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SPEECH ACTS ANALYSIS OF COVID-BASED EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC

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The article is devoted to the analysis of speech acts of epideictic rhetoric in terms of pragmalinguistics. The research material encompasses official Covid-based speeches made by the top officials of the country: Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and Donald Trump, the former President of the United States of America. The subject of the study comprises performative utterances of the speakers from the perspective of their illocutionary force. The theoretical and methodological basis for the analysis was the Theory of Speech Acts by J. Austin, as well as the classification of illocutionary acts by J. Searle. The analysis of Covid-based speech acts revealed their representative directive character. We have found out that the use of representatives in these epideictic speeches is due to the global goal of the speakers, that is to quiet the hearers (carrying out perlocutionary effect). It is supposed that stating the inevitability of certain events and their patterns, positive predictions and personal beliefs of people in power make ordinary citizens (hearers) put up with certain restrictions and inconveniences. In the pragmatic aspect, the use of directives (the second frequently used by speakers) is justified by the situational goal – to encourage the hearers to comply with the rules in connection with the introduction of quarantine. We have also concluded that commissives are used twice less frequently compared with the representatives and directives as their usage is primarily connected with the risk for the speaker to make promises and guarantees in quite unpredictable and uncontrolled time. For top officials this also involves reputational losses in case the promises are broken. It should be noted, though, that the use of declaratives in such speeches is very common and relevant as the speakers have appropriate social status and authority for official statements, decrees or decisions of state importance. Thus, the felicity conditions of declarations can be met. According to the research results the lowest frequency of the use of expressives proves the seriousness of the situation where emotionality and uninformativeness are inappropriate.

Key words: *speech act, epideictic rhetoric, speech acts analysis, pragmalinguistics.*

АНАЛІЗ МОВЛЕННЄВИХ АКТИВ ЕПІДЕЙКТИЧНИХ ПРОМОВ ПРО COVID-19

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Стаття присвячена дослідженню мовленнєвих актив епідейктичного дискурсу з позиції прагмалінгвістики. Матеріалом аналізу слугувати офіційні промови про Covid-19 перших осіб держав: Бориса Джонсона, прем'єр-міністра Великобританії та Дональда Трампа, екс-президента Сполучених Штатів Америки. Предметом дослідження виступають перформативні висловлювання мовців, виокремлені з публічних промов, з позиції їх ілокутивної сили. Теоретико-методологічним підґрунтям для аналізу слугувала теорія мовленнєвих актив Дж. Остіна, а також класифікація ілокутивних актив Дж. Сьорля. Аналіз комунікативних актив досліджуваних епідейктичних промов виявив їх репрезентативно-директивну спрямованість. Було з'ясовано, що використання репрезентативів зумовлене глобальною метою мовців – заспокоїти слухачів, досягнувши, таким чином потенційного перлокутивного ефекту, оскільки констатація невідворотності певних подій і їх закономірностей, позитивні прогнози та особисті переконання статусної особи змушують слухачів змиритися з певними

обмеженнями і незручностями, сприйняти їх як належне. У прагматичному аспекті використання директивів (друге місце за частотністю використання мовцями) виправдане ситуативною метою – спонукати слухачів до виконання правил у зв'язку з уведенням карантину. Аналіз також виявив, що вдвічі менший відсоток уживання комісивів, порівняно з репрезентативами і директивами, зумовлений перш за все ризиком для мовця давати обіцянки і гарантії у такий непередбачуваний і неконтрольований час, а також небезпекою отримати репутаційні втрати у випадку невиконання обіцянок. Типовим для такого типу промов є вживання декларативів, оскільки мовці мають відповідний соціальний статус і повноваження для офіційних заяв, указів чи рішень державного значення. Таким чином, умови успішності декларативів можуть бути виконані. Найнижча частотність використання припадає на експресиви, що є виправданим серйозністю ситуації, де емоційність і неінформативність є недоречними.

Ключові слова: мовленнєвий акт, епідейктичний дискурс, акто-мовленнєвий аналіз, прагмалінгвістика.

