

THE ACTUALIZATION OF PRESCRIPTIONS IN DIRECTIVE COMMUNICATIVE SITUATIONS

It is widely known that one of the primary functions of language is communication. Linguistic expressions allow language users to communicate their needs and wants, exchange and request information, give commands, offer apologies and so on.

Admittedly, our everyday conversations are overwhelmed with speech acts where we state our willingness to do or give something, ask to be given something or be favoured with something. In other words what we often do is performing commands, requests, orders, entreaties. Such acts are known as directive speech acts whose intention is to get the addressee to carry out some action.

The term directive was first introduced by J. Searle [3] in his work *The Classification of Illocutionary Acts* where he criticized Austin's taxonomy of performative verbs and proposed his own classification of illocutionary acts. Searle defines directives as communicative acts, which denote the beginning of an interaction. This implies that directive speech acts tend to show a high degree of determination, will-power and undertaking on part of one of the speakers.

Therefore, directive speech acts bring about a communicative situation, which is characterized by regulative, behavioural act, conduct undertaken in the initiating directive speech act. The reacting remark necessarily concerns the behavioural aspect of the communication either the interlocutor agrees to conform to the speaker's prescription and

perform the necessary action or he expresses his refusal to comply with the presumed conduct. In case of interlocutor's reluctance to cooperate, Searle proposes two ways of conducting the communication: the speaker accepts the refusal and terminates the conversation, or the speaker does not accept the refusal and insists on the performance of the action, by eliciting another directive speech act. In this case the adjacency pair comprises more than two remarks.

Thus, we can state that by initiating an exchange of speech acts directives form a special type of tied stretches of talk which we propose to call directive communicative situations.

The aim of the present paper is to observe the language forms speakers resort to to embody their intentions into prescriptions in directive communicative situations. We shall try to reveal what strategies are chosen by language users and how they are related to the construction of their utterances.

To approach this problem we need to look into the socio-pragmatic nature of directive speech acts in directive situations and disclose their operative features. As we know, pragmalinguistic analyses come to prove that speech is a regulatory form of behaviour and the successful performance of speech acts is a matter of conscious or subconscious control on part of the speakers. Perhaps the first thing to note in this connection is the list of Searle's *felicity conditions*, (also termed *appropriateness* or *success* conditions) which one should meet for the utterance to be labelled 'happy'.

Thus, a directive speech act is deemed infelicitous or unsuccessful if some of the conditions proposed by Searle (preparatory, sincerity, essential, propositional content conditions) do not hold.

Much depends on the fact who are the speakers and hearers involved in the communication. For example, you cannot ask your parrot to make

you a cup of coffee and your neighbour cannot order you to deliver the mail unless she is institutionally authorized to do so.

What happens if one of the aforementioned felicity conditions defining the speech act is violated? In his work *How to Do Things with Words* Austin [1] calls such acts *abuses*. Searle makes the same distinction, applying the terms *unsuccessful* and *defective*.

A directive communication situation comprises three aspects of analysis: semantic, syntactic and pragmatic. The semantic aspect reveals the propositional content of the utterance (who the performer is and what action is to be prescribed), the syntactic aspect expresses its communicative intention (behavioural prescription), performed with the help of an imperative sentence, whereas the pragmatic aspect presents a number of extralinguistic and sociolinguistic factors which include: the distribution of social roles between the interlocutors, the relationships between them, as well as their attitude towards the potential act. For example, one and the same act might be beneficial for one of the communicators and undesirable for another one.

The linguistic material based on the analysis of various types of directive acts and situations allows for various classifications of directive communicative situations.

To account for the choice of directive forms, Ervin-Tripp [2] found it helpful to classify directives into 5 types that include the relationship between the speaker and addressee roles.

Taking into consideration the pragmatic aspect of the directive situations and their illocutionary force, E. I. Belyaeva [4] assort them into:

- a) prescriptives;
- b) requestives;
- c) suggestives.

In case of prescriptives one deals with the obligation of an action, where the priority belongs to the speaker. As for requestives, the addressee takes the priority here and the speaker himself is under no obligation. In suggestive situations the speaker undertakes the priority and the addressee is free from any obligations. It is very important to note that in spite of the exact classification of directives, sometimes it appears difficult to define the true type of a directive. Therefore, one should always take into consideration the pragmatic context of the act. Thus, the imperative sentence *Have some more brandy* can be regarded as an order in a prescriptive context, a piece of advice in a suggestive one and a request in a requestive situation.

As we have already mentioned, in our paper we mainly focus on directive communicative situations initiated by directive speech acts, such as offers, orders and requests, initiating the verbal exchange. The latter function for transferring the speaker's prescription to the hearer. In all fairness, we should add, however, that though the second interlocutor is not a passive hearer and takes part in the process of communication, his communicative role is more that of a submission. Thus, while it is the speaker who prescribes the future action, in most cases, however, it is the hearer who has to decide whether to conform to the prescription or not. In case the hearer finds the action prescribed agreeable, he expresses his willingness to submit to it. This kind of directive communicative situation can be considered successful. In case the hearer finds the action prescribed deficient, he refuses to submit to it, the communicative situation, as well as the directive speech act can be labelled as a failure. Thus, we believe that communicative success and failure in directive communicative situations have to be linked with the hearer's willingness/unwillingness to conform to the speaker's regulations, directions.

