

Perlocution: "To Kill A Mockingbird" Of Speech Act Theory

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Abstract: Speech is a means for humans to express their thoughts, manifested in both oral and written forms. Thought occurs through speech, allowing people to communicate with one another. Oral speech reaches the listener through pauses, stress, intonation, and sounds, while written speech conveys meaning through the combination of letters and words according to specific rules, punctuation marks, various separators, grammatical precision, and the representation of sounds. One key difference between oral and written speech is that oral speech is heard, while written speech is seen and read. Written speech is a complex process requiring significant effort and time. From a syntactic perspective, written speech is the most complete and perfect form of expression. It is the best means to convey deliberate thoughts. Written speech develops based on oral speech. Oral speech evolves through interaction with others, imitation, and does not require specialized learning or study. In contrast, written speech, designed to represent sounds, words, and sentences visually, requires understanding of letters and symbols and the physical act of writing by hand.

Key words: locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act, speech act theory, oral speech, written speech

INTRODUCTION

Oral speech occurs rapidly and lacks the possibility of editing. It requires the speaker to develop their thoughts while holding previous ideas in memory. In terms of vocabulary, oral speech is significantly poorer than written speech, often relying on the repetition of the same words and forms. This is due to the spontaneous nature of word selection. The speaker's active verbal expression reaches the listener through pauses, tone, stress, and various gestures. The effectiveness of oral speech depends on presenting relevant and meaningful content, as well as the speaker's ability to generalize and provide evidence. Proper use of phonetic and lexical tools enhances expressiveness. A unique characteristic of oral speech is that once spoken, it cannot be revisited or revised. Nonetheless, logical thinking while speaking is essential. Oral speech can be prepared in advance or delivered spontaneously. Prepared speech is distinguished by its thoughtful structure and coherence, yet it still seeks to establish direct communication. In contrast, unprepared speech includes frequent pauses, which give the speaker time to think and formulate ideas. [1]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper explores the perlocutionary aspects of “To Kill a Mockingbird” through the lens of Speech Act Theory, focusing on how the speech acts within the narrative influence characters' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Perlocutionary acts, which pertain to the effects of an utterance on the listener, are central to the development of themes such as prejudice, justice, and empathy in Harper Lee's novel. The analysis examines key dialogues, such as those between Atticus Finch and his children, Scout and Jem, as well as the courtroom exchanges, to highlight how speech acts create emotional and cognitive responses in both characters and readers. [2] By applying Speech Act Theory to the novel, this study offers insights into how language can effect change, reinforce societal values, and challenge ingrained biases, ultimately shaping the moral and social messages of the text. The speech act theory states that all forms of communication, whether spoken or written, consist of three components. A locution is a term or phrase that carries both its literal meaning and underlying significance when spoken or written. In the context of studying the Bible, a locution refers to a text and its interpretation. Illocution refers to the intention of the speaker when uttering those words and sentences. That is, the goal the speaker aims to achieve through their spoken or written words. Perlocution refers to the impact or transformation that the speaker believes the audience will create in response to their words. The perlocution refers to the intended effect on the listener that the speaker aims to achieve through their words. An author may write a set of sentences with a specific meaning (locution) and intention (illocution) to have a particular impact on the listener (perlocution). The set of sentences (locution) could be meant to persuade someone to take action (illocution). A perlocution occurs when someone is convinced to act based on the words they have read. Perlocution occurs beyond the act of talking or writing. It is the impact caused by spoken or written language. Another illustration of the three parts can be seen here. A woman might tell her husband, “There is a strange odor in the kitchen.” [3] That is the phrase. She wants the husband to take care of the situation so that the kitchen doesn't smell anymore. That is the speech act. She is optimistic that her husband will take out the trash in the kitchen, which is causing a bad odor, in response to her request. That is the effect of the action. Another great example: When the bride and groom say “I do,” they are using a simple statement that can have different meanings in various situations. However, in this situation, they signify a particular promise of loyalty and dedication for life. The outcome is putting that promise into action for the rest of one's life.

In speech-act theory, a “*perlocutionary act*” refers to the effects or outcomes that occur as a result of an utterance. These are sometimes called perlocutionary effects. Ruth M. Kempson highlights the importance of distinguishing perlocutionary acts from illocutionary acts, explaining that a perlocutionary act involves the intended impact or change the speaker aims to achieve in the listener through their speech. [4] Kempson summarizes John L. Austin's framework from “How to Do Things with Words” (1962), outlining the three components of a speech act:

1. “*Locutionary act*” – *the act of saying something with a specific meaning.*
2. “*Illocutionary act*” – *the intent or communicative force behind the utterance.*
3. “*Perlocutionary act*” – *the effect or influence the speaker's words have on the listener.*