Introduction. One of the important aspects of linguistic pragmatics has largely been the Speech Act Theory (Kravchenko & Pasternak), founded by the British philosopher John Austin in 1955. In his work (Austin, 1962), the scientist developed the idea that certain utterances, which he called *performatives* (from the English “perform”), not only describe the reality and actions, but also carry out the actions themselves, being at its core speech acts. For example, in the utterance “*I am announcing the following additional actions: I am instructing the Small Business Administration to exercise ...*” the speaker is not only articulating a logically and grammatically correct sentence, but also is doing an action – gives instructions, that is performs a speech act. Thus, “speech act is something expressed by an individual that not only presents information but performs an action as well” (Wikipedia).

The research material encompasses official Covid-based speeches by the top officials of the country. The subject of the study comprises performative utterances of the speakers from the perspective of their illocutionary force.

Results and discussion. The essence of any speech act, including a performative one, consists in articulating the speaker’s utterance (locutionary act), addressing it to a hearer in a certain communicative situation and with a specific purpose (illocutionary act). Speech acts that are aimed at encouraging certain feedback from the hearer(s), primarily in their minds, are called perlocutionary acts. Since the felicity effect of a perlocutionary act can be estimated after its execution or non-execution, the subject of research in epideictic speeches can only be the potential, desired effect that the speaker implies in his/her speech act.

The most universal classification of illocutionary acts, which we relied on in our work, was proposed by the American philosopher and researcher John Searle (Searle, 1976). He identified 5 main classes of speech acts by illocutionary force: representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressive, and declaratives.

1. Representatives are informative acts that shoulder speaker’s responsibility for reporting certain state of affairs or for the truth of judgments and often contain speaker’s value judgement. Representative acts deliver factual information, make predictions, forecasts, statements, true judgments, descriptions, answers to questions, accusations, evaluations, characteristics, explanations, reports, etc.

2. Directives encourage the hearer to act or refrain from a certain action. This class includes prohibitions, requests, orders, instructions, appeals, etc.

3. Commissives impose on the speaker the obligation to perform the action that he/she has the desire and intention to perform. As examples can be promises, guarantees, oaths, intentions, etc.

4. Expressives show speaker's relevant attitude (emotional appeal) to the state of affairs to ensure compliance in a particular situation. Expressives demonstrate gratitude, pity, joy, justification, etc.

5. Declaratives are aimed at fixing certain state of affairs or changes in the world, society, etc. Examples are appointments, opening meetings, decisions, decrees, sentences, agendas, etc.

We have studied 152 speech acts in terms of their illocutionary force singled from the speeches of Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (Johnson) and Donald Trump (Trump), the ex-President of the United States addressed to their nations about the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis of speech acts of speakers revealed their *representative directive* character (see Fig. 1).

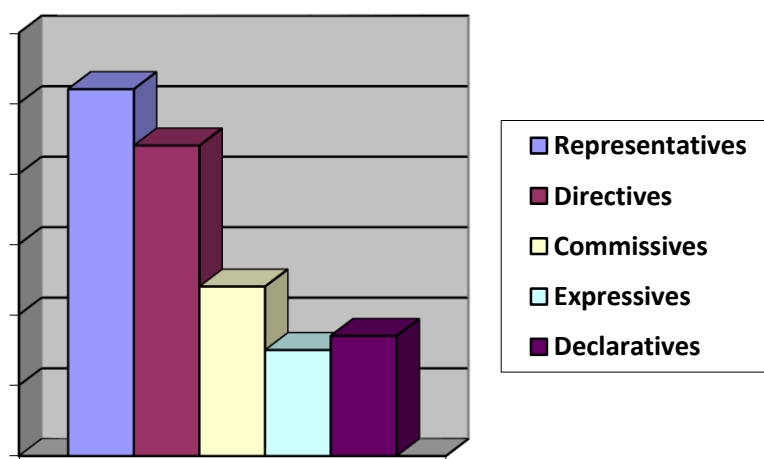


Figure 1. The ratio of illocutionary acts in epideictic rhetoric.

According to the illocutionary goal, the speakers most often used representatives for:

- presenting factual information about the state of affairs in the country and the world “*Today, the World Health Organization officially announced*”, “*the coronavirus outbreak that started in China and is now spreading throughout the world*”;
- describing the situation in the country in connection with the coronavirus pandemic “*It is now almost two months since the people of this country began to put up with restrictions on their freedom*”, “*We can see it all around us in the shuttered shops and abandoned businesses and darkened pubs and restaurants*”;

