

DISCURSIVE AMBIVALENCE IN ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH DIALOGIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract. *The article focuses on the analysis of discursive ambivalence in illocutionary speech acts. The paper examines pragmatic properties of strategic discursive illocutionary speech acts in modern English dialogic discourse. It is suggested that discursive ambivalence is characterized by discursive intention, i. e. what discursive development the speaker wants to create by the utterance. Discursive intents may differ according to the perlocutionary intents the speaker has in mind.*

Key words: *ambivalence, illocutionary speech act, discursive ambivalence, speech act theory, perlocutionary intention.*

Introduction. In the course of performing speech acts we ordinarily communicate with each other. The content of communication may be identical, or almost identical, with the content intended to be communicated. However, the meaning of the verbal alongside nonverbal means used in interaction may also be different from the content intended to be communicated.

One common way of performing speech acts is to use an expression which indicates one speech act, and to perform this act but apart from it one may perform a further speech act which is indirect. Indirect speech acts are commonly used to reject proposals and to make requests. This poses a problem for linguists because it is confusing (on a rather simple approach) to see how the person who made the proposal can understand that his proposal was rejected. Following substantially an account of H. P. Grice (1968), J. R. Searle (1975) suggesting that interlocutors are able to derive meaning out of indirect speech acts by means of a cooperative process out of which they are able to derive multiple illocutions; however, the process does not seem to accurately solve the problem. Sociolinguistics, for example, has studied the social dimensions of conversations. This academic discipline considers the various contexts in which speech acts occur [5]. So, let us consider the discursive ambivalence in illocutionary speech acts of contemporary English dialogic discourse in the light of the speech act theory.

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; 11]. 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 pragmatic properties of discursive 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.

Results. As it was already argued, ambivalence can be presented at different levels – at the utterance level and at the discourse level. Ambivalence that appears at the discourse level is termed *discursive* ambivalence and it is characterized by discursive intent. In such kind of ambivalence the addressee can choose one of the presupposed variants of continuing the conversation which means that the speaker's discursive intent is presented in a negotiable manner [10]. Discursive intents may differ according to the perlocutionary intents the speaker has in mind. N. Tanaka argues that at the discourse level the speaker's utterances can be viewed as 'pre-requests', 'pre-suggestions', etc. [12, p. 131].

In the next example let us examine the way such "pre-request" works. Miss Falewicz (X) who wants to take the videocassette with her favourite film talks to Mike (Y) who is not so optimistic about the film:

(1) X1: *Oh, Driving Miss Daisy. It's a lovely movie, isn't it?*

Y: *I really never got this movie.*

X2: *It's full of generosity and giving. Can you get this for me?*

Y2: *Miss Falewicz, I can recommend you a much better one* (Be Kind Rewind, 2008).

It is interesting that both communicators try to be polite and thus give each other only hints about their intents instead of expressing their thoughts directly. That is why the episode has a slight comic effect, as the interlocutors who have absolutely opposite ideas, are persistent in their desires and at the same time sound quite courteous and polite. The matter is that Y is a shop assistant at the videocassette store, while X is a customer. X has chosen the film to take, but Y is reluctant to give the tape as it is defective. Having no desire to lose the client, Y tries to persuade X to take another film, which turns to be quite difficult as Y is persistent.

In this episode we will analyze the speaker's utterances and the addressee's utterances from the point of view of discursive intent. Let us start with the line X1. From the point of view of discursive intent it may be analyzed as a 'pre-request' – X wants to take the film from Y and first expresses her admiration and excitement about that film. This is not yet a request; this is just a 'pre-request' that leaves it to Y to decide how to react. Although Y understands X's perlocutionary intent, he doesn't feel very enthusiastic talking about that film or concur with X's ideas. On the

contrary, he is aimed at not giving the tape with the film because it has been damaged, so he tries to make X change her mind about the quality of the film she has chosen.

