

Strategies Adopted in Making, Accepting and Declining

Invitation

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Abstract

The present research explores the nature of invitation making and acceptance in English society from a pragmatic point of view. It attempts to systemize the various strategies used for the purpose of inviting in English society; and to highlight the socio-pragmatic constraints governing their use. Three major aspects of inviting are mentioned: inviting, accepting an invitation and declining it. The research has shown that this process is

patterned, functional and rule-governed. Furthermore, it shows that social distance in relation to sex and age of the individual speaker is an important factor in determining the type of strategies used for inviting, accepting an invitation or declining it. It has also been argued that English people have a special patterning of inviting that can be understood and appreciated only by people sharing the same socio-cultural background. The results of the study have implications for intercultural communication.

الخلاصة

إن هذا البحث يستكشف طبيعة صياغة الدعوة وقبولها في المجتمع الإنجليزي من وجهة نظر براغماتية. فإنه يحاول أن ينظم ويمنهج مختلف الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة لغرض توجيه الدعوة في المجتمع الإنجليزي، وتسلط الضوء على المعوقات الاجتماعية والبراغماتية التي تحكم استخدامها. تم ذكر ثلاثة جوانب رئيسية من الدعوة: صياغة الدعوة، وقبول الدعوة ورفضها هذا وأظهر البحث أن هذه العملية تتبع إنموذجا معينا، وذات وظيفة معينة ومحكومة بقواعد خاصة. وعلاوة على ذلك، فإن البحث يبين بأن عامل المسافة الاجتماعية في ما يتعلق بالجنس والعمر للمتكلم الفرد يعتبر عاملا مهما في تحديد نوع الاستراتيجيات المستخدمة في صياغة الدعوة، أو قبول الدعوة أو رفضها. كما تم التأكيد على أن الشعب الإنجليزي يتبع إنموذجا معينا للدعوة التي يمكن أن تفهم وتقدر فقط من قبل الناس الذين يتقاسمون نفس الخلفية الاجتماعية والثقافية. إن نتائج هذه الدراسة لها آثار على التواصل بين الثقافات.

1. Introduction

"Speech act" is a technical term used in linguistics and the philosophy of language to refer to pragmatics. Pragmatics studies those aspects of meaning that cannot be captured by semantic theories. It deals with how speakers use language in a way which cannot be produced using linguistic knowledge alone. In brief, it is the study of how to recognize what is meant even when it is not actually said (or written). In other words, it is the study of the speaker's intended meaning. (Verschueren.1999: 21)

The paradigmatic use of language may be applied by making statements, but there are sorts of other things which we can do with words. We can make requests, ask questions, give orders, make promises, give thanks, and offer apologies. Moreover, almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at one time, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker's intention: there is the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, such as inviting or promising, and how one is trying to affect one's audience. (Huang. 2007: 119)

In general, speech acts are acts of communication. To communicate is to express certain attitudes, and the type of speech act being performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed. For example, a statement expresses a belief, a request expresses a desire, and an apology expresses regret. (Huang. 2007: 120)

As the speech act is classified into three parts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary, statements, requests, promises and apologies are examples of the four major categories of communicative illocutionary acts: constative, directives, commissives and acknowledgments respectively. This is the nomenclature used by Kent Bach and Michael Harnish, who develop a detailed taxonomy in which each type of illocutionary act is individuated by the type of attitude expressed (in some cases there are constraints on the content as well), (Yule.1995: 48). There is no generally accepted terminology here, and Bach and Harnish borrow the terms 'constative' and 'commissives' from Austin and 'directive' from Searle. They adopt the term 'acknowledgment', over Austin's HGCI and Searle's 'expressive', for apologies, greetings, congratulations etc., which express an attitude regarding the hearer that is occasioned by some event that is thereby being acknowledged, often in satisfaction of a social expectation. Here are assorted examples of each type:

Constatives: affirming, alleging, announcing, answering, attributing, claiming, classifying, concurring, confirming, conjecturing, denying, disagreeing, disclosing, disputing, identifying, informing, insisting, predicting, ranking, reporting, stating, stipulating

Directives: advising, admonishing, asking, begging, dismissing, excusing, forbidding, instructing, ordering, permitting, requesting, requiring, suggesting, urging, warning

Commissives: agreeing, guaranteeing, inviting, offering, promising, swearing, volunteering

Acknowledgments: apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, thanking, accepting (acknowledging an acknowledgment). (Leech.1996: 219)

