

# Offering as a Comissive and Directive Speech Act: Consequence for Cross-Cultural Communication

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**Abstract-** This paper sheds light on one of the most rigorous theories in modern Linguistics. It is the speech Act theory focuses on offer as one of the speech acts which can be subsumed under two categories namely commissive and directives. This paper also discusses the art of offer from different perspectives. It also focuses on the speech act of offering from philosophical, social, and cultural views.

**Index Terms-** offer, commissive, directive, speech act.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Speech act theory (SAT) is one of the core issues of modern pragmatics, as stated particularly by the Oxford philosopher, Austin (1962) and expanded by his student Searle (1969) and other scholars such as Back, and Harnish (1979). The speech acts of any language provide its speakers with culture-specific categories of verbal interaction. Speech acts can shed a great deal of light on broader cultural themes, but equally the significance of any particular speech act category can only be fully understood in broader cultural context (cf. Goddard, 2004). Further, cultures may differ in the rules when certain speech acts can be appropriately performed (Benthalia and Davies, 1989:102).

### A. *The Concept of Offer*

Generally speaking, in any society, people tend to cooperate with one another and help one another, for example, one individual does things for the sake of others to express a friendly and cooperative attitude. An example of cooperative attitude is offer.

Offer is regarded as a common word in every day usage of language for the purpose of presenting something to be accepted or refused (to offer someone a drink, money or help) or to express one's willingness or intention to do something and leave the offeree free to accept or refuse that offer (Oxford Modern English Dictionary, 1992: 739). Seeing someone standing near a car and waving on way to university or office, you may infer that something is wrong with his car or it is out of fuel. Being cooperative, one may stop a car to give a hand.

Hussien's (1984: 48) argues that offer is altruistic in nature, since what is offered is for the offeree's benefit. Therefore, the basic components of the concept of offer are voluntary aid by the speaker, the potential need of the addressee and altruism. The offered, in conversation, sets up a sequentially possible next place for the offered to be a response, presumably an acceptance, which is the preference sequence, but also other responses such

as refusal which are not preferable sequence (Davidson, 1984:104, and Hatim & Mason, 1990: 77), e.g.

-Have another piece of cake.

1. -No, thank you. I'm satisfied.

In a piece of conversation, two participants are being engaged: the offered who offers a piece of cake and offeree who declines his or her offer. Offers, then, could be outlined from the organization of adjacency pairs. An adjacency pair occurs when a certain turn projects a relevant next action or range of actions to be performed by another speaker in the next turn. These pairs include:

Table 1: Shows Adjacency pairs of offer

| <u>The First Pair</u> | <u>The Second Pair</u> |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Question              | Answer                 |
| Offer                 | Acceptance/ Refusal    |
| Request               | Grant/ Deny            |
| Greeting              | Greeting               |

Source: (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984: 6; Schegloff, 1984: 32; Houtkoop-steenstra, 1987: 147; Mey, 1993: 342; Beun, 1996: 7).

Adjacency pairs have the following features:

Two utterances length a first part and a second part.

Two different speakers producing each utterance.

Relative ordering of parts (first part is relative to the other). (Levinson, 1983: 303; Flowerdew, 1989: 72; and Yule, 1996: 76-78).

This is believed to be the true spirit of Speech Act Theory. In the present paper, pieces of conversation are extracted to be dealt with in order to apply them in examining the speech act of offering both in theoretical and practical dimensions. This type of speech act has been tackled from different perspectives: philosophical, social and cultural. In what follows, we will shed some light on these perspectives to provide a better understanding of the concept of offering.

