SPEECH ACT THEORY AND GRICEAN PRAGMATICS: A REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper entitled "Speech Act Theory and Gricean Pragmatics: A Review" appreciates the language of action words since pragmatic strategies are applied in order to bring out features of speeches. Pragmatic strategies such as entailment, presupposition, implicatures, context of situation, speech acts among others were used in this paper. The paper is also anchored on the pragmatic theory which is a speech act theory. This theory deals with utterances and how they are used to express actions. The examples used in this study were utterances used by some scholars in their research work and some extemporaneous examples given by the authors of this paper. These utterances served as our data in this paper. The study concludes that speech act captures an action performed by someone through his words. Also the central aspect of the Speech Act Theory is that an utterance is part of an action within the framework of social institution and conventions. J. L. Austin proposed three levels of speech acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act which were dissected in this paper.

Keywords: Speech acts, Gricean, Pragmatics, Implicature and Presupposition.

Introduction

Speech act theory also called pragmatic act theory or theory of pragmeme is the brainchild of the Oxford Philosopher J.L. Austin, whose 1955 lectures at Harvard University were post-humously published as *How to do Things with Words* (1975). The theory was further developed by scholars like John R. Searle, Bach and Harnish, Sadock, Cole and Morgan among others.

Every user of language intends among other things to influence their listener (s), that is, their listeners should behave in a certain way. This is basically what speech act theory is all about. In other words, the theory looks at the roles of utterances in relation to the behaviour or attitudes of the interlocutors in communicative discourse. It considers the speaker's intention and the effect of his speech on the listener. Yule (1994) observes that language is used to achieve diverse purposes: educate, instruct, inform, advice, correct. That is, our utterances carry several meanings and perform different actions and we must understand these meanings and their indexes.

Speech acts theory looks at the pragmatic function of utterances. The theory is premised on the belief that language is used to perform actions. That is, how meaning and actions are related to language (Udofot, 56).Schiffrin cites Austin (1962) that "the uttering of a sentence is, or part of the doing of an action, which again would not normally be described as or as 'just' saying something".

Cutting cites Austin (1962) that speech acts mean actions performed in saying something. That is, doing something with words. For instance, in sermon, the preacher unravels the communicative action of the true God who uses words to make a promise, give assurance, command, and curse, bless, among others. Every user of language intends, among other things, to influence their listener(s). That is, their listener should behave in a way that is commensurate with the utterance. In other words, speech acts theory looks at the behaviour or attitude of interlocutors in communicative discourse. As Ndimeleputs it, "utterances are acts… capable of producing enormous and far-reaching results…"

Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish define speech acts as "acts performed in uttering expressions" (394). Finegan avers that language (words) is used to make request, promise, report, direct, greet, invite, among other acts that would be achieved verbally, similarly,

Ogbulogo says, "speech act theory explains the roles of utterances in shaping the attitudes of participants in interpersonal communication. It reflects the intentions of the speaker and the effects the speaker's expressions on the hearer" (67).

For Wardhaugh "Utterances have some functional value," that our utterances are actions, they do certain things" (285). Wardhaugh puts it thus, "one thing that utterances do is make propositions. They do this mainly in the form of either statements or questions but other grammatical forms are also possible" (285).

Also, Odebunmi observes that speech act theory is anchored on the argument that language is used both to say things (speak) and to perform actions. An important aspect of speech act theory is that actions are performed using performative utterances by which a speaker performs an action or does something as distinct from constatives which determine the truth or falsity of an utterance by a speaker. Performatives are expressed using performative verbs. And when such verbs are used in utterances or pragmatic terms they perform actions as in:

- I pronounce you husband and wife (Wardhaugh, 286).
- I declare you president

The sentences above are performatives because they are expressed by the performative verbs *pronounce* and *declare* which are appropriately used in relation to context (marriage ceremony, swearing-in ceremony) respectively. Besides, both are in the present tense; and the sentences contain the first person subjects "I". The verbs are also contextually and textually appropriate. All these are conditions necessary for the expression of speech acts.

Cruse avers that "A performative verb is one which designates a specific speech act and which, if used appropriately, counts on the performance of the speech act. For Bach cited in Sharndama, performative utterances explicitly explain what we are doing. In addition, performatives are subject to felicity conditions: conditions that specify whether performatives work or not. That is, these conditions enable us to say when it is appropriate to perform acts such as reporting, asking questions, giving command. An utterance may be regarded as unsuccessful or incomplete if these conditions are not fulfilled or met. Performatives that do not work, as Austin puts it, are infelicitous. Grundy argues that reality of performatives depend on the contexts of

their operations and the ability of the interlocutors to operate in those context. In light of the performatory nature of utterances, Ogunsiji defines speech act as "actions performed via utterances" (p. 10). Bach describes the performative function of language as follows: "Almost any speech act is really the performance of social acts at once, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker's intention" (p. 102).

