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Quantitative analysis of Searle's speech acts in four selected English short stories

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Abstract

This study investigates the quantitative use of Searle's speech acts in four selected translated-into-English short stories of Tolstoy. It is believed that short stories represent a kind of reflection of real life in literature. However, culture plays its role in determining the use of the speech acts in this genre. The main question raised in the study is whether the speech acts under study are mostly used in the selected short stories. The analysis in the study is done by the methodology of collecting data, counting and tabulating the results. The findings show that all five speech acts are not mostly used and that there is a clear degree of variation of use among them

Keywords: Searle's Speech Acts, Pragmatics, Short Stories, Tolstoy, Speech Act Theory

Introduction

Language is used for such processes as making requests, ordering, inviting, promising.....etc. These are realized as speech acts by Searle and some others in the speech act theory that mainly deals with such functional use of speech. The present study is intended to analyze four selected translated-into-English short stories in terms of the frequency of use of some of the speech acts suggested by Searle. The study attempts to show which of the speech acts under study is mostly used in these short studies. It exactly attempts to answer the question of how much each of the speech acts of representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative is quantitatively (i.e. in percentage) used in the selected short stories. It is hypothesized that the speech acts under study are not mostly used and there is some variation in frequency of their use. The study is significant in that it shows that the knowledge of the speech acts can pave the way for better writing, understanding and appreciating the discourse in this art of literature. The findings of the study could also be of great value to writers, teachers and students of literature as well. Other studies may attempt qualitative methods for this kind of analysis as well.

Methodology

The short stories analyzed in this study are written by the Russian Novelist Leo Tolstoy and translated into English. They are:

1. God Sees the Truth , But Waits (1872)
2. Little Girls are Wiser than Men (1885)
3. The Imp and the Crust (1886)
4. A Grain as Big as a Hen' s Egg (1886)

The data collected from these short stories includes words, phrases and sentences extracted from the utterances of the characters. The study depends on the method of content analysis of the data collected and on analysis and interpretation of the findings. The content analysis is based on critical reading of the selected short studies, extracting the targeted data and classifying it according to the speech acts under study. The analysis is only quantitative. In other words, it is confined to only the frequency of use of each speech act and it is done by counting the number and percentage of the speech acts as used by the characters and then drawing conclusions about which types of the speech acts under study are predominantly or least used and the variation of their use in order. The data put for analysis is exclusive in that it is taken from certain selected short stories as samples representing certain selected particular speech acts of Searle viz representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative. However, the conclusions can be generalized and applied on other instances of similar data.

The main question raised in this study is whether the speech acts presented by Searle (Representative, Directive, Commissive, Expressive and Declarative) are mostly used or not in the selected short stories in this work and what is the variation in the frequency of use among them. In line with this question, it is hypothesized that all Searle's speech acts under study in this work are not mostly used in the selected short stories with certain degrees of variation among them. It is worth mentioning that the data counted for the analysis are only those that can be implemented in the teaching / learning process especially in integration of skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Review of Literature

Language is used for such purposes as ordering, apologizing, making requests, negotiating, persuading, encouraging ...etc and in the broadest sense; the general use of language is for communicating. With respect to occasions, language is used in lectures, gatherings, religious ceremonies, sport events and so on. Halliday (1972) states that such lists are endless as there are many social purposes for which language is used indirectly. Speech act theory deals with acts that are in forms of speech. It is assumed that when people speak, they are performing some acts to do something to affect the addressee. It can be assumed that, generally, when there is speech, there is an act as well. For example, when we make a promise, give warning or apologize, we are actually performing some kind of acts (Hymes, 1972). In the speech act theory, the smallest unit of analysis is not the sentence, as was the case traditionally, but the act (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). Austin (1962) is undoubtedly one of the forerunners in the domain of speech act theory. He made a distinction between constative and performative utterances. The constative ones describe something whereas the performative utterances are those that do not only perform a speech act but also describe the speech act. He (1962) further identifies the characteristics of performative utterances as containing present tense verb, second person object and active voice. He also states that the speech acts consist of three components locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary acts are those that are realized by the literal meaning of the utterance i. e, the sum of meaning of the individual lexes of the utterance (Austin, 1962:4). The illocutionary act is the pragmatic meaning of the utterance. The consequence or the effect of the utterance on the interlocutor by the speaker is called the perlocutionary act. Austin (1962) presented five categories of speech acts which are not of main concern in this study.