### B. *Offer as a Comissive Act*

Searle (1979) proposes another classification of illocutionary Acts and this classification is considered to be the most influential one and the most widely adopted by many scholars for further investigations (Cf.Mey, 1993: 170). Searle categorizes illocutionary acts into:

1. Assertive
2. Directives
3. Comissives
4. Expressives
5. Declartives

Following the previous classification, the speech act of offering is regarded as a commissive act in which the speaker commits himself to a certain future course of action. The direction of fit is world-to-words i.e., the speaker wants the world to be changed to fit his words. Sincerity condition is intention (speaker intends to do the action). The propositional content is always speaker does some future action (Searle, 1979: 14), e.g.:

- *Can I help you?*

Fraser (1975: 193) highlights that in making an offer, the speaker proposes to place themselves under an obligation to bring about the state of affairs expressed in the proposition. This type of speech act is being labeled under “acts of committing” as Fraser argues. Hickey (1986: 74-75), likewise, states that offering is among the set of acts that express commitment. His argument is that the commitment is independent of the hearer and his reaction to it is irrelevant because the hearer may accept or refuse the offer as in:

-*The doctor: I would like to take you to your hostel.*

- *No, thanks*

For Hickey, the doctor has only the readiness for commitment and if the offer is accepted by the hearer, the doctor’s commitment comes into effect. By making an offer then, the speaker’s commitment becomes bound with the hearer’s wish for doing the act.

Bach & Harnish (1979: 42) seem to accept the basic frames of Searle’s taxonomy and classify the illocutionary acts in terms of types of expressed attitudes;

1. ConnotativeS.
2. Directives
3. CommissiveS
4. Acknowledgments

What is crucial in this paper is that of commissives which compromise two subcategories; the first one means obligating oneself to do something whereas offers are proposals to obligating oneself to do something (Bach and Harish, 1979: 42). Edmondson (1981: 492-496) views the difference between promises and offers terms of the potential placing of such acts relative to other illocutionary acts, or in terms of the absence of the S’s belief that the hearer wishes or is willing that the speaker do an act by making an offer, the speaker undertakes the responsibility for doing future act which benefits the hearer.

Following Bach & Harbish, Allan (1986) points out that promises and offers are the only classes of commissives offering include:

|                                 |
|---------------------------------|
| Offer, propose, and volunteer.  |
| E.g. You need my help, brother. |

In this context, the speaker puts themselves under a social obligation to do something. This social obligation provided the cooperative principle is being observed and has it within his power to help the hearer (Allan, 1986: 195, 206).

Making an offer means putting something forward for another’s choice (of acceptance or refusal). An offer then, as is a conditional commissive act (Vandervken.1990: 182). Allan (1986: 195) believes that commissives involves only promises

and offers. Additionally, a promise means obligating oneself to do something for the benefit of the hearer. While an offer is a promise that is conditional upon the hearer’s acceptance (for further details, see Al-Sulaiman, 1997, 97). The following example is relevant:

- If you need paper, I can get what you want.

When making an offer, the offerer promises to give hearer the leave papers on condition that hearer needs those papers. Often, an offer is bound (propositional content condition) by a definitive time frame. When the time has expired, (as in the offer to purchase a house) if it has not been accepted the offer expires and the speaker is no longer bound by it. The hearer’s response can be an acceptance or refusal or to make a counter-offer. A counter offer is an offer that is made in response to previous offer of the hearer (preparatory condition) and modifying the terms there of (Vanderveken, 1990: 185).

### C. Offer as a commissive-directive Act

In a response to Searle’s and Austin’s classification, Hancher (1979: 7) highlights that Searle’s system is tighter and more consistent than Austin’s. Nevertheless, Hancher proposes that both commissive and directives involve cooperation and could be combined in one group named as conditionals. According to this view, offering is treated as a commissive direct act that requires two participants to act, the speaker as well as the hearer looks towards the completion of this act in some response by the hearer. The effect of all this is the cooperative illocutionary act.

The idea of combining the two categories (commissive & directives) into one group stated by Hancher is somehow similar to Searle’s proposal (1979: 14) to combine these two categories and relate them under a unified category (through directives are hearer-centered and commissive are speaker-centered).

## II. FELICITY CONDITIONS

The researcher, Searle (1969: 54-71) initially regards the possibility of classifying speech acts through specifying their felicity conditions i.e., the condition that must pertain for successful performance of a particular speech act. These conditions include: **essential conditions**, which say what kind of illocutionary act the utterance is count as; **propositional content conditions**, which specify what kind of propositional content the speech act is to have; **preparatory conditions**, which specify the contextual requirements (for example speaker’s or hearer’s ability or willingness to do an act and so on), and **sincerity conditions**, specifying which psychological state of the speaker will be expressed in the speech act.

