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### SEMANTICS OF AMBIVALENCE IN ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH DIALOGIC DISCOURSE

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**Abstract.** *The article focuses on the analysis of strategic ambivalence in illocutionary speech acts. Ambivalence is reflected in common understanding of interlocutors as 1) the simultaneous existence of two opposed and conflicting attitudes or emotions; 2) the possibility of interpreting an expression in two or more distinct ways; 3) vagueness or uncertainty of meaning. In terms of our investigation, ambivalence is viewed as the indirectness of speech acts in which speakers do not make clear which sequence of related illocutionary acts they intend. Further, ambivalence is understood as the case with negotiable interpersonal intent. Also ambivalence is defined as a rhetorical device found in an ambiguous speech act which is intentional and motivated by demographic, socio-cultural and socio-economic factors.*

*The paper examines semantic properties of strategic ambivalent illocutionary speech acts in contemporary English dialogic discourse. It is suggested that as a multilevel phenomenon ambivalence can be realized at three levels: 1) grammatical or functional level, 2) lexical level, and 3) emotional level or emotional grounding. It has been suggested that emotionally complex events may result in the experience of ambiguous emotions existing at the same time and, consequently, evoke ambivalent speech acts. Thus, ambivalence generally refers to opposing forces existing simultaneously within an individual.*

*Ambivalence can be circumstanced by tension between two emotions of different valency. It can be conditioned by tensions among other dimensions as well. Emotional ambivalence may be formed of a combination of high and low activation emotions in response to a certain situation or decision. Therefore ambivalent emotions may be inconsistent with respect to valency, arousal level, and / or appraisal and action tendency, strength.*

*The essence of ambivalence concept in illocutionary speech acts lies in the speaker's failure to make it quite clear which of the series of related illocutionary acts is intended. The reasons of using ambivalence and expectations of the addressee vary from one case to another while the ambivalence remains quite common in daily interaction. There are different levels of intention in performing a speech act. The first one is interpersonal intention – it defines the expectations of the speaker considering how s/he wants the addressee to perceive her / his speech act. The second one is perlocutionary intention – it defines what the speaker wants the addressee to accomplish by performing the speech act, or what perlocutionary effect the speaker wants to have on the addressee.*

**Keywords:** *ambivalence, semantics, illocutionary speech act, speech act theory, perlocutionary intention.*

**Introduction.** Speech activity like any other activity has its specific organization determined by goals and tasks of communication. Pragmatic approach to the study of language functioning enables the researchers [3; 6; 7] to get a better understanding of the communication mechanism and recognition of structural units which are aimed at language contact associated with the organization of the process of verbal communication. Frequently interlocutors have

various viewpoints on what a polite conversation is. For some of them politeness means being indirect. For the others politeness means directness, i. e., saying exactly what they mean. And once the investigation gets into the details, the differences of conversational strategies become more complex and, thus, we face the linguistic phenomenon called "ambivalence" [20]. Ambivalence is commonly understood as 1) the simultaneous existence of two opposed and

conflicting attitudes or emotions; 2) the possibility of interpreting an utterance in two or more distinct ways; 3) vagueness or uncertainty of meaning.

**Recent researches and publications.** Our daily communication presupposes that we perform speech acts. Taking into consideration the content of communication, it is possible to state that it may be identical, or almost identical, with the content intended to be communicated. Depending on the content intended to be embodied in communication, the meaning of the verbal and nonverbal means of interaction can be different.

Verbal communication can be considered from the point of view of the speech act theory [1; 13]. This theory argues that the notions of locution, illocution and perlocution should be distinguished. The illocutionary act is an act performed *in* saying something, as contrasted with a locutionary act, the act of saying something, and also contrasted with a perlocutionary act, an act performed *by* saying something [1 p. 113]. The idea of indeterminacy of illocutionary speech acts was suggested and developed by such scholars as J. L. Austin, K. Bach, R. M. Harnish, R. T. Lakoff, G. N. Leech, J. R. Searle, J. A. Thomas and A. Weiser.