- reporting on taking appropriate measures “*I have consulted across the political spectrum, across all four nations of the UK*”, “*... we are marshaling the full power of the federal government and the private sector to protect the American people*”;
- stating generally known true facts “*From the beginning of time, nations and people have faced unforeseen challenges.... This is the way it always was and always will be*”.
- predictions and forecasts “*I am confident that ... we will significantly reduce the threat to our citizens and we will ... defeat this virus*”, “*If we are vigilant — and we can reduce the chance of infection, which we will — we will significantly impede the transmission of the virus*”;
- logical conclusions and personal convictions, such as accusations “*As a result, a large number of new clusters in the United States were seeded by travelers from Europe*”; evaluations “*Our team is the best anywhere in the world*”, “*No nation is more prepared or more resilient than the United States*”; explanations “*Because although we have a plan, it is a conditional plan*”; characteristics “*We have made fast progress on testing*”.

The use of representatives in these epideictic speeches is due to the global goal of the speakers, that is to quiet the hearers (carrying out perlocutionary effect). It is supposed that stating the inevitability of certain events and their patterns, positive predictions and personal beliefs of people in power make ordinary citizens (hearers) put up with certain restrictions and inconveniences.

In the pragmatic aspect, the use of directives (the second frequently used by speakers) is justified by the situational goal – to encourage the hearers to comply with the rules in connection with the introduction of quarantine through:

- calling to obey health and safety regulations: personal hygiene, maintaining social distancing, etc. “*For all Americans, it is essential that everyone take extra precautions and practice good hygiene*”, “*you should avoid public transport if at all possible – because we must and will maintain social distancing*”;
- kindly requesting to be careful and be aware of the risk of infection “*We must stay alert*”, “*we must also recognise...*”, “*The elderly population must be very, very careful*”;
- instructing on how to act in the current situation “*You can sit in the sun in your local park, you can drive to other destinations, you can even play sports but only with members of your own household*”, “*Wash your hands, clean often-used surfaces, cover your face and mouth if you sneeze or cough, and most of all, if you are sick or not feeling well, stay home*”;
- prohibiting certain actions due to imposed restrictions “*There will be exemptions for Americans who have undergone appropriate screenings, and these prohibitions will not only apply*”, “*we will be suspending all travel from Europe to the United States for the next 30 days*”;
- ordering to comply with quarantine rules “*You must obey the rules on social distancing and to enforce those rules*”, “*Now we must take the same action with Europe*”.

Commissives are used twice less frequently compared with the representatives and directives, as their usage is primarily connected with the risk for the speaker to make promises and guarantees in quite unpredictable and uncontrolled time. For top officials this also involves reputational losses in case the promises are broken. However, the speakers reinforce the achievement of the global and situational goal by commissions with illocutionary force of:

- promises “*I will soon be taking emergency action, which is unprecedented, to provide financial relief*”, “*we will increase the fines for the small minority who break them*”;
- guarantees “*I met with the leaders of health insurance industry who have agreed to waive all co-payments for coronavirus treatments, extend insurance coverage to these treatments, and to prevent surprise medical billing*”, “*And to ensure you are safe at work we have been working to establish new guidance*”;
- intensions “*I will be setting out more details in Parliament tomorrow*”, “*... if there are outbreaks, if there are problems, we will not hesitate to put on the brakes*”.

Since we have studied the epideictic speeches of the top officials of the country, it should be noted that the use of declaratives in such speeches are very common and relevant as the speakers have the appropriate social status and authority for official statements, decrees or decisions of state importance. Thus, the felicity conditions of declarations can be met: “*I signed into law an \$8.3 billion funding bill to help C.D.C.*”, “*I have decided to take several strong but necessary actions to protect the health and well being of all Americans*”.

According to the research results the lowest frequency of the use of expressives proves the seriousness of the situation where emotionality and un informativeness are inappropriate. Speakers mostly use expressives to thank for solidarity and support “*... it is thanks to your sacrifice we are now in a position to begin to move in steps to Level Three*”, “*God bless you, and God bless America. Thank you*”; “*And thanks to you we have protected our NHS*”.

We have found only a few utterances of expressives demonstrating compassion in order to establish psychological contact: “*And though we grieve for all those we have lost ...*”.

Conclusion. Thus, the theory of speech acts became a new tool of linguistic analysis in contemporary pragmalinguistics, enabling to go beyond a simple sentence as an object of study.

The hypothesis that the speech act is the basic unit of communication opens wide prospects for the study of pragmatic relationships, patterns of functioning and felicity conditions of communication.

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