## III. HOW TO PERFORM THE SPEECH ACT OF OFFERING

An offer is sincerely performed when certain holding conditions are fulfilled (Alston, 1964: 40). The speaker takes for granted the hearer’s permission to make an offer. The speaker thinks he is willing and able to perform the act and assume that the addressee is also willing to permit the speaker to carry it out. Alston concludes that if any of these conditions is simultaneously denied, the speaker commits a pragmatic contradiction in performing this illocutionary act.

Searle (1975; 1979: 32) draws a distinction between the direct and indirect speaker acts. Searle claims that in indirect speaker acts, speaker communicates to hearer more than the literal

meaning by virtue of Grice's cooperative principle and the mutually shared knowledge of the speaker and the hearer together with ability by the hearer to make inferences about the act performed. The richest mine to the performance of indirect speech acts is that of Commissive as Searle himself states. Searle then proposes the following sentences, any of which can be uttered to perform an indirect offer:

A. *Sentences concerning the propositional conditions:*

I will do it for you.

Shall I give you the money now?

B. *Sentences concerning the preparatory conditions:*

1. S is able to do A

Can I help you?

Could I be of assistance?

I can do that for you.

I could get it for you.

2. H wants S to do A

Would (wouldn't) you like some help?

C. *Sentences concerning the sincerity condition:*

I intend to do it for you.

Searle (1979:56) argues that these examples suggest the following generalizations:

**Generalization 1-** *S can make an indirect Commissive by asking whether or stating that the preparatory conditions obtain.*

**Generalization 2-** *S can make an indirect Commissive by asking whether or stating that the propositional content condition obtain.*

**Generalization 3-** *S can make an indirect Commissive act by stating that the sincerity condition obtain.*

Bach and Harnish (1979: 51) points out that a speaker offers an act to a hearer if the speaker expresses:

1. The belief that the speaker's utterance obligates him to act on condition that the hearer indicates he wants speaker to act.
2. The intention to act on condition that hearer indicates he wants speaker to act and
3. the intention that hearer believes that speaker's utterance obligates speaker to act and that speaker intends to act on condition that hearer indicates he wants speaker to act.

In making an offer, the speaker communicates to the hearer that s/he is not against carrying out a future action which is assumed by the speaker to have a positive sequences for the hearer but the speaker is not sure whether the hearer wants his action carried out (Trosborg, 1995: 9).

From what have been mentioned, it seems that there is an overlap in the whole or part of the felicity conditions proposed. This is due to the fact that an offer is considered a Commissive act. A commissive illocutionary act (Tsohatzidis, 1994: 220) is an act where the speaker commits himself to make actual state of affairs represented by the propositional content. Our argument is that in making an offer a speaker commits a hearer to act, or even both the speaker & hearer will be engaged in that accomplishment of an act. Consider:

- a. Can I help you?
- b. Won't you sit down?
- c. We'll have another drink.

In (a) the speaker will do some act on condition that the hearer accepts the offer and the speaker expresses his willingness and ability to do an act. In (b) the speaker expresses his wish that the hearer do the act, i.e., to sit down. As for (c) the speaker expresses his desire that he and the hearer will do the act on condition that the hearer expresses acceptance of that offer. An offer then is treated in this study as a commissive-directive act. Our next step then is to sit the felicity conditions for the performance of the speech act of offering in the light of the previous studies with some modifications.

#### IV. THE SYNTHETIC MODEL

The speech act of offering is said to be felicitous and performed successfully if it fulfills the following conditions:

**1. The Propositional Content Conditions:**

- a. S expresses the proposition of offer in his utterance.
- b. S predicates a future act of S and / or H on condition that H accepts A.

**2. The Preparatory Conditions:**

- a. H may accept or refuse A.
- b. S assumes H is willing that A be done.