Assuming that directive communicative situations comprise at least two remarks, **the stimulus** – a directive act, initiating the process of interaction by prescribing a certain kind of future action, and **the responding remark** – refusal or acceptance, expressing the interlocutor's willingness or unwillingness to conform to the prescription, we are faced with another problem, the problem of illocutionary force indication.

It is true that much of everyday communication is done through direct and indirect speech acts.

Our analysis comes to prove that both speakers – the prescriber and the doer of the action – resort to indirect forms of illocutionary force indication. We suppose that indirect ways of expressing the illocutionary force of the utterance are dependent on the speaker's wish to be polite and avoid negative answer in reply to his request or order on the one hand, and avoid communicative conflicts in case of refusal on the other hand. Politeness is a communicative strategy that motivates the use of indirect speech acts, and contributes to friendly, sociable atmosphere of interaction.

Adopting this assumption, we conduct the pragmalinguistic analysis of directive communicative situations on the basis of the following adjacency pairs marked with pragmatic variables of direct and indirect interactions:

- directives – acceptance;
- directives – refusal.

Thus, proceeding from the observation that directives comprise at least two remarks – a directive act, marking the process of interaction and refusal or acceptance reacting to it, we arrive at the following classification of directive communicative situations:

- a) direct/indirect directives – direct/indirect acceptance;
- b) direct/indirect directives—direct/indirect refusal.

It is worth mentioning, that the terms *acceptance* and *refusal* agree with our understanding of communicative *success* and *failure* of the utterance.

Regrettably, we have to restrict ourselves to the boundaries of the given paper and cannot enlarge on each of the aforementioned types. Therefore, we present to your attention only the most vivid cases of our research. Our classification is initiated with direct offers responded by direct acceptance. These communicative situations, which constitute the majority of the cases in our observations, are more likely to take place between familiar equals such as friends, relatives, marriage partners and casual acquaintances. For example:

Blanche: Honey, do me a favour. Run to the drugstore and get me a lemon coke with plenty of chipped ice in it. Will you do that for me, Sweetie?

Stella: Yes. [8: 60]

This stretch of dialogue is taking place between two sisters. At the beginning of the conversation Blanche declares the conversation open by calling Stella *Honey*, a form of address, which is more likely to be used in communication between people who are either very close to each other or know each other well. At the same time by saying *do me a favour* she grants her sister a presupposition that she is going to ask her for something. The direct request *Run to the drugstore and get me a lemon coke with plenty of chipped ice in it* expounds the presupposition. As if afraid that Stella will turn her request down, Blanche closes the channel by transmitting her sister a turnover signal with a polite request: *Will you do that for me, Sweetie?* Here she again deploys a special form of address *Sweetie* to

a) make sure that her request will not be turned down;

b) signal her interlocutor to respond positively to her request, which the latter respectively does.

Of special interest are the cases where the addressee expresses his acceptance indirectly in an attempt to mask his strong determination to accept the action prescribed. Let us match an example.

Kerry: (offering a popper)... Fly with me.

Asher: I don't really approve of drugs ... any artificial stimulus, ... but I think a writer has to leave himself open to any new experience. Don't you?

Kerry: (putting the popper in his hand) Wide open. [6: 448]

The scene above is entirely based on the shared knowledge of both participants. By offering his interlocutor *to fly* with him Kerry implies the ecstatic state a person can be under the influence of a narcotic drug and is sure that the listener will comprehend him. Asher's response, on the other hand, appears to be built upon the following scheme: *disapproval* → *potential refusal* → *acceptance of the intended action*. The latter is achieved with the help of an assertion *I think a writer has to leave himself open to any new experience* and the tag question *don't you*, revealing Asher's willingness to accept the suggestive.

Our research conducted on the basis of British and American contemporary plays shows that some of the directive speech acts rarely run the risk of being turned down. Thus, direct or indirect orders, if they are taking place in an adequate situation where the addresser acts as a social superior to the addressee, can hardly be refused. The reason is not that the hearer is always willing to comply with the instructions prescribed, but that the illocutionary force of the order does not allow him to reject the prescription. That is to say he accepts the order because the former is an *order*. Let us adduce a similar example.

Purdy: ...Sakini!

Sakini: Yes, boss?

Purdy: You're a civilian employee in the pay of the United States Army. And should dress accordingly. Pull your socks up!