A.P. Martinich, in his book “Communication and Reference”, describes perlocutionary acts as actions performed “by” speaking rather than “in” speaking. Examples include persuading, provoking, inspiring, or comforting others. Unlike locutionary and illocutionary acts, which rely on conventions, perlocutionary acts are more natural and involve psychological or behavioral changes in the audience. [5] Nicholas Allott, in “Key Terms in Pragmatics”, illustrates this with a hostage negotiation scenario: A negotiator tells a hostage-taker, “If you release the children, we'll allow the press to publish your demands.” The illocutionary act here is the offer being made, while the perlocutionary effect is the hostage-taker releasing the children as a result of the offer. Katharine Gelber, in “Speaking Back: The Free Speech Versus Hate Speech Debate”, provides a practical example of perlocutionary acts. When someone shouts “fire” in a crowded space, it leads people to flee, believing the building is ablaze. [6] The perlocutionary act is convincing others to exit the building. Similarly, in a courtroom, when a jury foreperson declares “guilty,” the illocutionary act is the pronouncement of the verdict. The associated perlocutionary act might be the

convicted person accepting their fate of being escorted to jail. These outcomes stem from but are distinct from the initial illocutionary acts. Marina Sbisa, in her essay “Locution, Illocution, Perlocution,” observes that perlocutionary effects can extend far beyond the speaker’s original intent. She refers to this as the “accordion effect,” where any result of a speech act can be considered perlocutionary. For instance, surprising someone with breaking news might cause them to trip, fall, and injure themselves. While the immediate perlocutionary effect might be their belief in the news, the subsequent unintended consequences, like the injury, are still tied to the speech act. However, some theorists prefer to restrict the term “perlocutionary effect” to outcomes that the speaker specifically intended. [7]

Whereas locutionary and illocutionary acts have enjoyed wide scholarly attention right from the inception of the Speech Act Theory, (Searle 1969, 1976, and 1979; Vendler, 1972, Katz, 1977; Bach and Harnish, 1979; Ballmer and Brennestuhl, 1981; Edmondson 1981; Adegbija, 1982; Allan, 1986, 1994, 1998; Wierzbicka, 1987 and Ude, 1996) perlocution has been given very little attention. Apart from Cohen, (1973), Davis, (1979), Gu, (1993) and Marcu, (2000) Speech Act theorists hardly devote more than a paragraph or two to perlocution (Searle, 1969; Bach and Harnish, 1979; Adegbija, 1982 and Ude, 1996). The reasons for this disinterest vary. [8] While some linguists argue that perlocutionary acts are California Linguistic Notes Volume XXXV No. 1 Winter, 2010 2 outside linguistics (Allan 1998, Akmajian et al, 2001) or more precisely, that perlocutionary acts are not as intimately related to linguistic structure as locution and illocution and so has little or nothing to contribute to the understanding of language (Akmajian et al, 2001:379) others argue that perlocution is far too complex for linguists advising that perlocution be left for philosophers interested in the effects of language (Adegbija, 1982, Allan 1998). [9] Adegbija (1982:88) for example, opines that: Perlocutionary effect is so difficult to recognise sometimes (in whatever way defined) and so complex and intriguing a phenomenon to characterise that it will most likely remain enigmatic for a very long time to come. Written speech is a form of communication conveyed through text or symbols. It includes writing, typing text, composing emails, writing books and articles, and preparing official documents. [10] Unlike oral speech, written communication does not require an immediate response from the recipient and has its own set of advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages of Written Speech:

- Allows careful thought and formulation of ideas.
- Messages can be stored and reread at any time.
- Provides greater precision and clarity compared to oral speech.
- Enables communication with people over long distances, even in different cities or countries.

Disadvantages of Written Speech:

- Lacks facial expressions, gestures, and vocal intonation, which can make understanding more difficult.
- Slower and more labor-intensive than speaking.
- Risk of misinterpretation due to errors or ambiguity.
- Requires mastery of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the ability to express ideas clearly and coherently.

Punctuation marks used in writing—such as periods, commas, dashes, and ellipses—correspond to the pauses and intonations in oral speech. In literary language, both oral and written forms share neutral, cross-style expressions, but each form also has distinctive features. For example, oral literary language often employs simple sentences, incomplete sentences, and loosely connected compound sentences. In contrast, the syntactic structure of written literary language is more complex. It frequently uses subordinate clauses, introductory words and phrases, complex simple sentences, isolated and coordinated elements, and intricate compound sentences. This complexity distinguishes written speech from its oral counterpart, emphasizing its structured and elaborate nature. [11]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The oral form of literary language is used in lectures and conversations, while its written form is utilized in scientific, technical works, official documents, publishing, and the press. However, these forms are interconnected. This theory first appeared in the research of scholars like **W. Humboldt**, **C. Bally**, **K. Bühler**, **É. Benveniste**, and **M. Bakhtin**, while **Sh. Safarov** notes that the development of pragmatics in the second half of the 20th century is associated with the formation of **Speech Act Theory** as a linguistic-philosophical teaching. The primary proponents of this theory were **J. L. Austin**, an English logician, and **J. Searle**, an American psychologist. Speech Act Theory is considered a subfield of pragmatics, exploring how words, phrases, and sentences are not only used to convey information but also to perform various communicative actions. [12] This field finds applications not only in linguistics but also in philosophy, psychology, literary theory, and even artificial intelligence development.

