in the world (declaring (a war), baptising, nominating, appointing).

3. SPEECH ACTS RELATING CONCEPTS

3.1. Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four maxims

In conversation, when we talk about something we communicate connected information, we also assume that our interlocutors are willing to communicate and cooperate, we may express ourselves in a direct way, but we also quite often use indirectness in our expressions. When we interact with others indirectly, what we should bear in mind is that our intentions are not always perceived as we meant them to be. So the aim of our everyday communication is the hearer to recognise speaker's intention with which he/she produced an utterance, so that the communication itself will not fail (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). Thus, our exchanges with interlocutor(s) are based on cooperative aims. On the basis of the cooperative aims, Grice (1975) introduces a Cooperative Principle (CP) which he describes as the general principle of talk exchange in which the interlocutors make a "conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or directions of the talk exchange" (Grice, 1975, in Coupland and Jaworski, 2006, pp. 67-68). Within this principle, he lists four maxims: the maxim of **Quantity** (Make your contributions as informative as is required; Do not make your contributions more informative than is required), the maxim of **Quality** (Do not say what you believe to be false; Do not say that for which you lack adequate information), the maxim of **Relation** (Be relevant), and the maxim of **Manner** (Be perspicuous: Avoid obscurity of expressions; Avoid ambiguity; Be brief; Be orderly).

In conversation, the hearer assumes what the speaker's intention is when he/she utters something, so trying to imply what was said. On the basis of the cooperative principle, Grice formulates the notion of *conversational implicature*, which is related to general features of discourse. When some information is communicated indirectly and implicitly, and the hearer needs to work out the implicature in order to understand what the speaker wanted to say i.e. his/her intention. Due to the theory of CP generates conversational implicatures, "which unlike conventional, implicatures, convey an implicit meaning not derivable from their conventional use", intentional non-observance of the maxims is considered as main focus of the theory (Ogierman, 2009, p. 8). The theory of conversational implicature is considered as the most influential step into the process of development of pragmatics (Ogierman, 2009), and one of its main ideas (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014).

3.2. Goffman's introduction of the term 'face'

Goffman (1967) claims that every human being involved into social encounter strives to achieve what he calls a *line* – "a pattern of verbal and non-verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the other participants, especially himself" (Goffman, 1967, in Coupland and Jaworski, 2006, p. 299). Whether or not the speaker will take a line, the interlocutors will assume that that is his/her attitude and in that way they form an impression of him. In the line the speaker reflects his own *face*, which Goffman describes as "a positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact." (Goffman, 1967, in Coupland and Jaworski, 2006, p. 299), stating that it is the established image of self according to the approved social norms. As the conversation involves minimum two participants, it is evident

that the each speaker will have feeling about interlocutors' face, which may differ in quantity and direction from those of his/her own face. The group rules and the given situation determine the intensity of the feeling one has for face and its distribution to the other faces in contact. According to Goffman, person may *have, be in, or maintain face* if their line in contact presents a typical image of him/her and which is asserted by the other interlocutors' judgments and evidence; one may *be in wrong face*, or when other get the impression that his/her image is not consistent to the line gained for him/her; and one may *be out of face*, or when he/she is in contact with other interlocutors without having an expected line. There are cases when person may also *lose face*, meaning to be in wrong face, to be out of face, or to be shamefaced; and *to save face*, which means that the person keeps the interlocutors' impression that he/she has not lost his/her face. In conversation with others, and according to the situation, it is quite important to show self-respect, as well as thoughtfulness towards the others in order not to be treated as heartless or shameless. In that way, interlocutors will be able to maintain their own face, as well as other's face and as a kind of condition of interaction, in keeping up with the already sustained line, basing the succeeding responses on them, they will be able to maintain mutual acceptance of lines. There are cases when one wants to save his/her own face, and on the other hand, when he/she feels he/she needs to save the interlocutor's face, due to different purposes and occasions. On the basis of the notion of *face*, Goffman introduces another term, *face-work*, which means "to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face" (Goffman, 1967, in Coupland and Jaworski, 2006, p. 302). Face-work is used in order to prevent the incidents (the possible threats to face) where each interlocutor has a defensive orientation towards his/her own face (in order to save his/her face), and a protective face in order to save other's face. Meanwhile, in the attempts to save one's face, the person must beware of not losing his/her own face, and on the other hand, in trying to save his/her own face he/she must consider other's loss of face.