**The purpose** of this research is to reveal semantic properties of ambivalent illocutionary speech acts in contemporary English dialogic discourse. The research is conducted on the material of movies in English and the units analyzed are taken from the movies characters' dialogues.

To reach the objective of the research and accomplish its tasks, a number of general scientific **methods** (deduction, induction, analysis, and synthesis) as well as methods of linguistic analysis (pragmatic, discourse, speech act, and contextual analyses) are used.

Semantic analysis is the process of relating syntactic structures, from the levels of phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs to the level of the writing as a whole, to their language-independent meanings, removing features specific to particular linguistic and cultural contexts, to the extent that such a project is possible. The elements of idiom and figurative speech, being cultural, must also be converted into relatively invariant meanings. In our investigation we deal with ambivalent illocutionary speech acts and thus our first and foremost aim is to differentiate the meanings of ambivalent utterances – explicit and implicit meanings, direct and indirect, literal and figurative ones. In the course of semantic analysis we ascertain not only derivative referential meaning but also the character of transposition, generating of new meanings.

**Results.** Before considering semantic properties of ambivalence let us see what ambivalence is in the common understanding of interlocutors. Ambivalence is viewed as the

simultaneous existence of two opposed and conflicting attitudes, emotions, etc.; the possibility of interpreting an expression in two or more distinct ways; vagueness or uncertainty of meaning [4, p. 38].

In terms of our investigation, ambivalence is viewed as the indirectness of speech acts in which the speakers do not make clear which sequence of related illocutionary acts they intend to use. Furthermore, ambivalence is understood as the case with negotiable interpersonal intent.

Ambivalence is a multilevel phenomenon – it can be found on different levels such as grammatical, lexical and emotional ones. Let us view ambivalence existing on each of them closer.

The notion of 'ambiguity' as a property of sentence is defined by J. Leech as something pertaining to a (declarative) sentence which expresses more than one proposition. This reflects a difference between levels of a linguistic statement: "sentences are syntactic units, whereas propositions are semantic units; ambiguity is a one-to-many relation between syntax and sense" [11, p. 79]. Because of the arbitrary relationship between sign and referent, multiple meanings are potentially understood as a feature of 'language universal'. This multiplicity of propositions within a single syntactic unit is employed to communicate effectively. Thus, departing 'ambiguity', we enter the arena of 'ambivalence'.

Ambiguity can be realized at two levels – grammatical or functional level (e.g. *flying planes can be dangerous*) and at the lexical level in terms of 'polysemy' (e.g. *plot, branch*) and 'homonymy' (e.g. *port, flock*). H. P. Grice [8] points out that its fundamental principle of 'normal' and ordinary communication is to make a coherent and effective exchange of ideas which should be the result of the Cooperative Principle of effective communication. In this connection he elaborates the term 'maxim of manner', a communicative principle that helps avoid obscurity and ambiguity in normal communication, thus pointing out the fact that in 'normal communication' ambiguity is unintentional and can be avoided with 'care'. In some cases 'ambiguity' is initiated intentionally in order to make the communication effective, which is called 'ambivalence'.

Ambivalence which is termed as 'amphibology' or 'amphiboly' in traditional rhetoric [10] can be defined as ambiguous speech act which is intentional, and is motivated by demographic and socio-cultural or socio-economic factors. Such a syntactic structure having more than one illocutionary force is evident from the example mentioned below:

(1) Clothes for unmatched people  
[advertisement of a designer wear – 'Ritu Wears']  
(Be Kind Rewind, 2008).

The effect of 'ambivalence' of the above ad-

text can be observed in terms of the following interpretations in (a) and (b):

(a) Clothes are desired to 'match' the people who wear them. So if it does not 'match', then it is not desirable.