Today, the study of issues related to oral communication is a central focus in linguistics and related disciplines such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and neurolinguistics. One of the promising areas of speech research is **linguistic pragmatics**, which studies the relationship between the use of language units and the speaker's intentions. Pragmatics investigates **speech etiquette**, a reflection of speech relations, which evolved alongside the development of Speech Act Theory in the second half of the 20th century. **C. S. Peirce's** logical-philosophical views on language laid the foundation for introducing speech act theory into linguistics. He considered speech acts as intentional verbal actions performed in accordance with the norms and principles of speech behavior accepted in society. [13]

Speech acts involve three key components: the **speaker (addresser)**, the **listener (addressee)**, and the **speech situation**. A speech act is triggered when someone uses speech to communicate or express an intention to perform an action. The theoretical framework for speech acts was first developed by **L. Wittgenstein**, who argued that speech should be analyzed as inseparable from the speaker and explained it using the concept of "**language games**". [14]

The linguistic philosophy school, represented by scholars like **J. Austin** and **J. Searle**, built upon the ideas of **Wittgenstein**, **C. S. Peirce**, and **C. I. Morris**, who is renowned for his work in semiotics. They developed a theory of pragmatic functions based on the concept that language is an action. [15] For a long time, the speech act remained the primary unit of pragmatic analysis. The focus of Speech Act Theory is on speech as purposeful communicative action conducted in compliance with linguistic behavior rules and influenced by context.

The term **pragmatics** (from the Greek *pragma*, meaning "action" or "deed") refers to a field of semiotics and linguistics that studies the functioning of linguistic signs in speech. The term was introduced in the late 1930s by **C. I. Morris**, who divided semiotics into three branches: **semantics**, which examines the relationship between signs and objects; **syntax**, which focuses on the relationships between signs themselves; and **pragmatics**, which studies the relationship between signs and users (speakers). [16]

According to Morris, pragmatics considers language as a system of actions. He defined pragmatics as the study of the relationship between signs and their interpreters, emphasizing that it deals with all psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena observed in sign activity. The formation of pragmatics as a distinct area of linguistic research was influenced by the semiotic theories of **C. S. Peirce**.

In the 1960s, influenced by the logical and philosophical theories of **J. L. Austin** ("How to Do Things with Words", 1962) and the pragmatic analyses of **P. F. Strawson**, **J. R. Searle** ("What is a Speech Act?", 1969), **Vendler**, **P. Grice** ("Logic and Conversation", 1975), and others, pragmatics began to be recognized as a distinct discipline. **I. M. Kobozeva** states that the founders of pragmatolinguistics viewed Speech Act Theory as a theory of linguistic activity, focusing on communication as a goal-oriented process involving linguistic tools. [17]

Three traditions emerged in Western linguistics in the 1960s, aiming to establish pragmatics as an independent field and distinguish it from related fields like semantics:

1. **Neo-positivist tradition**, represented by **R. Carnap**, focused on philosophy and logic. Carnap sought to distinguish scientific knowledge from philosophical discourse, advocating for logical and linguistic analysis. Scholars like **M. J. Cresswell**, **R. Montague**, and **D. Lewis** emphasized the relationship between syntactic structures and the context of use, arguing that certain expressions (such as indexical expressions) should be studied within pragmatics.
2. **Semantic-pragmatic tradition**, represented by **J. J. Katz**, explored the meaning of sentences in both semantics and pragmatics. Katz posited that semantics deals with context-independent meanings, while pragmatic meaning depends on the context and specific usage. This tradition emphasized the study of speech acts at the intersection of semantics and pragmatics, highlighting the influence of context on meaning, particularly in the case of **illocutionary acts**. [18]

In summary, **Speech Act Theory** and **pragmatics** have significantly contributed to understanding language as an active, context-dependent process. These fields illuminate how language functions not only as a tool for conveying information but also as a means of performing actions and achieving specific communicative goals.

CONCLUSION:

Pragmatics, as a dynamic and interdisciplinary field, bridges the gap between linguistic form and communicative function. Rooted in the foundational works of scholars like **W. Humboldt**, **C. S. Peirce**, **L. Wittgenstein**, **J. L. Austin**, and **J. Searle**, it has evolved into a comprehensive framework for understanding how language operates as a tool for action. Central to this framework is **Speech Act Theory**, which highlights the intentional and context-sensitive nature of communication. Pragmatics goes beyond the structural analysis of language to explore how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and influenced by social context, speaker intentions, and listener perceptions. The integration of philosophical, psychological, and sociological insights into pragmatics has enriched its explanatory power, making it relevant not only to linguistics but also to fields such as artificial intelligence, cognitive science, and discourse analysis. In essence, pragmatics underscores the view that language is not a static system of signs but an active, goal-driven mechanism that facilitates human interaction. The study of pragmatics, therefore, offers profound insights into the ways in which language shapes, and is shaped by, the complexities of human experience, demonstrating its indispensable role in the broader understanding of communication and cognition.

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