Y's reply – Y1 – does not contain any positive or negative judgements about X's choice or about the film itself. Prima facie it seems that the utterance is neutral, that Y cannot share X's impressions simply because he didn't understand the film. But at the same time we may assume that Y didn't like the film, because he "*really never got this movie*" which means that he probably has watched it several times but each time failed to understand it. Such Y's utterance presupposes that continuation of the discourse is aimless as the participants cannot come to an understanding of the issue.

In spite of such turn in the conversation, X still wants the film she has chosen and her next replica makes her desire clearer (X2). Apparently she got Y's idea that he didn't like the film (or she simply wanted to add new arguments to her previous statement) and thus tried to be more convincing telling that "*It's full of generosity and giving*". Finally, X reinforces her utterance with an open request – "*Can you get this for me?*"

Being asked directly (X2) Y still has no desire to comply with X's request and tries to refuse in a polite way. His utterance (Y2) seems even more like an offer or a suggestion to find a better film, though in fact it is a kind of "pre-rejection".

Example below illustrates our previous statement that the discursive intent is negotiable in illocutionary speech acts on the discourse level. Will (X) is talking to Charlotte (Y) while dancing:

(2) X1: *You don't dance. You float.*

Y1: *My mom was a great dancer too. But, you knew that. Maybe.*

X2: *... We danced a couple of times* (Autumn in New York, 2000).

In this situation Y's discursive intent is quite clear – she wants to talk about her mother and their relations with X – but at the same time it is negotiable, because it is left to X to decide whether he wants to dwell on this topic or not. The conversation and the situation itself are more than sensitive, because X is trying to court Y who is aware of the fact that many years ago X was in relationship with her mother.

Thus, X realizes Y's discursive intent to make him talk about her mother, but being reluctant to do so he simply acts a neutral utterance telling that they have "*danced a couple of times*". For him it was a good way to avoid the awkward conversation, and at the

same time he didn't disappoint Y as her discursive intent was negotiable.

In daily interactions there are many situations when one of the interlocutors wants to suspend or avoid disliked themes in conversations. In such cases s/he uses ambivalent illocutionary speech acts to make it clear for the other participant(s) that s/he has no desire to touch upon the issue [9]. From the point of view of discursive intent such utterances can be more polite or less polite but they all express S's refusal to dwell on the topic [7].

Let us take the next example that illustrates the polite way to reject the imposed topic for conversation. A patient's mother (X) who is in despair talks to Dr. Chase (Y) about their son's chances to recover:

(3) X: *Can you encourage me?*

Y: *Let's hope for the better* (House M. D., 2004-2009).

First of all, it should be said that the situation in which the conversation takes place is quite delicate. On the one hand, X is grateful to Y for he finally diagnosed her son's illness and started the needed treatment. But on the other hand, she is still infuriated because it took Y so long to set a precise diagnosis and now it might be too late to save her son's life.

By her utterance, X just asked a question to get to know any news about her son's chances to recover. Or probably she wanted to express reproach and make Y feel guilty for X's son. In any case, Y felt the delicacy of the situation and tried to avoid being trapped within unpleasant conversation by using neutral utterance that appeals to common human feelings and thoughts. So, replying in such a way Y saved his face as a good doctor and made an effort to remain on good terms with X.

We have discussed a polite way to avoid unwelcome conversations. Sometimes people care less about politeness. They use different tricks to break off the unpleasant talk. Let us view example where the addressee uses one of such tricks which is called distancing [8]. A patient (X) is trying to fall into a talk with Dr. House (Y) who is really unwilling to communicate:

(4) X: *What are you watching?*

Y: ...TV (House M.D., 2004-2009).

From the point of view of the speaker, X is trying to be polite and runs into a chat with Y. "What are you watching?" is not just a question that presupposes a simple answer. This is a kind of "pre-suggestion" to make a conversation. Such "pre-suggestion" implies the addressee's readiness to extend the conversation.

From the point of view of the addressee, it is more preferable to understand X's utterance as an invitation to talk, not just as a request for information. In this particular episode it does not seem that Y cares much about being polite with X; that is why his extremely short reply – "TV" – sounds like a simple answer to the direct question being at the same time a kind of not very polite refusal to continue the conversation. It may seem even that Y didn't understand X's discursive intent and took his utterance as a direct question that demands a direct answer.

