

AN ANALYSIS OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN THE LETTERS WRITTEN BY NON-ENGLISH SPECIALIZATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

In order to do research on the sentences in letter writing, a group of 47 students, non-English specialization students, were asked to write letters to their friends. This research was carried out by analyzing 94 letters. There were 94 letters being analyzed because each student had to write a letter and a reply to one of their friends. The aim of the research is to analyze the illocutionary acts found in the letters written by non-English specialization students. The objectives are to explore the illocutionary acts in the sentences from the letters, to classify the types of the illocutionary acts used in the letters, and to find out which type of illocutionary acts is the most frequently used and which type of illocutionary acts is the least frequently used in the letters. Searle's theory of illocutionary acts (1976) was used in this study. According to Searle (1976), the sentences can be identified into five types of illocutionary acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. The findings of this research are that not all sentences have illocutionary acts; only the first four types of illocutionary acts can be found in the letters written by those students; the most frequently used illocutionary acts are expressives because the students have expressed their feeling and wishes through the sentences in order to communicate and become more familiar; and the least frequently used illocutionary acts are commissives since the students have not written about their plans. It is concluded that writing informal letters can communicate well and the relationship between friends can become stronger as they can present everything without any prohibition.

1. Introduction

People are the social creatures. They need to communicate for various purposes. They use different ways to communicate with each other. They may interact verbally or non-verbally. In these two ways, verbal communication is mostly used to interact. The very first considerable reason is that verbal communication is much easier to be produced and understood than non-verbal communication. Therefore, speech is more widely used than gestures. Another reason is that speech or words can be learned automatically and adaptable unconsciously.

There are four communication skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The receptive skills of listening and reading provide the resources or knowledge to understand the meaning of the words, sentences or utterances produced by a speaker or a writer. From that knowledge, people can produce their own utterances and sentences as speakers or writers. Ways of production of sentences or utterances can differ in accordance with the purposes. People may produce utterances to pass on messages, to describe things, to comment, to ask questions for information, to ask someone to do something, to tell their plans, to express their feeling, to declare what they have done, and so on.

The utterances can be in written forms as the sentences in narrative writing, sending letters or emails. When the utterances are difficult to be told face on face, letters become an alternative way to communicate. Therefore, letters are also an excellent way for communication.

To study the purposes of producing utterances, the research has been carried out. In this research, informal letters between friends are analyzed through Searle's theory of illocutionary acts (1979). Searle's theory has been widely used to do many studies throughout the world.

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A group of 47 students, who are from first year Mathematic class, helped in this study. Each of them wrote a letter to their friends. Their letters are informal letters since the communication is between friends and it is reasonable to write informally.

The aim of this research is to analyze the illocutionary acts found in the letters written by non-English specialization students. The objectives are to explore the illocutionary acts in the sentences from the letters, to classify the types of the illocutionary acts used in the letters, and to find out which type of illocutionary acts is the most frequently used and which type of illocutionary acts is the least frequently used in the letters.

The research paper consists of five main sections. The first section is the introduction of this research. The second section includes the characteristics of informal letter, theoretical background and related researches. In the next section, the research methodology is presented. The fourth section shows the findings and discussion of this research. The conclusion of this research can be seen in the very last section.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Characteristics of Letters

According to Targetstudy website, a letter is a written message that is sent to persons who are far away. In letters, a clear message is always conveyed. People write letters to relatives and friends. Sometimes, people write letters for practical purposes like sending an application letter. So, the art of writing a letter must be acquired for practical purposes. There are three kinds of letter writing. They are informal letter writing, official letter writing and business letter writing.

Informal letters are written to relatives or friends. They are also known as personal or social letters. Official letter writing includes a letter of application, a letter to government officials and a letter to newspapers. They are also used for sending information among departments. Recommendation letter and reference letter are also counted as official letters. Business letter writing is used as a communicative tool in the business and is usually written by traders, firms and companies for business purposes.

There are six main parts in writing a letter. The first one is heading. It has two parts: address of the writer followed by the date on which the letter was written by him. The second part is the salutation or greeting. It may vary due to the relationship between the sender and the receiver of a letter. The third part, the body of the letter, is the most important part of the letter because the writer can write everything he or she want to tell the reader. The body can be divided into paragraphs to mark changes of subject-matter. It is important to use short and clear sentences. The sentences and the meanings need to be complete. The writer needs to write neatly for the reader's convenience. He or she also has to take care of using punctuations. The fourth part is the conclusion of the letter. And the next part is the signature of the writer. The last one is the address of the receiver. It is usually written on the envelope.

2.2. Theoretical Background

In the article *A Classification of Illocutionary Acts* written by John R. Searle (1976), the illocutionary acts are classified into five different categories. They are representatives, directives, commissives, expressive and declaratives.

Table 1: A brief over view of his classification of illocutionary acts according to Searle(1976).