Sharndama cites Bach that performatives could be implicit: contain a verb that is not clearly defined. It is the context of utterance that enables the listener to decode meaning of the utterance or the speaker's intention. The utterance, "it is dark", for instance, is an implicit performative. If uttered in a room at night, it could be interpreted as a request that light be switched on.

Classification of speech acts

Austin in his book; *How to do things with words*, classifies speech acts into three: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. Austin sees *locutionary acts* as actual utterance or content of speech. Horn and Ward locutionary act is,

…construction of speech, such as uttering certain sounds or making certain marks using particular words…in conformity with the grammatical rules of a particular language… senses and references of the language (23).

Similarly, Sharndama cites Bach that it is the act of saying something, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, according to specific grammatical conventions.

Illocutionary acts refer to what an utterance is doing. Austin and his successors observed that it is the use to which language is put. That is, the meaning that the speaker wishes to convey or the action that should be performed; the force or effect of an utterance or unit of language will have when uttered. It is where saying equals doing, as in betting, welcoming and warning. It is a contrast to locutionary act. Illocutionary act is therefore the expression of the preacher's feeling, attitude or intention.

A *perlocutionary act* is the effect of the utterance on the listener. It is an act that is attributed to the effect of saying something. Black sees it as the effect of our utterances or what we say on the hearer.

Ishaya citing Searle classifies speech acts (locutions and illocutions) into five, namely; representatives, (assertions, claims, reports, statements, hypotheses, descriptions, suggestions), directives (suggestions, requests, commands, challenges, invitations, entreaties, dares, expressives (complaints, thanksgiving, apologies, congratulating, condoling, confessing, denying), commissives (promises, threats, offers, pledges, vows, bettings, agreements) and declaratives (decrees, declarations, blessing, firing, arresting, commissioning, marrying and sentencing).

Representatives: Crystal citing Searle explains representatives as speech acts that tell when the speaker asserts a proposition to be true. Representatives comprise statements of facts, conclusions, descriptions which demonstrate the speaker's belief in whatever he is saying (Sharndama, 2015). Verbs which express representations include: affirm, believe, conclude, deny, report. An example of representative speech act is shown below:

> Let every mountain before you come down now!
> In the name of Jesus
> (Ayodabo, 2015).

Directives: These verbs of speech acts are used to make the addressee or hearer do something particularly what the speaker wants. Directives show command, order, request, and suggestion. Examples include;
- Please go out.
- Why don't you wash the plate yourself?
- Will you close that door?
- Rise to your feet
- Shout Hallelujah!

Expressives: These are speech acts in which a particular speaker expresses feelings and attitude to or about a situation or circumstance. Expressives include apologies, appreciations, congratulatory remarks, complaints, as in regret, welcome. Examples are:
- I detest idleness
- I am sorry for coming late.
- I am happy, He is risen.
- Lord Jesus, I have sinned against you.

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Commisives: these speech acts commit the speaker to do something in the future, they may be vows, promises or threats:
- I do hereby pledge my loyalty in you.
- I will deal with you.
- Jesus, I promise to serve you all the days of my life.

Declaratives: These are speech acts which alter the state of affairs in the world. They are normally performed by someone in a position of authority within an institution (Sharndama. They are associated with acts such as baptizing, naming, marriage, judging, for example,
- I hereby *pronounce* you husband and wife
- I hereby *sentence* you to three years imprisonment without an option of fine.
- I hereby *name* this road Abak Road.
- I *baptize* you in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- I *declare* you free in Jesus' Name.

The discussion above demonstrates that Speech Acts Theory is about using language to accomplish a certain goal depending on context. Our use of language as Ogbologo, Syal and Jindal argue that is dependent on contextual factors like social and physical circumstances, abilities, beliefs and the relationship between the speaker and the listener. The action/reaction of participants in a discourse is very important in language analysis. Austin's classification of speech acts: locutionary act (the literal meaning of an utterance), illocutionary act (the social function of an utterance) and perlocutionary force (the effect produced by an utterance in in a given context) which constitute the functional units of communication (Udofot, 102).

Gricean Pragmatics
Pragmatics mainly deals with language users in a real life situation, and about the conditions that enable those users to use linguistic techniques and materials effectively and appropriately. Udofot cited in Ndimele sees pragmatics:

>…as the analysis of meaning that takes into account not only the observable aspect of a language event but also the unobservable: the

choices they (users) make, the constraints they
encounter in using their language for social
interaction and the effect their use of language has
on other participants" (127).