The next example illustrates how the addressee who did understand the speaker's discursive intent avoids the imposed topic with the help of another indirect speech act. Dr. Chase (X) wants to talk to Dr. Forman (Y) about their female colleague (Z):

(5) X1: *She's weird, isn't she?*

Y1: *Bad idea.*

X2: *What?*

Y2: *You work with her* (House M. D., 2004-2009).

The matter is that X is in relationship with Z who is his female colleague, and they are trying to keep it in secret from the other staff. When X wanted to talk to Y about Z (still keeping in secret their relations), Y refused to talk. Moreover, he made X understand that he is aware of their relationship with Z and doesn't approve it because they "work together", which means that they are violating professional ethics by dating.

Since in the English culture it is not acceptable to speak about personal life with outliers, moreover, to mix work with personal life, the speech behaviour of interlocutors becomes interesting. Both interlocutors regardless of the delicacy of situation are expressing their thoughts in a masked way, with hints and with the help of indirect speech acts, but both of them clearly understand each other. That's why an abstract and seemingly neutral utterance "She's weird, isn't she?", being in fact an ambivalent speech act, was perceived by Y not as just a question requiring a direct answer, but as an invitation to talk about Z. Besides, it is an invitation to a talk of personal kind that doesn't consider professional affairs.

Thus, X hasn't reached the initial discursive intent to discuss the personality of Z. In contrast, Y has imposed upon him his own variant of conversation, making it at the same time tactfully and delicately, not excluding the moral element. In this case the answer Y2 – "You work with her" –

itself is an ambivalent illocutionary act because, first of all, it expresses the thought indirectly, and secondly, it can be perceived in different ways by addressee. The illocution of this utterance lies in the nature of the functions it fulfills. Those are functions of refusal to continue conversation by proposed scenario, and also a taboo on inconvenient for both interlocutors topic.

Thus, having analyzed different examples of ambivalence at the discourse level, we can sum up that it is used by interlocutors consciously or unconsciously but almost always, at least in most cases, to realize the discursive intent of this or that speaker. Such discursive intents can vary and they depend on this or that aim the interlocutors pursue, and on the results of conversation the participants expect.

It is necessary to mention that always (or almost always) the speaker's discursive intent is presented in a negotiable manner so that the addressee could choose one of the presupposed variants of continuing the conversation. Such freedom of deliberate construction of further

dialogue gives its participants a possibility to avoid unpleasant topics or, otherwise, to regard in more details this or that aspect of conversation. Besides, the interlocutors do not break the Maxim of Politeness and can use such kinds of utterances as 'pre-requests', 'pre-suggestions', etc., that, of course, facilitates the ways of mutual understanding for them.

Discussion. Ambivalence is found at different levels – the utterance level and the discourse level. At the discourse level it is called a discursive ambivalence. It is characterized by discursive intention, i. e. what discursive development the speaker wants to create by the utterance. In such kind of ambivalence, the discursive intent is presented in a negotiable manner so that the addressee could choose one of the presupposed variants of continuing the conversation. Discursive intents may differ according to the perlocutionary intents the speaker has in mind. At the discourse level the speaker's utterances can be viewed as 'pre-requests' and 'pre-suggestions'.

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ДИСКУРСИВНА АМБІВАЛЕНТНІСТЬ В ІЛЛОКУТИВНИХ МОВЛЕННЄВИХ АКТАХ СУЧАСНОГО АНГЛОМОВНОГО ДІАЛОГІЧНОГО ДИСКУРСУ

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Анотація. У статті розглядається дискурсивна амбівалентність в іллокутивних мовленнєвих актах. Визначаються прагматичні особливості дискурсивних амбівалентних іллокутивних мовленнєвих актів сучасного англomовного діалогічного дискурсу. Встановлено, що визначальним фактором дискурсивної амбівалентності є дискурсивний намір мовця, тобто якого розвитку бесіди чекає від адресата мовець. Дискурсивні наміри можуть відрізнятися залежно від перлокутивних намірів, які має на увазі мовець.

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