John Searle (1992) proposed “linguistic acts” as based on Austin’s speech act theory. He made no reference to performative verbs and stressed conditions and rules of how the interlocutor may respond to an utterance. He emphasized the pragmatic aspects of the utterance and related the speech act to production, interpretation and meaning. He focused on the intended meaning which is also the comprehended message on the part of the listener in addition to the linguistic rules governing the utterances. Reasoning that the central linguistic unit is the speech act, Searle states that there are just illocutionary acts and further maintains that there are only two kinds of rules governing speech acts. These are: the regulative rules which are found in the imperatives and the constitutive ones which are found in the definitional. Searle (1969) devised descriptive terms to categorize the different speech acts. The five categories he proposed are: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative. These categories are based mainly on the illocutionary component of the theory. However, although some element of intentionality is implied in the speech act, Searle (1975) proposed the indirect speech act where shared knowledge and power in reasoning and inferring are needed for mutual understanding. Indirect speech acts are more connected to the concept of politeness where variety of indirect speech acts can result in various forms of politeness. Based on the speaker’s intention, Searle (1975) suggested five categories of speech acts. They are:

Representative: when we use language to make statements about things in cases of asserting, claiming, reporting...etc. Verbs in this category commit the speaker to different degrees about the truth like when we suggest, doubt and deny something.

Example: *This is a German car.*

Directive: when we use language to try to get people to do things. Suggestions, requests and

commands are all directives and they differ in the force of the attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something; for example, when a teacher orders a student to leave the class. However, imperatives and commands in this category can be of varying degrees.

Example: *Why don't you close the door?*

Please, sit down.

Commissive: when the speaker commits to a particular action in the future like the speech acts of promises and threats.

Example: *If you do not stop fighting, I'll call the police (threat).*

I'll take you to the movies tomorrow (promise).

Expressive: They are used to express attitudes and emotions by use of some expressive verbs like apologize, deplore, thank, welcome ...etc as in acts of making an apology, a complaint, thanking someone or congratulating someone.

Example: I thank you, *the meal was delicious.*

Declarative: These speech acts are those that cause some changes in the real world. In other words, upon performing this type of speech acts, words cause real change in the physical world; for example, when a bride and groom say "I do" upon the marriage pronouncement of the priest.

Example: *I now pronounce you man and wife (by the priest).*

With respect to studying speech acts in second language acquisition context, the issue is to what extent speech acts in first language appear in the second language. To put it another way, are the same classes of speech acts in the first language found in the second one? The presupposition is that all classes of speech acts are found across languages, but no rigorous study has confirmed this claim (Fraser, 1985). It has been claimed by Brown (2007) that politeness is a universal notion and indirect speech is a universal strategy used across all languages and cultures to achieve politeness. Drawing on such universal conventions across all languages and communities, the basis for speech act is common social customs. Thus all successful communications in various situations are dependent on the learning of these social conventions. Researchers such as Cole and Morgan (1975), Fraser (1985) and Searle (1969) believe in the cross-linguistic differences and are interested in the conventional aspects of speech acts in all types of discourses such as those in literary short stories.

Due to the similarity of various strategies in all languages in performing speech acts, it has been suggested that second language learners should learn how to shape their intentions in the target language (Fraser, 1985). However, though some researchers believe in the universal basis of speech acts, they also acknowledge the existence of differences across languages as well. For example, Searle (1975) holds that the translation of speech acts across languages does not necessarily entail keeping the indirectness of speech acts. There are other researchers who believe that the strategies used in the different cultures are not identical and formation of the speech acts is dependent on the norms of the communities both in conceptualization and performance. The way the speaker realizes speech acts is influenced by cultural norms of his society (Green, 1975; Gumperz, 1982; Wierzicka, 1991). The speakers may use their own norms in performing speech acts (Moerman, 1988). Blum – Kulka et al (1989) maintain that what Searle has put forward is under the influence of English examples but they specifically argue that the indirect request is true for all languages including English, French, Hebrew, Spanish ...etc.