Illocutionary acts	Functions	Examples
Representatives	to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition	describe, call, classify, identify something
Directives	to let the speaker get the hearer to do something	order, request, invite, advise, permit someone
Commissives	to commit the speaker to some future course of action	promise,pledge somebody to do something
Expressive	to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content	thank, welcome, congratulate, apologize, condole, deplore
Declaratives	to tell the successful performance of one member brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality	Declare something

2.3 Related Researches

The first research is *An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts in Business Letter*. It was conducted by Ratu Ruchina fom Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakata, in 2010. The aim of the research is to analyse the kinds of sentences illocutionary acts in Business Letter from P. T Helindo Maju Mandiri and P. T Mitsubishi Chemical Indonesia in Cilegon-Banten. The study was carried out by Searle's theory of illocutionary acts (1976). The objective is to find out the reason of communication activity which is always started from the speaker that wants to explain his or her purpose to hearer. The finding is that all five types of illocutionary acts can reveal the theme of the letters.

The next research is *Illocutionary Acts analysis of Chinese in Pematangsiantar*. The researcher is M. Pd Herman from University of HKBP Nommensen, Medan-Pematangsiantar, Indonesia. This research was done in 2015. The aim of the reasearch is to analyze the utterances of Chinese who live in Hos Cokroaminoto, Pematangsiantar by using five types of illocutionary acts presented in Searle in Leech (1983). The findings of the research are that only four types of the illocutionary acts can be found in the Chinese utterances spoken by the people who live in Hos Cokroaminoto, Pematangsiantar. The illocutionary acts found are representatives, directives, expressives and commissives.

3. Research Methodology

Firstly, a group of students was chosen. A total of 47 students participated. They are first year students majoring in Mathematics from Yadanabon University. They are regarded as non-English specialization students. Their first language is Myanmar. They are learning English as a second language. They have a strong knowledge of writing a letter to friends.

Secondly, they were asked to write a letter to any of their friends. Before writing, the following instructions were written on the board.

Write a letter to your friend. Share your information and ask whatever you want to know about them.

Then the instructions were explained. The students were explained that there were two main things they had to write. They were to tell about themselves and ask questions about their friends.

The next step was writing the letters. The time given was 20 minutes. Most of them write about one page of A4-sized paper within 20 minutes. Then the letters were collected.

After collecting the letters, they were asked to write a reply to the letters that were delivered to them. The instructions used were as follow.

Write a letter to reply the letter that you have received recently.

So, the letters that they had written were randomly delivered to them and they had to pretend as the addressee of the letter that they had received. Before writing the reply, they were guided to write the feeling that they had after reading the letters and to answer the questions in the letters. Then they wrote a reply within 20 minutes. Then both the first letters and the second letters or replies were collected.

After collecting the letters, the letters were numbered. They are a total of 94 letters, including 47 letters and 47 reply letters. Then the first letters were marked as 'A' and their reply letters were marked as 'B'. Therefore, the first pair was marked as '1A' and '1B'.

The next step was to analyze the sentences written in the 94 letters according to Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. The sentences were identified whether they had illocutionary acts. The sentences with illocutionary acts were classified into five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressive and declaratives by using Searle's illocutionary acts theory (1976). The final step was collecting the data from all of the letters.

4. Findings and Discussion

A total of 896 sentences are found as having illocutionary acts. Not all sentences are considered as having a type of illocutionary acts. It is found that there are 225 representative illocutionary act sentences, 263 directive illocutionary act sentences, 106 comisive illocutionary act sentences and 302 expressive illocutionary act sentences. No declarative illocutionary act sentence is found. Therefore, expressive illocutionary acts are most frequently used in the letters. Commissive illocutionary acts are the least frequently used.

The following figure (Figure 1) presents the frequencies of the illocutionary acts found in the letters written by non-English specialization students. It tells that there are 225 representatives, 263 declaratives, 106 commissives and 302 expressives. No declarative is found. The figure shows that the highest frequency is expressive illocutionary acts. The lowest is the commissive illocutionary acts.

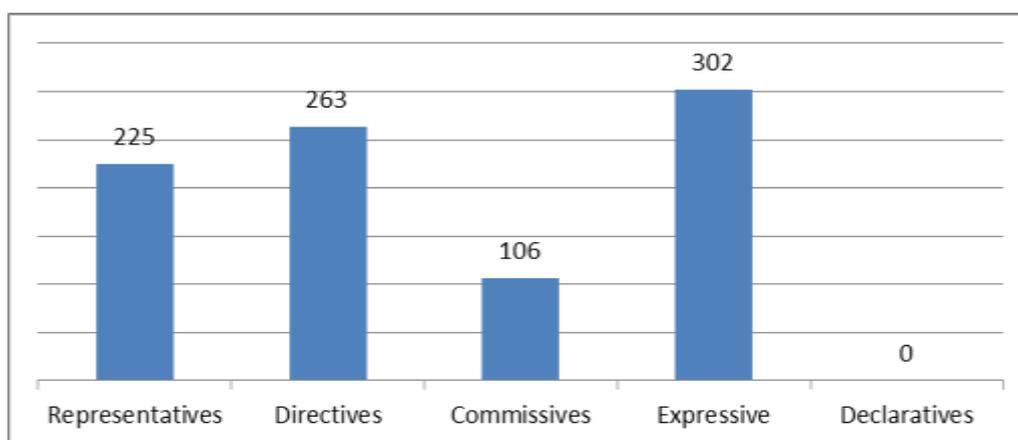


Figure 1: The frequencies of the illocutionary acts found in the letters written by non-English specialization students.