This interpretation at once captures the attention of the target consumer by 'indirect-convincing' communication by the negative social value of an 'undesirable situation' of being 'unmatched' (a linguistic structure with a prefix having a negative value). As soon as the 'negative value' is communicated to the consumer, that text is interrogated by the individual for the second time as to how a linguistic construction with a 'negative social value' is placed in a social system (e.g. mass media like hoarding / magazine / television) which is expected to be ideally positive. Such an interrogation of the same individual triggers their thinking process in order to understand the positive value of the message and they are motivated to go through the same advertising text for the third time and ultimately receives the second interpretation or the conscious interpretation as –

(b) Clothes of the particular designer is for 'exclusive' and 'special' people who do not 'match' with the general mass (in terms of finance or intellect, etc.)

This very sense of being 'special' helps in boasting indirectly the ever desired feeling of human being and the individual is motivated to visit and purchase from 'Ritu Wears' in order to prove themselves 'special' in their social setting.

Therefore the 'ambivalent' effect of this syntactic structure tells us that the negative attribute of the clothes is transformed to socially 'positive' attribute of an individual, thus capturing not only the multiple meaning but rather a diametrically opposite meaning (e.g. negative and positive aspects) of the ambivalent linguistic structure.

The other advertising text can be exemplified below:

(2) *Book for a Figure Correction Package* [advertisement of VLCC Health Club] (House M.D., 2004-2009).

The term 'figure' means 'number or numeral' and 'shape of body' as well. When the term is used in juxtaposition of the term 'correction' it appears to convey the meaning of 'numeral'. But the anchored picture (a picture of a plump lady) and the name of the health club help to understand the other meaning, i.e. 'shape of body'.

It is worth mentioning in this context that 'ambivalence' has been observed to be operative at the lexical level as far as the data of the present work is concerned. The linguistic forms which are functionally attributive have been observed to be the potential lexical items for 'ambivalence' in

advertising texts.

Recent research in the area of emotions has suggested that emotionally complex events may elicit the experience of not only negative emotions, but perhaps more commonly, both positive and negative emotions simultaneously (Fong, Tiedens 2002; Larsen, McGraw, Cacioppo 2001; Williams, Aaker 2002) which have been termed emotional ambivalence. More specifically, previous researchers have defined emotional ambivalence as "the simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotions regarding an object, event or idea" [5, p. 2]. Similarly, M. G. Pratt and L. Doucet [14, p. 205] define emotional ambivalence as the association of both strong positive and negative emotions with some target.

Ambivalence generally refers to opposing forces existing simultaneously within an individual (Meyerson, Scully 1995; Pratt, Doucet 2000). Thus, ambivalence may be defined by tension between two emotions of different valency, but it may also be identified by tensions among other dimensions as well. For instance, there may be tension in the level of arousal between two emotions experienced simultaneously (i. e., anger, which is high arousal, versus depression, which is low arousal) or the cognitive appraisal and action tendencies associated with two emotions experienced simultaneously (i. e. fear triggering avoidance tendencies and excitement triggering approach tendencies). Ambivalent emotions may therefore be inconsistent with respect to valency, arousal level, and /or appraisal and action tendency, they are of high strength, and they are experienced simultaneously.

Following from this definition, it is clear that the experience of emotional ambivalence may involve a wide variety of emotions. For instance, ambivalence may involve a combination of positive and negative feelings, such as when a person experiences intense happiness, anxiety, fear and pride about a new promotion. Alternatively, emotional ambivalence may take the form of a combination of high and low activation emotions in response to a situation or decision, such as excitement (high activation) and contentment (low activation). In both of these cases, an individual experiences the tension between emotions that encourage the individual to engage and approach their environment (positive or high activation emotions), and others that encourage the individual to disengage and avoid their environment (negative or low activation emotions) [15].

A growing number of empirical studies have identified situations in which individuals can and do feel both positive and negative emotions simultaneously. For instance, individuals could experience happiness and sadness at the same

time in both laboratory and natural settings. Positive and negative emotions could co-occur at moderate levels of emotional intensity in daily mood reports. In daily narratives, adult employees could experience both positive and negative effect on the same day. People report a co-occurrence of happiness and sadness: graduation day, dormitory move-out day, and after watching the film *Life is Beautiful* [12], which depicts a father's often comic attempts to shelter his son from the evils around them during their detention in a World War II concentration camp.