It studies the contextual evidence that encoding and decoding require for
a message to be understood. Mgbemena and Ewurum argue that
pragmatics contributes to our understanding of the language use and
structure. It seeks to explain the symbiotic relationship between what a
person says and the context in which he says it and the circumstances
surrounding such utterance.

Pragmatic analysis therefore entails our assessment of how
language is used and understood contextually (when, how people speak
and its effect or interpretation by the hearer (Crotzier and Deittweiler).
Our primary concern is to determine a language user's knowledge of
appropriate pragmatic forms and the appropriate context for their use.
Pragmatic tools such as locution, illocution, perlocution, presupposition,
implicature, entailment, etc are usually considered. In pragmatic analysis
we try to examine how language is used so as to enable us interact with
other people, to take on roles and to express and understand feelings,
attitude and judgment. For Melefa, we engage in pragmatic analysis
because we believe that, nothing happens by chance, especially where
the context of the event is considered.

Pragmatic analysis enables people, particularly, listeners to
unearth the intricacies involved in language use for better understanding.
In the context of our proposed study, it will help the congregation to
understand the language of preachers. A pragmatic analysis of language
in general requires that words are used in agreement with one another in
the context of use. Mey says; "To understand another person's wording,
I have to word the world with him or her, by participating in a common
social context" (p. 307).

Pragmatic analysis of language comprises components such as
speech acts and contexts which have been previously discussed. These
include presuppositions, implicatures, entailments, deixis. These
components consider meaning in relation to language users,
communication code and socio-cultural conventions.

Presupposition

The notion of presupposition is credited to H. P. Grice. Yule defines presupposition as the truth of a speaker's assumption concerning what the hearer knows. For Osisanwo (2008), presuppositions are basic assumptions made by the speaker or writer concerning the hearer or reader in relation to the topic of discourse. Such assumptions are likely to be accepted without challenge since they are founded on a common ground. Ogbologoalso sees presupposition as what the speaker assumes that the listener already knows. Both the speaker and the listener share a common form of background knowledge. For example, "Have you stopped stealing?" presupposes that the person asked was or used to be a thief. Similarly, the sentence, "When did you stop stealing?" presupposes that the person asked used to steal, and that he/she no longer steals.

Presupposition could be semantic (deal with "the logical relations that hold between sentences" in other words, it is part of sentence meaning) or pragmatic (concerns the conditions required for a speech act to be seen as contextually appropriate) (Osisanwo, p. 86).

Implicature

The term is also credited to H. P. Grice. It is an aspect of meaning that is pragmatic based. Osisanwo (2008) says, "implicature is one of the strongest aspects of pragmatics because through the contribution of Paul Grice, scholars… have been able to beam their search light on the inner working of pragmatics (p. 92). According to Udofot, implicatureis used to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest or mean as distinct from what the speaker literary says. Ogbologo sees implicature as "the act of deducing from an utterance other forms of meaning" (p.160).

For Grundy, implicature is, "an inferred, often with a different logical (that is non-truth preserving) form from that of the original utterance" (p.299). If a speaker says "I have a flat tyre", the implicature may be that he/she is looking for assistance or wants to be directed to a vulcanizer. Therefore speaker B may reply, "There is a vulcanizer over there". Implicature cannot be interpreted from their *semantic/grammatical meaning but from environmental or conversational;* while conventional implicature "thrives on cooperation between the two interactants(Grundy, p. 299). Implicature serves a

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variety of goals beyond communication: maintaining good social relations, misleading without lying, style and verbal efficiency.

Entailment

This is a communication situation whereby, if one proposition entails another, the other proposition also entails it. That is, if the first utterance is true, the second one is automatically true as in:
- I have a wife – I am married.
- Victor killed the dog – the dog is dead.

Saeed says, "Entailment is a relationship between sentences so that if a sentence A entails a sentence B, then if we know A we automatically know B". Alternatively, he adds that, "it should be impossible… to assert A and deny B" (.4). Similarly, Grundy (2008) defines entailment as, "A meaning that is always associated with an expression so that on every occasion when the expression occurs the meaning arises" (298).

The context of situation

Language and context are inseparable as the latter is a necessary condition for inferring meaning in communication; spoken or written. Thus Brown and Yule assert that context is the environment, circumstance of language use. That language analysis may not be adequate enough if context is not considered. If a grammarian for instance, wants to ascertain or judge whether a sentence is correct or not, "he is implicitly appealing to contextual considerations" (25)

Grundy (196; 10) holds that context is very important in determining the meaning of an utterance. That our inference from "the utterance we hear and our knowledge of the world (context) "are the two kinds of premise that give meaning to our utterances".