Sakini: Yes, boss. [7: 614]

As we can see, the dialogue presented above is an example of a direct order. By calling the name of his interlocutor, *Sakini!* Purdy resorts to one of the most common ways of initiating a conversation. His interactant responds immediately with *Yes, boss* expressing both his readiness to act and inquiring about his manager's further instructions. This *yes, boss* prompts us that the conversation is going on between a superior and his subordinate. Purdy, the superior, makes the following presupposition *You're a civilian employee in the pay of the United States Army*. This may sound rather strange. Why does Purdy have to report to his inferior that he is a civilian employee in the pay of the United States Army? Is Sakini unaware of the fact? On the other hand, Purdy's second presupposition tied to the first one with the help of the conjunction *and*, as well as the elided clause where the person addressed is omitted *And [you] should dress accordingly* predicts in some way what his order is going to be. It would be much easier for Purdy to utter one declarative sentence, like this *You're a civilian employee in the pay of the United States Army and should dress accordingly*. In that case, however, his order would not sound so imperious. Purdy deliberately truncates his utterance into two separate sentences as if preparing ground for his final announcement expressed with the help of a direct order *Pull your socks up!*

Sakini's positive response on the other hand is motivated neither by his wish, nor the necessity of pulling the socks up. It strongly depends on his commander's direct order. Such orders are rarely disobeyed. It

would be strange enough if he retorted him stating that he would rather prefer walking in loose socks.

By now we have considered directives determined to achieve communicative success. As far as the communicative failure of the utterance is concerned, it is interesting to note that direct refusals are much fewer in our observations than indirect ones. We have already broached the problem of politeness as one of the general explanations why one turns to indirect refusals in speech more frequently than to direct ones. In speech we try not to show our disagreement openly and hurt our interlocutors. Accordingly, we organize our speech in such a way so that our negations and refusals do not sound impolite and save the face of our interactors. The matter described below, however, represents the opposite case where the employment of indirect refusal does not aim at sparing the interlocutor's feelings, but emphasizes the hearer's unwillingness to commit the action.

Stella: ... Your face and your fingers are disgustingly greasy. Go and wash up and then help me to clear the table.

Stanley: (He hurls a plate to the floor) That's how I'll clear the table.
[8 :82]

The scene breaks between a married couple. In her first assertion Stella makes a double emphasis on the possessive pronoun *your* [*your face*] and [*your fingers*] presupposing what her interlocutor's further actions would be. The sentence *Your face and your fingers are disgustingly greasy* does not merely state a fact, it implies Stella's prescription which, in its turn, is constituted from two direct requests *Go and wash up* and then *help me to clear the table*. Stanley, in spite of the fact that his wife exercises two directives, ignores the first one, discarding the second. He constructs his retort by hurling a plate to the floor and

implies an indirect refusal [*That's how I'll clear the table*] referring back to his actions.

Another point is why Stanley does not simply recourse to direct negation for defying Stella's order. The clue perhaps should be sought in the truth that he does not expect his wife to address him with similar requests and reacts violently intending to demonstrate his superiority over his spouse.

Types of indirect refusals are numerous and varied. The reasons for which speakers apply them differ from culture to culture, from situation to situation. As we have previously noted, the felicitous fulfillment of prescriptive directives strongly depends on the fact whether the person taking the priority over his hearer is institutionally powered to do so. Let us consider the following case.

Bomber: Go back to bed!

Millie: Go blow your nose! [5: 213]

The interlocutors involved in the conversation do not have anything in common. They are neither friends, nor relatives. It seems rather strange why Bomber would order or ask Millie, who is the daughter of their neighbour, to go to bed. Moreover by saying *Go back to bed* he emphasizes the adverb *back* inferring, perhaps, that she is too young to have any discussions with him and willing to get rid of her presence.

Millie's retort may seem entirely incoherent from the grammatical point of view, for in traditional grammar an imperative sentence is rarely responded by another imperative sentence, as well as a direct order is hardly preceded by another direct order. But here we deal with the case when the hearer exercises the same technique as the speaker in order to turn down the order. By responding Bomber with another order, Millie proves to be unresponsive to his former instruction. Indeed, if we approach the utterance taking into consideration its pragmatic aspect, we can arrive at the conclusion that Millie disobeys Bomber's order indirectly.

At the same time Millie's order *Go blow your nose* cannot be supposed to possess a truth value and result in complete fulfillment for Millie herself does not expect Bomber to go and blow his nose right away. By reacting in such a rude manner she only wants to emphasize the fact that Bomber does not possess any right to instruct her and implies refusal.

To conclude, etiquette is not simply *table manners* and *ladies first*, it is also something reflected in our language behaviour. Cueing directives is as easy as saying 'hello' and as much desirable. Through them we frame our discourse, fulfil our expectations and achieve our goals. But do we always spare our interlocutors' feelings in an attempt to execute our intentions? Frequent are the situations, when we prescribe our interlocutors something that is out of the reach of their duties. More often we are assigned something that is beyond our competence and we find it so difficult to turn down the prescriptions. Therefore, be it deliberately or spontaneously, we seem to be very scrupulous in our choice of directive speech acts, intending to sound polite and wishing to achieve the communicative success of the utterance.

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