


Pragmatic analysis of speech act theories in Ola Rotimi’s “our husband has gone mad again”

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ARTICLE INFO	Abstract
<p>Keywords: <i>Pragmatics, Speech act, Theory.</i></p> <p>©2025 Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International</p> 	<p><i>This work focused on the Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Act theory in Ola Rotimi’s “Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again”. Some selected dialogue from the drama text under study were used as samples and analyzed using J.L. Austin’s (1962) Speech Acts Theory. Speech act is central to pragmatics. It is concerned with specific social acts performed in making utterances. Speech act is credited to J.L. Austin in the views he expounded in the series of William James lectures he delivered at Harvard in 1955. The book was published and entitled “How to Do Things With Words”. Speech act is concerned with what interlocutors within a given discourse situation do with words as we can see in the dialogues within the drama text under study. Austin developed three speech acts which include the locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act. Searle (1975) holds that we use language for a number of things; we tell people how things are, we try to get them to do things, we commit ourselves to doing things, we express our feelings and attitudes and bring about changes in behaviour with utterances. The researcher used speech act theory to analyse selected dialogues in the drama text. Based on the findings, the researcher made the following recommendations; Teachers should create awareness on the teaching and learning of speech act theory. Students should be motivated to develop interest in speech acts, curriculum planners should include speech act theory in the curriculum and government should provide textbooks on speech act theory to students.</i></p>

Introduction

Various language experts have focused their attention in the study of meaning as an enterprise in language use. Austin (1962) contends that language is not just about the statements we use in expressing our objectives. He holds that the words we use constitute the actual performance of an action. Searle (1975) observed that speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions or making promises... all linguistic communications involves linguistic (speech) acts. Yule (1996) holds that speech acts are “actions performed by the use of an utterance to communicate. Mey (2001) argue that “speech acts are verbal actions happening in the world... I perform an activity that at best intentionally brings about a change in the existing state of affairs.

The central idea of speech act theory therefore is that whenever we make an utterance in a verbal exchange, we actually act on several levels. On the whole speech acts in modern linguistics is a revolution which both x-ray the interlocutors’ utterances and harmonize their views on interpersonal meaning.

Statement of the Problem

People viewed language in terms of meaning of words and phrases. They were primarily concerned with the use of language in the day-to-day interactions. Speakers do not realize the actions they perform through utterances. Thus, Austin (1962) draws attention to the importance of speech

acts in human communication. He contends that there is a lot more to language than ordinary sentence meaning. To cover this gap mentioned above, this is why this research is being conducted.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to carry out a Pragmatic Analysis of the Speech Act theory in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husbands Has Gone Mad Again*. Specifically this work is designed to;

1. Examine the speech acts in some selected dialogues in the text under study.
2. Determine the extent to which the three types of speech acts were applied in the dialogues.
3. Make recommendations for effective application of speech acts in language teaching and learning.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in many ways; Language learners will understand that a speech act is an utterance that has a performative function in language and communication. The work will enable interlocutors know when a particular act is performed in an utterance. The recommendation will help curriculum planners to emphasize speech acts in language teaching and learning. The pragmatic study of texts is fast growing as an acceptable procedure for rewarding research. Therefore, the insight from this study will serve as significant database for more research in the discipline. The extent to which these speech acts occurred in the text under study will serve as a reference point for the application of speech act analytical model for other researchers in the field.

Research Methodology

Method of Data Collection

The researcher made use of a drama text - *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi for data collection. Some dialogues were selected from the drama text. The data for the existing study include those statements which contain the three speech acts as propounded by J.L. Austin. They are; the locutionary acts, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were subjected to qualitative analytical method. Qualitative analytical method concerns the analysis of data with reference to the research in focus. The dialogues are used as the basis of analysis. These dialogues were examined using Austin's speech act theory. The researcher used the three speech acts to analyse the selected dialogues.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Pragmatics:

Gibbs (2017) defines pragmatics as "the ways people used language in context for social communicative purposes". Yule (1996) and Kempson (1986) described pragmatics as the study of language in use.

Speech acts:

Speech acts is concerned with what interlocutors within a given discourse situation do with words. Linguists over the years revolved all arguments in favour of speech acts around three main acts which include the locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act.

Theory:

Stephen P. Robbins (2003: p) holds that "A theory is a set of assumptions and propositions used to explain, predict and understand phenomena". Gregor, S. (2006) explains that "A theory provides explanations and predictions that are testable through empirical investigation".

According to Babbie E.R. (2001) "A theory is a systematic set of interrelated statements intended to explain some aspects of social life. Application of the Speech Acts to Selected Dialogues in *Our Husbands Has Gone Mad Again*". Below are some of the dialogues and the speech acts performed.