2. Theoretical background

The term "speech act" refers to the realization of the speaker's intention in a single or a sequence of utterances. The speech act of invitation appears, for example, when the speakers are showing their intention to request the hearer's participation in, or attendance at, a certain occasion, mainly the one hosted by the speaker (Austin.1962: 227). Invitation is an illocutionary speech act which is supposed to be basically "face enhancing act, whenever you say something that lessens the possible threat to another's face" for the hearer, because the speaker undertakes in this speech act to offer the hearer an opportunity to enjoy or acquire something for the benefit of the hearer. In this sense, invitation is assumed to belong chiefly to Searle's expressive and Leech's convivial speech act categories because of its face enhancing act nature (Blom.1972: 131). However, in the researcher's own observation of this speech act, it has been confirmed that invitation is sometimes achieved as one type of requesting, when a speaker wants to ask a hearer to participate in or attend at a certain event. In such a case, invitation enters Searle's (ibid.) directive or Leech's competitive domains, which are mainly concerned with Brown & Levinson's FTA "face-threatening act: when you say something that represents threat to another person's self-image" framework (Blom, 1972: 133).

It is therefore essential in this research to investigate how the two opposite concepts, FEA and FTA, are realized by native speakers. Emphasis, simplicity, clarity, and other face-enhancing elements are usually observed in FEA strategies, while indirectness, tentativeness, mitigation and other face-saving components are the features of face-threatening act achieving strategies. (Mey, 1993: 112)

Speech act theory is based on the assumption that language is a form of behavior, and it is governed by strict set of rules (Searle, 1969:82). The speech act, according to this theory, is seen as the minimal unit of (linguistic) communication. It is defined as an utterance that serves a particular function in communication. Austin, (1962: 94-108) proposed a set of three simultaneous types of acts: Locutionary act: (i.e., reference and sense). The meaning of the

statement itself, Illocutionary act: The contextual function of the act, Perlocutionary act: what one achieves by saying something. This is the effect of the act upon the listener.

In his work on the theory, Searle, (1976: 22) suggests five illocutionary acts that one can perform in speaking:

- a) Assertives: statements that may be judged true or false because they purport to describe a state of affairs in the world, such as asserting, concluding,
- b) Directives: statements that attempt to make the addressee's actions fit the propositional content;
- c) Commissives: statements which commit the speaker to a course of action as described by the propositional content such as promising, offering;
- d) Expressives: statements that express the "sincerity condition of the speech act" such as apologizing, thanking, inviting; and
- e) Declaratives: statements that attempt to change the world through utterances, such as declaring war.

However, although Searle speaks of the speaker-hearer relationship and marks the indirectness of speech act which carries the relation between the literal meaning of the words and the implicated function, he neglects other variables such as, social status, sex, age and cross-cultural differences of certain speech act. Most of these elements, however, are accounted for by Brown and Levinson in their work on politeness theory, the focus of which is the notion of "face" suggested earlier by Goffman (Horn, 1992: 44-50).

The notion of "face" as suggested by Goffman and developed by Brown and Levinson (Levinson, 1983: 38) is an important framework within which invitation making and acceptance can be successfully explained. The notion of 'face' has been defined as "the negotiated public image, mutually granted by participants in a communicative event." For Goffman a person's face is his image of himself in terms of approved social attributes. In an encounter all participants are responsible for maintaining their own and each other's faces cooperatively in the course of the interaction. For Brown and Levinson 'face' is a favorable public image consisting of two different kinds of desires or face wants, the desire to be unimpeded in one's actions, and desire to be approved of. The former was labeled by Brown and Levinson as negative face and the latter as positive face (Levinson, 1983: 27). Brown and Levinson see negative politeness strategies as less threatening than positive politeness strategies, since the latter

assume that the hearer shares the speaker's feelings of closeness. Brown and Levinson believe that while conducting a speech event, speakers are motivated by two basic wants of face: a) the desire of a participant that his action be approved or accepted by another participant and this is labeled as positive face wants, and b) the desire of a participant that his actions be "unimpeded or be free from imposition" and this is termed as negative face wants. Brown and Levinson believe that some acts, by their nature, threaten face, i.e. face threatening acts; therefore they require softening (Chen, 1996: 217).