However, the specific strategies applied by speakers are not the same across languages but are

determined by social norms of the community. It needs to be noted that even the study by Blum-Kulka et al was on western languages and cultures and generalization of their statements to non-western cultures is questionable. So application of strategies for performing speech acts in western culture may be not suitable for culture such as Arabic or Persian which seem to enjoy different socio - cultural conventions from western cultures.

In the realm of language teaching along with the prevalence of communicative language teaching, the focus of language study shifted away from non-contextual to meaningful use of language. The primary concern of language teaching professionals becomes the development of communicative competence in second language learners (Brown and Yule: 2007). So, language use brings some changes in the world and utterances speak for themselves .Consequently, it was claimed that the basic element in language use and interpretation was the speech act though the pragmatists did not agree with that (Verschueren, 1999). For example, they state that situational factors must be taken into account in use and interpretation of speech acts. A speech act like requesting may have different realizations in various contexts such as in classroom or court. Research in speech act theory in the context of second language became important after the emergence of the communicative approach in second language teaching/ learning.

From the late 1970s onwards, there have been attempts to apply speech act theory so as to interpret literary works. The first attempts show the value of speech acts analysis for literary criticism for example. However, at the same time, these contributions were exclusively devoted to drama; owing of course to the centrality of dialogue in this genre. Yet, the analysis of speech acts also offers new insights into short stories. Walsh (2007) clearly pointed out that fiction is usually understood to have a second-order relation to the real world via the mimetic logic of fictional representation i.e. it represents events or imitates discourses that we assimilate through nonfictional modes of narrative understanding. This leads to the important question: “How can a fictive narration be a referential act or even an act of communication?” To give an accurate answer to this question, there is a need for a pragmatic approach that is advocated to this issue of fictionality.

Alfiana (2009) conducted a speech act analysis on “*Hello Magazine’s Short Stories*”. The study found that the speech acts used in short stories in this magazine were representative, expressive, directive and commissive. Trisnawati (2012) carried out a speech act analysis of O. Henry’s *After Twenty Years*. The study showed that this story could be utilized to empower the teaching /learning process of character-building education. It is definite that there are many aspects to comprehend from literary short stories. Also, there have been some contributions and attempts concerning speech act analysis of literary texts. Our work is hopefully one of them.

Results of the Study

The frequency of occurrence of the speech acts and their percentage values in each of the selected short stories vividly depict the results aimed at in this study. The details are presented in the following tables:

Table 1: The Speech Acts Used in *God Sees the Truth, but Waits*

Speech Acts	Commissive	Declarative	Directive	Expressive	Representative	Total
Frequency	15	35	67	38	19	174
Percentage	8.6%	20.1%	38.5%	21.8%	11%	100%

Table 1 shows that in “ God Sees the Truth , But Waits ” , the highest frequency of occurrence is in the directive speech act (67 out of 174 with percentage value of 38. 5%). The commissive speech act has the least frequency (15 with percentage of 8.6%).

Table 2: The Speech Acts Used in *Little Girls are Wiser than Men*

Speech Acts	Commissive	Declarative	Directive	Expressive	Representative	Total
Frequency	0	2	78	57	4	141
Percentage	0%	1.4%	55.3%	40.4%	2.83%	100%

In *Little Girls are Wiser than Men* , as shown in this table , the directive speech act , once again has the highest frequency of occurrence (78 out of 141 with percentage of 55.3%) . The declarative speech act has only 2 instances of occurrence (percentage of 1.4%) and there is no instance of occurrence of the commissive speech act in this short story .