S/N	Lekoja-Brown’s Statement	Speech acts performed
1	“Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life? – No no – you want to chop a big slice of the National Cake? – Na Politics? (Act 1 scene 1, page 4)	Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act

The act performed by Lekoja-Brown’s utterance is locutionary because we expressed the basic literal meaning of the words chosen in the utterance. The illocutionary act performed by Lekoja-Brown’s statement is “guaranteeing”. He is assuring Okonkwo that Politics is good. Also the perlocutionary act is the effect the utterance has on Okonkwo. Okonkwo was very happy to join politics.

S/N	Lekoja-Brown’s Statement	Speech acts performed
2	“Wallahi kalahi! If they put you on auction right now – you, your degrees, your coat – everything ... I can buy you ten times, and still have plenty money left to buy you all over again! (page 6)	Locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary acts

From the above utterances, one can express the basic literal meanings of the words which Lekoja-Brown has chosen. This is the locutionary act. The illocutionary act of this utterance is “Promising”. Considering the utterance, the researcher explains that the perlocutionary act is that Okonkwo has automatically become a politician.

S/N	Lekoja-Brown’s Statement	Speech acts performed
3	“Don’t come empty, O! Woman, I want two beers? Sikira: “I’ve heard you, my lord” (page 6)	Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act

The locutionary act in the above dialogues is that we can express the basic sentence meaning of the utterance. The illocutionary act is “Commanding”. The perlocutionary act is observed from Sikira’s response. She brought the stout beer as demanded by Lekoja-Brown.

S/N	Lekoja-Brown’s Statement	Speech acts performed
4	It is not for my wedding nor for the memorial ceremonies for the departed spirits of my forefathers, that I am killing myself to get this house clean. Oooo no, woman! Our husband’s wife is arriving this afternoon from America and you know. Sikira: Good news! (Scene II page 15)	Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act

We can express the basic literal meanings of Mama Roshida’s utterances, which is the locutionary act. The illocutionary act is “explaining” and the perlocutionary act is that Solora is exited.

The above analysis shows that one can perform more than one act in a single utterance.

S/N	Sikira’s statement	Speech acts performed
5	Will our husband care for me now that Miss World is coming here.	Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act

The basic literal meaning of Sikira’s utterance is well understood and that is the locutionary act. The illocutionary act is “doubting” and the perlocutionary act is seen from Mama Rashida’s response. She understood what Sikira meant. So her utterance has produced an effect on Mama Rashida. (act 1 scene 11 page 15).

S/N	Mama Rashida’s Statement	Speech acts performed
6	“You may come in now my lord” Mustafa: I am coming in	Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act

The three speech acts are performed in the above dialogues. The locutionary act is that the sentence meaning is clear. The illocutionary act is “Explaining” while the perlocutionary act is observed from Mustafa’s response. “I am coming in”. (act 1 scene 11 Page 16).

S/N	Mallam Gaskiya’s Statement	Speech acts performed
7	“And aside from the fact that the present leader of our Party is so old-fashioned and automatic about the risky implementation of his whimsical strategy, this whole Mimbo-jumbo about military exercise is a political set up is a shame.	Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act

The above statement contain the three acts performed in a speech. The locutionary act is the utterance literal meaning. The illocutionary act is “explaining. The perlocutionary act is seen on the effect the statement has on Lekoja Brown. His response shows that he understood what Mallam Gaskiya explained. (act II scene ii page 52).

S/N	Liza’s Statement	Speech acts performed
8	“That’s silly – it isn’t right for a wife to tell her husband to go to hell without a reason”.	Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act

The locutionary act is observed in the clear meaning of the utterance. The illocutionary act is “advising” while the perlocutionary act is observed from Sikira’s response. (act II scene III page 54).

Recommendations

The study in focus highlighted the central idea of Austin’s speech act theory. This central idea is that whenever we make an utterance in a verbal exchange, we actually act on several levels.

From the findings the present study proffered the following recommendations.

1. Language teachers should create awareness for teaching and learning of speech act theory.
2. Students should be encouraged to develop interest in speech act theory.
3. Curriculum planners should include speech act theory in the curriculum.
4. Government should provide textbooks on speech act theory to students.

Conclusion

This work has delved into the pragmatic analysis of speech act theory in Ola Rotimi’s “*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*”. The researcher contends that speech act theory is one of the major theories that have significantly impacted the study of meaning in language. Thus, Kent Bach Robert and M. Hurnish (1979) in their publication entitled “Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts” argue that the theory of speech act is a core concept of the theory of linguistic communication. This study has been able to establish that participants in communicative situation interact in context. Speech act theory can be combined with another theory for an effective linguistic research. Speech

act is an utterance that has a performative function in language and communication as evidenced in selected utterances in "*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*".

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