The letters were written by the Mathematic specialization students. The addressees of the letters were their friends who were away from them. Many of them were their best friends who were studying in different universities or working away. In the letters, it is found that the students wrote the sentences about their daily life, such as what they were doing during those days, how their university was, how their family was and how their new friends were.

Most of the letters start with the question, "How are you?". The greeting of a letter usually starts with that question in order to ask the reader of the letter if he is in good health. Another sentence that is widely found in the greeting is "I'm fine". The questions, "How is your family?" and "How are your parents?" are also frequently found in the letters. The questions can ask about the reader and they show that the writer cares for the reader.

The above questions are regarded as directives because they are asking the reader for information. The sentences, such as "I'm fine", "I'm in the great of health" are classified as representatives since they describe about the writer.

In the body of the letter, the students describe about themselves, their university, their specialization, their teachers, their school subjects, their new environment, their new friends, and their social life. Some of the sentences are as follows.

"I am good at Math and terrible at English."

"Yadanabon University is very good for me."

"My specialization subject, Math, is a special subject."

"Our teachers are experienced and qualified."

"Our English teacher is good at teaching, kind, and funny."

"My new neighbors are quite and helpful."

The sentences are regarded as representative illocutionary acts because they describe about the things that the writers want to share with the readers.

The writers also ask questions in the body part of the letters. Asking questions can make the friendship stronger. The questions mostly found in the letters are as follows.

"Do you miss me?"

"Do you remember me?"

"What are you doing these days?"

"How is your university?"

"Are you ready for the exam?"

"What are you going to do after the exam?"

"Do you have boyfriend?"

The questions are classified as directives since they are asking to get information about the readers.

The writers often write their plan, promise and intention in the body of the letters. The sentences that show the plan, promise and intention of the writers can be identified as commissive illocutionary acts. Some of the sentences with commissive illocutionary acts are as below.

"I'll ask questions to you."

"If we are free, we will go out."

"We'll meet after the exam."

"I'll always remember you."

"I'll give my phone number."

"We are going to Pyin Oo Lwin."

The writers also direct and give advice to the readers. Such kinds of sentences can be regarded as directive illocutionary acts. Some of the sentences with directive illocutionary acts are mentioned below.

"Don't worry about me."

"Take care."

“Call me when you are free.”

“Do not drink alcohol and smoke.”

“How about going out?”

The writers express their feeling in many sentences. They can be regarded as expressive illocutionary acts. Such kinds of sentences are as follows.

“I’m sorry that I can’t attend the university with you.”

“I don’t worry about the exam.”

“I’m interested in doing homework.”

“I miss you so much.”

“The whole fresher welcome ceremony was really enjoyable.”

“I want to know about you.”

“Thank you for your letter.”

“I’m very glad to receive your letter.”

“Welcome to my home.”

“Sorry for not contacting you for a long time.”

The expressive illocutionary acts can also be found in the conclusion of the letters. The wishes of the writers for their readers are expressed in the following sentences.

“Have a nice day.”

“Whish you all the best.”

“Best wishes.”

“Good luck!”

“I hope your father get well soon.”

The sentence, “You are my best friend”, seems to have a declarative illocutionary act because it sounds like declaring something important. But sentence is considered by comparing “best friend” and “good friend”. These words show the quality of friends. Therefore, the sentence, “You are my best friend” is regarded as a representative illocutionary act. Any declarative illocutionary act is found in the letters. This is because the letters are written for the friends of the writers. There is nothing to declare.

As the instruction for the first letter (A) says to tell about the students themselves and to ask their friends about them, the more questions and directives are found in the first letters (A) than in the reply letter (B). In the reply letters (B), the writers answer the questions of the first letters (A). The more expressive illocutionary acts can be found in the reply letters (B) since the instruction for the reply letter is to write how the writers feel after reading the letter (A).

Grammatical errors are neglected. If the sentences do not make sense, they are left to be analyzed. There are some wrong spellings. But, if they are still meaningful, they are analyzed.

5. Conclusion

A group of 47 students, non-English specialization students, were asked to write letters to their friends. According to Searle (1976), the sentences of the letters were identified into five types of illocutionary acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. The findings of this research are that not all sentences have illocutionary acts; only the first four types of illocutionary acts can be found in the letters written by those students; the most frequently used illocutionary acts are expressives because the students have expressed their feeling and wishes through the sentences in order to communicate and become more familiar; and the least frequently used illocutionary acts are commissives since the students have not written about their plans. It is concluded that writing informal letters can communicate well and the relationship between friends can become stronger as they can

present everything without any prohibition. It is recommended that the next research should study the letters of English specialization students.

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