Moreover, Brown and Levinson contend that the concept of face itself is universal, though the specific manifestations of face-wants may vary across cultures with some acts being more face-threatening in one culture than in another. The distinction made by Brown and Levinson between positive and negative politeness leads to another important distinction, that of positive and negative politeness societies. Brown and Levinson argued that England, for example, can be seen as a negative politeness society when compared to America. (Foley, 2000: 275-76) demonstrated that "crucial to Brown and Levinson's model of politeness is a principle of cooperation among interlocutors in the mutual maintenance of face in conversation; ideally speaker perform various types of speech acts more or less politely to preserve each other's face. By virtue of their nature as politeness phenomena, invitations can be seen as one means through which people attempt to win the social approval of each other. Therefore, they address the participant's positive face wants, i.e. they intend to tell the invitee that his/her acceptance of the invitation is desirable and appreciated. By contrast, declining an invitation may put the inviter's positive face at risk and preserve the invitee's. Brown and Levinson, (1987: 236) are quite aware of the importance of solving such a problem when they pose a balance principle. This principle is based on the assumption that participants have adequate motives for preserving each other's face. If somebody commits an offence against somebody else, the latter has the right to complain, the offender (i.e. the person who declines the invitation) has the obligation to apologize and the target person (i.e. the inviter) has the obligation to accept the apology. In this way, an offence might be terminated, the inviter's face is preserved and social harmony and interpersonal relationships may be restored. So, it is believed that Brown and Levinson's model could provide an insightful account of the various ways in which linguistic politeness can be conveyed as far as invitation making is concerned (Searle, 1969: 58).

2.2. Invitation Strategies

Based on the work of earlier researchers on similar politeness formulae like, for example, apologizing (Holmes 1990, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Olshtain and Cohen 1983, Frazer 1981); gift offering (Hua et al, 2000); compliment and compliment responses (Wolfson, 1983; Knapp et al, 1984; Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001) invitation making and acceptance in English society can be analyzed according to a categorization of strategies. A satisfactory categorizing system for the naturally occurring strategies in the English corpus comprises the following three basic categories: making an invitation, accepting an invitation, and declining an invitation (Goffman, 1967: 152).

2.2.1. Making an invitation

Inviting in English society, like inviting elsewhere, is based on the relationship between the inviter and the invitee. According to (Searle, 1976:177), the goal of spoken interaction is to communicate things to the hearer by getting him/her to recognize the intention that one has to communicate those things. The speaker then must achieve the intended effect on the hearer by allowing him/her to recognize his/her intention to achieve that effect. So, the recognition of the intention or intended meaning of the utterance (speech act) seems crucial in achieving a level of success in understanding. As far as invitation making is concerned, English society has a special patterning of inviting. That is to say, in several cases it has been noticed that an inviter tends to exploit the negative face of the invitee (i.e. the want not to be imposed upon by others) for the purpose of addressing his/her positive face (i.e. the want to be thought of as desirable person) (Coats, 1986: 167)

It has been observed that the conventional way of inviting in English society takes place either explicitly or implicitly. By the explicit way we mean this type of expressions which indicate that the addresser has explicit intention of inviting, like for example, "I invite you to my birthday party". And by the implicit way we mean that type of inviting which indicates that the addresser has the intention of inviting, but without saying that directly. For example, while two friends are passing by a coffee-shop one of them may say: "How about to take a cup of coffee?" And the one who initiates such a question has the intention of (inviting) paying for the drink (Brown, 1978: 177). This latter type of inviting is usually used only among intimates, friends, status equals, or family members in intimate situations. While the explicit way is usually used by people who have more social distance and less solidarity in a rather formal situations (Brown, 1978: 179).

2.2.2. Accepting an invitation

A Christian culture, which is mainly dominated by the Bible and the traditions of, Jesus the Christ, calls for accepting an invitation or a gift. This fact is clearly manifested in the Christ's words (i.e. one of his traditions) when he accepted the invitation of one of the Pharisees to have lunch with him. Needless to say that these sources form two of the major objects of faith and are seen by English Christians as the fundamental authority which controls and judges the actions and behavior of people in their daily interactions (Levinson, 1983: 198).

Socially speaking, in response to requests, invitations, and offers, acceptance or agreement in English society is usually preferred and refusing or rejecting is not. The act of refusal can be seen as a face-threatening act for the listener, and often realized through indirect strategies with a great deal of mitigation and/or delay. Acceptance or agreement, however, tends to be used in direct language without much delay, mitigation, or explanation. The speech act of acceptance occurs when a speaker reacts with pleasure, whereas the speech act of refusal takes place when a speaker reacts with displeasure or disapproval (Mey, 1993: 114).

2.2.3. Declining an invitation

(Chen, 1996:2) noted that the speech act of refusal occurs when a speaker directly or indirectly says "no" to a request or invitation. Refusal is considered to be a face-threatening act to the inviter, because it contradicts the inviter's expectations, and is often realized through indirect strategies. Therefore, unlike acceptance, it requires a high level of pragmatic competence. As said previously, accepting an invitation among English people is the norm. But in case of refusing, a great deal of mitigation has to be utilized by the invitee so as to be able to turn down the invitation. Therefore, one key to getting along well with one another, friends and acquaintances should know how to deal with the face-wants that may arise as a result of declining an invitation (Austin, 1962: 89).

