SPEECH ACT THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This research gives a general overview to Speech Acts with relevant examples. The kinds of speech acts; locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative.

Keywords: Speech acts, Locutionary Acts, Illocutionary Acts and Perlocutionary Acts.

In the philosophy of language and linguistics, **speech act** is something expressed by an individual that not only presents information but performs an action as well. The contemporary use of the term goes back to J. L. Austin's development of performative utterances and his theory of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Speech acts serve their function once they are said or communicated. These are commonly taken to include acts such as apologizing, promising, ordering, answering, requesting, complaining, warning, inviting, refusing, and congratulating.

Speech acts can be analysed on multiple levels:

1. A **locutionary act**: the performance of an utterance: the actual utterance and its apparent meaning, comprising any and all of its verbal, social, and rhetorical meanings, all of which correspond to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any meaningful utterance;

2. An **illocutionary act**: the active result of the implied request or meaning presented by the locutionary act. For example, if the locutionary act in an interaction is the question "Is there any salt?" the implied illocutionary request is "Please pass the salt to me." or at least "I wish to add salt to my meal.";

3. and under certain conditions a further **perlocutionary act**: the actual effect of the locutionary and illocutionary acts, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not.

4. Additionally, a **metalocutionary act** categorizes speech acts that refer to the forms and functions of the discourse itself rather than continuing the substantive development of the discourse, or to the configurational functions of prosody and punctuation.

Illocutionary acts

The concept of an illocutionary act is central to the concept of a speech act. Although there are several scholarly opinions regarding how to define 'illocutionary acts', there are some kinds of acts which are widely accepted as illocutionary. According to Austin's preliminary informal description, the idea of an "illocutionary act" can be captured by emphasizing that "by saying something, we do something", as when someone issues an order to someone to go by saying "Go!", or when a minister joins two people in marriage saying, "I now pronounce you husband and wife." (Austin would eventually define the "illocutionary act" in a more exact manner.)

Perlocutionary acts

While illocutionary acts relate more to the speaker, perlocutionary acts are centered around the listener. Perlocutionary acts always have a 'perlocutionary effect' which is the effect a speech act has on a listener. This could affect the listener's thoughts, emotions or even their physical actions. An example of this could be if someone uttered the sentence "I'm hungry." The perlocutionary effect on the listener could be the effect of being persuaded by the utterance. For example, after hearing the utterance, the listener could be persuaded to make a sandwich for the speaker.

Performative speech acts

An interesting type of illocutionary speech act is that performed in the utterance of what Austin calls performative utterances, typical instances of which are "I nominate John to be President", "I sentence you to ten years' imprisonment", or "I promise to pay you back." In these typical, rather explicit cases of performative sentences, the action that the sentence describes (nominating, sentencing, promising) is performed by the utterance of the sentence itself.

Indirect speech acts

In the course of performing speech acts people communicate with each other. The content of communication may be identical, or almost identical, with the content intended to be communicated, as when a stranger asks, "What is your name?" However, the meaning of the linguistic means used may also be different from the content intended to be communicated.

Speech Acts are commonplace in everyday interactions and are important for communication, as well as present in many different contexts. Examples of these include:

• "You're fired!" expresses both the employment status of the individual in question, as well as the action by which said person's employment is ended.

• "I hereby appoint you as chairman" expresses both the status of the individual as chairman, and the action which promotes the individual to this position.

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