Table 3: The Speech Acts Used in *The Imp and the Crust*

Speech Acts	Commissive	Declarative	Directive	Expressive	Representative	Total
Frequency	16	7	15	41	6	85
Percentage	19%	8.25%	18%	48.23%	7%	100%

The table shows that the expressive speech act in *The Imp and the Crust* has the highest frequency of occurrence (41 out of 85 with percentage of 48.23%) . As the least, there were only 6 instances of occurrence of the representative speech act in this short story (percentage of 7%).

Table 4: The Speech Acts Used in *a Grain as Big as a Hen’s Egg*

Speech Acts	Commissive	Declarative	Directive	Expressive	Representative	Total
Frequency	3	5	31	2	73	114
Percentage	2.6%	4.4%	27.19%	1.75%	64%	100%

Table 4 shows that the representative speech act has the highest frequency of occurrence in the short story *A Grain As Big As A Hen’s Egg* (73 out of 114 with the percentage of 64%) . The expressive speech act gets the least frequency of occurrence (2 with the percentage of 1.75%). To present a vivid full picture of the frequencies and percentage values of the five speech acts in the four selected short stories, table 5 provides a comparison of the results as a totality.

Table 5: Comparison of the Five Speech Acts Used in the Four Selected Short Stories

Short Stories	Commissive	Declarative	Directive	Expressive	Representative	Total
God Sees the Truth, but Waits	15	35	67	38	19	174
Percentage	8.5%	20.5%	38.5%	22%	11%	100%
Little Girls are Wiser than Men	0	2	78	57	4	141
Percentage	0%	1.5%	56%	40.5%	3%	100%
The Imp and the Crust	16	7	15	41	6	85
Percentage	19%	8.25%	18%	48.23%	7%	100%
A Grain as Big as a Hen’s Egg	3	5	31	2	73	114
Percentage	3%	4.5%	27.19%	1.75%	64%	100%
Mean Percentage	8%	9%	35%	28.12%	21.25%	100%

Table 5 shows the frequency of occurrence of the speech acts under study in this research in the order depicted as follows:

- The highest: The Directive Speech Act (35%).
- The Second: The Expressive Speech Act (28.12%)
- The Third: The Representative Speech Act (21.25%)
- The Fourth: The Declarative Speech Act (9%)
- The Least: The Commissive Speech Act (8%)

Conclusion

It is important to notice that the characters in the short stories reflect real or fictitious life. In other words , they announce , attest , express , request , guarantee , demand , command apologize , praise, warn , deny , recommend ,suggest and so on . These speech acts are expressed by the personalities of the characters and need to be perceived by the readers and the content and message of each speech act are to be realized as such. However , the simple statistics used in the analysis of this study (the percentage and the mean) gives a direct clear answer to the main question raised in this study and verifies the hypothesis (see the introduction) about the frequency of occurrence of the speech acts of commissive , declarative , directive , expressive and representative in the four selected short stories under study in this work . It is found that none of the five speech acts scores a percentage value that can be considered as very high or high. This is verified if we know that the highest frequency of occurrence (of the directive speech act) is only 35%. In another word, the speech acts are not mostly used in the short stories .The percentage has not even passed half of the number i.e. 50%. This means that, on the contrary, the characters in the short stories use the speech acts in a very usual standard. Is this finding good or bad? The researchers see that that could be the interest of further research.

Use of the speech acts make the characters look more realistic , and utilizing a great deal of the speech acts is one of the main means of style for the writer to convey his intended message and for the reader to perceive the speech act in that message . However, the frequency of use of the speech acts varies from one literary genre to another and from one writer to another. This can be clearly noticed in the findings of this study where Leo Tolstoy, the writer whose short stories are selected for analysis in this work, makes use of the speech acts but with different degrees of variation. This could be a reflection of the specific structures of each speech act whether linguistically or culturally. People in real life or in fiction use the speech acts in different situations and for different purposes and always with certain degrees of variation. An examination of the statistical order of use of the speech acts under study proves this to a great extent.

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