It is clear that English people tend to use a variety of apologetic strategies so as to soften the perlocutionary effect of the face-threatening act on the addressee having an invitation rejected. Most English people believe that the use of such apologetic expressions is a significant act of politeness and, hence, a redressing strategy. Basically, they are lexical and syntactic markers of politeness which speakers usually use to show their awareness that something wrong has happened and it has to be amended. So, such speech forms are seen by English people as markers of solidarity (Austin, 1962: 93).

2.3. The impact of social distance in relation to sex, age and social context on invitation making and acceptance

One of the most important aspects discussed by (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 96) is identifying three parameters which influence the choice of politeness strategies: the social distance between the speaker and the interlocutor, the relative power between them, and the rank of imposition. According to Brown and Livenson, the speaker can calculate the size of face-threatening act on the basis of these three parameters. He/she can acknowledge them by performing face-threatening act strategies. In her study on 'apologies in New Zealand English', Holmes, (1993: 159) speaks of a remarkable effect of social distance in relation to age and sex on the type of apologetic strategies used by the subjects. As far as this research is concerned, the following common features of the influence of these factors on invitation making and acceptance are established:

1. The degree of social distance or solidarity between the interactants in relation to other social factors such as relative age, sex, social roles, whether people work together, or are of the same family are found to be of great effect on the type of strategy being used by the individual speaker upon inviting, accepting an invitation or declining it (Levinson, 1983: 162).

2. All informants, of both sex, demonstrate preference for performing the (FTA) (refusing an invitation) accompanied with a lot of regressive action. This happens by using several apologetic expressions that may be prefaced to the face-threatening act to tone down the illocutionary force of the utterance of refusal on the inviter (Austin, 1962: 148). Females tend to use such strategies much more often than males, and they are more likely to use them with males than females.

3. There are highly significant sex differences in the frequency with which they employ certain type of expressions. While females, for example, show a significant preference for using a lot of good wishes upon refusing an invitation. Males, by contrast, demonstrate preference for using the strategies of explanations (i.e. justifying their refusal) with a promise of compensation.

4. There are also highly significant gender differences in the frequency with which they display certain emotions (judged by facial expression), with males being associated with more boldness expressions, females with looks of shyness and embarrassment. Males are more frequently clear than females. Females are seen as honest more frequently than males are or appear to be so.

Females also smile upon accepting/declining an invitation more than males (Blom, 1972: 179).

5. The younger speakers are more likely to reject an invitation than the middle or older age groups. This could be explained on the ground that older people are quite aware of their role as guardians of their society's values. Younger people, by contrast, tend to do that in defiance of the cultural norms of society (Austin, 1962: 166).

6. Casual invitations (e.g. an invitation for a cup of tea) are over three times more likely to be declined in non-domestic ("things do not relate to one's home" as in domestic "things relate to one's home") settings, while formal invitations (i.e. invitation for a wedding party) are about as likely to be accepted (Andersen, 1978: 95).

Conclusions

A detailed analysis of the pragmatic devices which are employed by English people has been provided in inviting, accepting an invitation and/or declining it. Several aspects of many strategies, presented in section two, have been highlighted and approached from a socio-pragmatic perspective. The analysis has shown that the strategies utilized by English people for the purposes of inviting, accepting an invitation and rejecting it are culturally shaped by cooperative elements and that they could be understood and appreciated by people sharing the same cultural background.

In terms of inviting and accepting an invitation, however, it is likely that English people tend to use this tactic so as to achieve two goals simultaneously: first, to enhance the positive face of the invitee by telling him/her, in an indirect way, that he/she is an important person. Second, to inform him/her that his/her acceptance of the invitation is highly appreciated, therefore, he should respond to it positively.

In case of declining an invitation, it is worth mentioning here that, English people tend to apply as intensifiers a number of positive politeness strategies such as offering good wishes, claiming mutuality or stressing common membership. In case of refusing an invitation English people tend to use a variety of apologetic strategies so as to soften the perlocutionary effect of the face-threatening act on the inviter, who had an invitation been rejected. Most English people believe that the use of such apologetic expressions is a significant act of politeness and, hence, a redressing strategy.

(Kashrus, 1997: 34) claims that "people who share a common language and culture have an easier time 'making sense' of each other's utterances and actions". Based on the research results, the following recommendations are proposed.

First, it is recommended that further research to be done to identify other factors that may affect invitation making and acceptance in this particular environment. A second recommendation is to continue to track the young group of speakers' behavior based on their daily exposure to other cultures through their use of the internet and other means of communication. A third recommendation is to distribute the information collected from this research to researches concerned with other politeness methods.

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