M. G. Pratt and L. Doucet's [14] research has shown that people experience multiple forms of emotional conflict at work. M. G. Pratt and his colleagues' research with *Amway*, managing care organizations and bank call centres, have demonstrated that employees can hold ambivalent feelings toward their organization and their co-workers. For instance, they report that call centre workers expressed ambivalence towards authority because managers place conflicting demands upon workers but are also sources of emotional support. M. G. Pratt's case studies of employees in several organizations have proved that employees can hold ambivalent feelings toward their organization, which can influence recruitment, identification and commitment. C. T. Fong and L. Z. Tiedens' research [5] also suggests that the role or position may increase the incidence of emotional ambivalence. For instance, in the film *House M. D.* (2004-2009) [9], being a woman in a high status position was shown to bring about both happy and sad emotions. Happiness was thought to result from achieving an important goal of high status, and sadness was thought to result from holding a non-stereotypic gender role.

In addition to uncovering the situations that bring about emotional ambivalence within individuals, a couple of studies have examined the individual-level consequences of experiencing emotional ambivalence. Specifically, C. T. Fong's [5] research in a laboratory setting suggests that the experience of emotional ambivalence enhances creativity. In contrast, field research measuring emotional

ambivalence with respect to experiencing both negative and positive effect on the same day did not show any significant relationship to daily creative thought.

**Discussion.** Ambivalence is commonly understood as the simultaneous existence of two opposed and conflicting attitudes, emotions, etc.; the possibility of interpreting an expression in two or more distinct ways; vagueness or uncertainty of meaning.

Ambivalence is also defined as a rhetorical device found in an ambiguous speech act which is intentional and motivated by different demographic, socio-cultural and socio-economic factors. Ambivalence can be advantageous to the speaker but also can lead to misunderstandings between people.

As a multilevel phenomenon ambivalence can be realized at three levels: 1) grammatical or functional level, 2) lexical level due to polysemy and homonymy, and 3) emotional level or emotional grounding.

As for the reasons and background of linguistic ambivalence, they are various. One of the most common reasons is that there exists emotional ambivalence in people's mind. Another reason is the desire to influence others in a non-direct way. One more reason is the idiomatic nature of human thinking processes.

It has been suggested that emotionally complex events may result in the experience of ambiguous emotions existing at the same time and, consequently, evoke ambivalent speech acts. Thus, ambivalence generally refers to opposing forces existing simultaneously within an individual.

Ambivalence can be circumstanced by tension between two emotions of different valency. It can be conditioned by tensions among other dimensions as well. Emotional ambivalence may be formed of a combination of high and low activation emotions in response to a certain situation or decision. Therefore ambivalent emotions may be inconsistent with respect to valency, arousal level, and/or appraisal and action tendency, strength.

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## СЕМАНТИКА АМБІВАЛЕНТНОСТІ В ІЛЛОКУТИВНИХ МОВЛЕННЄВИХ АКТАХ СУЧАСНОГО АНГЛОМОВНОГО ДІАЛОГІЧНОГО ДИСКУРСУ

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**Анотація.** У статті розглядається стратегічна амбівалентність в іллокутивних мовленнєвих актах. Визначаються семантичні особливості стратегічних амбівалентних іллокутивних мовленнєвих актів сучасного англomовного діалогічного дискурсу. Амбівалентність розглядається як опосередкованість мовленнєвих актів, в яких мовці не чітко пояснюють, яку послідовність пов'язаних ілокутивних актів вони мають намір використовувати. Встановлено, що як багаторівневий феномен амбівалентність може бути реалізована на трьох рівнях: 1) граматичному чи функціональному, 2) лексичному та 3) емоційному.

**Ключові слова:** амбівалентність, семантика, іллокутивний мовленнєвий акт, теорія мовленнєвих актів, перлокутивний намір.