3.3. Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness

Brown and Levinson present a theory of linguistic politeness on the basis of the theory of speech acts and Goffman's notion of face, relating to two major categories of politeness: positive and negative politeness (Ogierman, 2009). Thus, Brown and Levinson define *face* as: "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (as cited in Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014, p. 64). They make a distinction between positive and negative face, referring to as 'wants' of the members of society, in the following way:

negative face: the want of being unimpeded;

positive face: our want of being accepted and liked by others. (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014, p. 64)

Regarding the notion of face, maintaining face is regarded as the central element in the accepted notions of politeness. In interaction, there are cases when the interlocutors feel that their face is threatened, so they take a stand to defend their face, which meanwhile indicates a threat to others' face. Hence, the act of cooperating, without imposing a threat to neither face is the main interest for both of the parties due to their interchangeability and the need to maintain face (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). There are acts that intrinsically threaten face and are called "*face threatening acts*" (FTA) and when there is a possibility of their occurrence, the speaker uses strategies, called *politeness strategies*, which show the speaker's desire to be polite, meanwhile mitigating hearer's face threat. These strategies refer to expressions of solidarity, and the negative politeness strategies refer to expressions of restraint (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014). The speaker's evaluation of the face threat and thus, on their choice of strategies for performing the FTA depends on the social power, social distance, and imposition of the speech act (Ogierman, 2009). We can infer that the aim of successful communication is interaction where the both parties will cooperate in order to maintain their face.

3.4. Leech's concept of Politeness Principle

According to Leech, "politeness is an important missing link between the CP and the problem of how to relate sense to force" (as cited in Ogierman, 2009, p. 10). He suggests that the CP "should be supplemented by a Politeness Principle (PP)" (Leech, 1983, as cited in Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014, p. 62), which is a principle that is seen as "the reason why a particular content or form is preferred over another" (Ogierman, 2009, p. 10) and states the following:

-Minimise (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs and the corollary

-Maximise (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs

(Leech, as cited in Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014, p. 62)

4. DEFINING THE SPEECH ACT OF APOLOGISING

According to Searle (1975), apologising belongs to the category of ‘expressives’ or the speech acts that express the speaker’s psychological state. It is a post-event act indicating that the speaker has committed some violation of a social norm and thus by its implementation he/she confirms his/her involvement in and responsibility of the offence imposed on the hearer (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984). Goffman describes apologising as: “a gesture through which an individual splits himself in two parts, the part that is guilty of an offence and the party that dissociates itself from the delict and affirms a belief in the offended rule” (Goffman, 1971, as cited in Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014, p. 71). Eva Ogierman (2009) provides a bunch of definitions of the speech act of apologising from different linguists, and taking into consideration all of these definitions we can infer that apology is a part of an interaction between two parties (offender and offended) that has evolved from a prior event, in which the actual act of apologising presents a manifestation of good manners and kind of reaction to an offence made by the offender which is carried out as a violation of a social norm or a failure in fulfillment of peoples’ expectations. Hence, it is a social function which serves as a ‘tool’ for restoring and maintaining balance and social harmony of communication. By its nature, apologising includes face loss for the speaker and support for the hearer (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984).

4.1. Strategies for realisation of speech act of apologising

For the performing of speech acts people have at their disposal several strategies that they use in order to fulfill a/some social function. The possible set of strategies for the realisation of certain speech act is called *speech act set*. Cohen explains that the realisation of speech acts involves minimum one strategy given in the speech act set or a combination of more strategies of the speech act set (Cohen, 2010). Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) assert that the realisation of the speech act of apologising can be performed in two possible ways:

- a) apologising using explicit illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), which is considered as the most direct way of an apology (with the use of routinised, formulaic expression of regret like: (be) sorry, apologise, regret, excuse, forgive, pardon);
- b) apologising (with or without the IFID) using utterance that contains some/one or a combination of the strategies in the speech act set: 1) an explanation or account of the cause which brought about the offence; 2) an expression of the S’ responsibility for the offence; 3) an offer of repair; 4) a promise of forbearance.

The implementation of these strategies depends on the situation and the type of the infraction, as well as on the language and culture where it takes place (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984; Cohen, 2010). Depending on the extent of the offence implemented by the infraction, the apology may be intensified using several intensification devices:

- a. an intensifying expression within the IFID (with an intensifier: adverbial (eg. I’m very...sorry.) or repetition (double intensifier) (eg. I’m terribly, terribly sorry.);
- b. expressing explicit concern for the hearer – externally to the IFID (with expression of concern for the hearer (eg. Have you been waiting for long?));
- c. using multiply strategies (with or without the IFID and any one or more of the four other strategies) (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984, p. 8).

CONCLUSION

According to the theories of speech acts, we saw that we use language in order to perform some kind of action. Speech acts are integral part of the language use in everyday communication and people should bear in mind how they would express themselves in order to their interlocutor to perceive the right intention of the used utterance. So in order to establish an effective communication, learners need to acquire the pragmatic ability i.e. the knowledge about pragmatics and the ability to use it. Apologies as kind of speech acts are used in everyday communication for the purposes of restoring the violated social norm and harmony. By apologising we express our good manners by taking responsibility for intentional or unintentional violation of some social norm.

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