In his pragmatic act theory or theory of pragmeme; a theory of context which considers the verbal behaviourof an individual within the affordances of context, Mey (43) argues that context determines what one can say and vice versa. That is, context makes us organized and meaningful in our utterances. Mey observes further that context goes beyond mere influence, "Context is action, context is about understanding what things are for… what gives our utterances their true pragmatic meaning and allows them to be counted as true pragmatic acts" (p.19).

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The above shows that language is not haphazardly used. Every aspect of human life such as sermons have their unique language. And one's effective use of language is to a great extent, measured by one's mastery and appropriate use of lexical items and expressions as they relate to different contexts and speech events. Hence Ogbologo (2005, p.45) defines context as "those factors which determine choices in language in social interaction". He adds that differences in meaning are brought about by the context of language use. Because pragmatics focuses on language use, it cannot be separated from context. Since language operates in context not vacuum. Osisanwo observes that scholars like Firth, Ellis and Halliday have individually worked on the concept of context as it relates to language use. He observes further that in discussing context in pragmatics, we are interested in finding out the different types of context which contribute to our understanding of how language is used in particular situations.

Context should be physical, psychological and linguistic among others (Osisanwo, 2008). The physical context covers the interractants/interlocutors in a discourse, the activities, the place and time. The place where the discourse is taking place also contributes to meaning. For instance, a context can be church where the word of God is preached. Like the other factors, the time of a particular discourse "can be used in determining what language is being used for" (p. 80).

Psychological context refers to the state of mind of the individuals involved in a discourse. Is it of happiness, joy, anger, sorrow? The state of the preacher's mind determines his use of language. For example, a preacher's use of language in his sermon on tithe/offering may be influenced by his temperament, the financial state of the church, illiterate nature of his congregation, etc.

Linguistic context here points to the peculiarity of language use. This covers aspects such as lexical or word choice and syntactic types. Preachers at times create words to amuse their listeners or drive home their message. This explains why Halliday's view that lexical sets of language are open systems (allow for the creation of novel words) is of interest to this study.

Lycan (138), Syal and Jindal explain that "pragmatics is the functioning of language in context"(157).. Lycansays "when a sentence is uttered, it is invariably uttered in a particular context by a particular speaker for a particular purpose" (p.12).

According to Armstrong and Ferguson (2010) language should be seen as "a set of meaning-making resources" which is not only dependent on a set of syntactical semantic construct" but also on the communicators' environment or situation of operation. Different contexts require different kinds of vocabulary and different expressions that are suitable to that particular context (Armstrong and Ferguson, 2010, citing Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks and Yallop. Ifeanyicites Halliday who in his *Language as a social semiotic:The social interpretation of language and meaning* (1978) explains the relevance of context in meaning or language.

The question is, how does a hearer choose which interpretation to select? How does he know which interpretation the speaker intended? In an attempt to provide answers to such questions, Grice (1975) proposed maxims of conversation which constitute principles for selection of inferences. These were maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner (Udofot, 129).

Conclusion

Speech acts is a technical term in linguistics and philosophy of language. It captures an action performed by someone through his words. The British philosopher J. L. Austin who contributed the term (speech acts) to pragmatics claimed that, by speaking, a person performs an act, or does something (such as state, predict, or warn) and that meaning is found in what an expression does. Simply put, the central aspect of the Speech Act Theory is that an utterance is part of an action within the framework of social institution and conventions. Austin proposed three levels of speech acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. A locutionary act is the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning, comprising phonic, phatic and rhetic acts actually corresponding to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any meaningful utterance. A phonic act produces an utterance-inscription. It is concerned with physical act of producing a certain sequence of vocal sounds (in the case of spoken language), or a set of written symbols (in the case of written language). A phatic act is an act of composing a particular linguistic expression in a particular language. It is the act of constructing a well formed string of sounds/symbols (a word, phrase, or sentence in a particular language). Rhetic act is an act of contextualising the utterance-inscription (Austin, 1962). It is responsible for tasks such

as assigning reference, resolving deixis, and disambiguating the utterance-inscription lexically and grammatically.

By the idea of illocutionary act, Austin believes that saying is doing. Therefore, "by saying something, we do something else." For instance when someone orders someone else to come by saying "Come!", or when a minister joins two people in marriage saying, "I now pronounce you husband and wife". An interesting type of illocutionary act is that performed in the utterance of what Austin calls performatives. Typical instances of these are "I demand an apology", "I assure you there will be a change". In these rather explicit cases of performative sentences, the action that the sentences describe (demanding, ensuring) are performed by the utterance of the sentences themselves.

Furthermore, Austin explains that perlocutionary acts entail the consequences or effects of utterances on the audience in a linguistic encounter; such consequences or effects being special to the circumstances of utterance. Its actual effect, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not. For instance, the locution, 'See a snake behind you' has an illocutionary act of informing or warning. The perlocutionary act will be manifested in the addressee who either runs or screams.

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