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Am I Invited?

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Abstract

Invitation is a social act performed by socially active beings through the use of words. The speaker who invites uses politeness tactics to make sure that the hearer would comply with it considering his act of invitation as a sincere request to be present or make available himself / herself to the time, place, occasion, etc. as put forward by the speaker.

The act of invitation has the effect of making the hearer feel happy and make him believe that the outcome of the invitation will be good for him. People can invite directly and/or indirectly. Direct invitation put the hearer under obligation to the act of invitation whereas the indirect invitation leaves the option to comply with the request with the hearer. The present paper focuses on the way of performing the act of invitation in an indirect way by quoting and analyzing examples from G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* and *The Doctor's Dilemma*.

Introduction

People use words to perform actions. While performing actions through words speakers generally make use of sentences which have a particular form and a specific function. The linguistic forms and the functions conventionally associated with them are sometimes very strictly followed, whereas on some occasions the functions performed by the linguistic form uttered are not directly associated with the conventional function of the form. These direct and indirect associations of the form and function of an utterance lead to the classification of the speech acts into Direct Speech Acts and Indirect Speech Acts.

A Direct Speech Act has a typical sentence form (for example, interrogative for question) with a performative verb, whereas in an Indirect Speech Act, the form of the sentence suggests a different function than it actually has to perform (for example, interrogative for request). If speakers strictly adhere their use of sentence to the forms and functions associated with it, then they are said to perform a Direct Speech Act.

Searle, in his essay *Indirect Speech Acts*, is of the view that actions performed through speech acts possess two different types of illocutionary acts which he termed as the *primary illocutionary act* and the *secondary illocutionary act*. Searle says "the secondary illocutionary act is literal; the primary illocutionary act is not literal" (in Cole and Morgan; 1975: 61). His term *primary illocutionary act* indicates the group of utterances which convey a different meaning from the literal meaning expressed by the speech acts.

The ‘apparatus’, as suggested by Searle {in Cole and Morgan (ed.) 1975: 61}, that would be considered to explain the indirectness of Indirect Speech Acts would include the theory of speech acts, mutually shared factual background, the theory of cooperative principle and the hearer’s ability to infer the implied meaning from the contextual background.

Invitation

Invitation is a speech act where the speaker wants the addressee to do a certain thing or to come to certain place. It, generally, has the illocutionary force of a directive type of speech act. According to Vanderveken (1990: 191), “to invite is to request someone to become party to something, perhaps a group or a process and this is a propositional content condition.” The act of invitation has the effect of making the hearer feel happy and make him believe that the outcome of the invitation will be good for him.

Example 1

MRS HIGGINS: Goodbye. Would you like to meet Miss Doolittle again?

FREDDY: Yes, I should, most awfully.

MRS HIGGINS: Well, you know my days.

Pygmalion: Act III, Page No. 61

Freddy, with his mother and sister, comes to the house of Mrs. Higgins. Mr. Higgins is present at the location with Liza and wants to get his mother’s opinion about how Liza speaks English and what she speaks. Freddy is attracted by the beauty of Liza. Mrs. Higgins understands this and so she asks him if he would like to meet her again. The positive response of Freddy to the question of Mrs. Higgins makes her to make the above utterance (‘Well, you know my days’) which is an indirect invitation to him from Mrs. Higgins to come to her house to meet Liza on her (Mrs. Higgins) at-home day.

The utterance of Mrs. Higgins is a representative type of speech act asserting that Freddy has the information about her at-home days, but the implied meaning is derived from the directive type of speech act, which has the illocutionary force of an invitation. When Freddy presents his wish of meeting Liza by having a positive reply to the question of Mrs. Higgins, she makes the above utterance with the feeling that she must ask him to come to her home (*propositional content condition*) as she believes that it would make him happy and would be considered by him as something good done for him (*preparatory condition*) by her. Freddy understands that Mrs. Higgins’ assertion of the information about her at-home days is relevant (*theory of cooperative principle*) to her question about his interest in meeting Liza for the next time and so he infers that her utterance is not just an assertion but meant to be an indirect invitation to him to come to her house on her at-home day to meet Liza (*hearer’s ability to infer*), so he thanks her and goes out. The primary illocutionary act is of an invitation, whereas the secondary illocutionary act is an assertion.

Example 2

MRS DUBEDAT: He made those drawings; and they are not the best—nothing like the best; only I did not bring the really best: so few people like them. He is twenty-three: his

whole life is before him. Wont you let me bring him to you? wont you speak to him?
wont you see for yourself?

RIDGEON: Is he well enough to come to a dinner at the Star and Garter at Richmond?

The Doctor's Dilemma: Act I, Page No. 113

Mrs. Dubedat comes to the consulting room of Ridgeon in order to talk to him to save her husband from tuberculosis. Ridgeon says that he could not take her husband as he does not have "time, means, and skill" (Act I: 110) for another patient and all the patients that he has at hand are chosen ones and worth saving. Mrs. Dubedat shows him the paintings of her husband which impresses Ridgeon and he thinks that Louis must be a genius, to which she says that those paintings are not the best by him and he could make better paintings. She requests him to save her husband who is suffering from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-three. Ridgeon utters the above sentence to Mrs. Dubedat as an affirmation to her request to see him; but his utterance is an indirect speech act which is meant as an indirect invitation.

The utterance of Ridgeon is in the form of interrogative but the function it performs is that of imperative form with the illocutionary force of invitation. Ridgeon utters the above to affirm Mrs. Dubedat that he is ready to see her husband on her request, but uses indirect speech act to invite her with her husband for dinner to the Star and Garter at Richmond because the interrogative form would provide her with the option of refusal of the invitation if her husband is not well enough to go for dinner at the Star and Garter at Richmond. Ridgeon's utterance has the effect that makes Mrs. Dubedat happy and makes her think positive about the cure of her husband (*preparatory condition*). The utterance again is a request to Mrs. Dubedat to become a member by joining the bachelors' dinner at Star and Garter at Richmond (*propositional content condition*). The utterance of Ridgeon is relevant to the conversation (*theory of cooperative principle*) as she would be able to consult him and other doctors present in the dinner about the cure of her husband. The primary illocutionary act is invitation whereas the secondary illocutionary act is that of a question.

Conclusion`

Invitation is indirectly meant by the characters in the selected plays in two different ways.

Firstly, the representative type of speech act is used as directive type of speech act with the primary illocutionary act of invitation through the secondary illocutionary act of assertion (example 1).

The second way of indirect invitation is to use the interrogative form to perform the function of imperative form where the primary illocutionary act of invitation is performed through the secondary illocutionary act of question (example 2).

The act of indirect invitation may also lead to doubt. The hearer may doubt the sincere request of the speaker and also doubt if he is invited or not; however such doubts are seen only when the background knowledge is not shared appropriately and when the hearer has problem

with the inference of meaning of the indirect invitation. In such cases the hearer may say to himself, 'am I invited?'

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