**3. The Sincerity Conditions:**

- a. S wishes A to be done.

**4. Essential Condition:**

- a. S intends to make H recognize that S's utterance counts as a wish that A be done.

A set of semantic rules can be derived for the use of IFID (illocutionary force indicating devices) which will be appropriately used only if the felicity conditions of the illocutionary act are satisfied:

- a. The Propositional Rule:

The proposition of offer is to be uttered in the context of a sentence, the utterance of which predicates some future A by S and/or H.

- b. The Preparatory Rule:

The proposition of offer is to be uttered only if S assumes that H is willing that A is done.

- c. The Sincerity Rule:

The proposition of offer is to be uttered only if S wishes A is done.

- d. The Essential Rule:

The proposition of offer counts as a wish that A is done.

#### V. THE SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS

A. *The Propositional Content Conditions*

- a. Speaker expresses the proposition of his offer by saying "Have another piece of cake."
- b. He predicates that the hearer would have a piece of cake if he accepts speaker's offer.

B. *The preparatory Condition*

- a. The hearer may accept or refuse to have another piece of cake.
- b. Speaker assumes that the hearer is willing to have another piece of cake.

C. *Sincerity Condition*

Speaker wishes to give another piece of cake to the hearer.

#### D. Essential Condition

Speaker intends to make the hearer recognize that his utterance "have another piece of cake" counts as a wish to have another piece of cake.

### VI. TEXT ANALYSIS

Offers are realized by using various linguistic constructions. Imperatives are one of these constructions.

The grammatical criteria of this speech act are as follows:

1. **Mood:** Imperative.
2. **Agent:** 2nd person singular (implicit).
3. **Subject:** 3rd person singular (explicit).
4. **Tense:** Present.
5. **Voice:** Active.
6. **The type of speech:** Direct.

### VII. CONSEQUENCES FOR CROSS-CULTURE COMMUNICATION

This paper is an attempt to examine the possible structures that lead to the realization of the speech act of offering. It is through this paper that we shall continue to expand our awareness of language function and improve our understanding of cross-cultural communication. The current paper is of interest to Arab learners in order to maintain socially appropriate equivalence of offers in the target language (English). The present study then goes beyond the philosophical tradition put forth by Austin (1962: 150-163) and Searle (1969: 23-24) where talk dealt with a static product rather than dynamic process. This paper leads us to question some of the assumptions in the literature. While Searle and many other philosophers considered offer as a commissive act in which a speaker commits himself to do a future act, we have found that offers are pre-events commissive directive acts in which a speaker commits himself and/or hearer to do an action on condition of hearer's acceptance. We may classify offers according to *Orientation* into:

#### A. Speaker-Oriented Offers

In making such offers, the speaker commits himself to do certain future act. The effect of this act is assigned by the speaker himself and the hearer in this case plays the role of an observer. Consider:

-Do you want me to get you a chair?

#### B. Hearer-Oriented Offers

These offers are the act in which a speaker commits, or direct hearer to do certain future act if hearer accepts that. The assignment of the illocutionary act then will be or hearers part as in:

- Have a Pepsi.

#### C. Speaker-Hearer-Oriented Offers

Making an offer mostly involves two participants i.e. speaker and hearer. In such a case, the speaker commits himself and hearer to do certain act on condition that the hearer accepts to do the act specified in the propositional content of the speaker's offer as in:

- Perhaps, we should have another drink

An important question for speech act theory is the relevance between function and form. It has been argued that an account of the force of an utterance should not be exhausted by one of its syntax and semantics otherwise; the illocutionary act would collapse into the locutionary act (Holdcroft, 1994: 350-351).

Many philosophers claim that there is no clear one-to-one relation between **form** and **force** of an utterance. There are three literal forces: statements, questions, and command correspond to three types of sentences: imperatives, interrogatives and declaratives, respectively. As we have already observed in English, different structures may map the same illocutionary act as in:

- Have a drink. (Imperative)
- Will you drink? (Interrogative)
- We'll have a drink. (Declarative)

Imperative constructions usually include a verb and an object, if the verb is transitive, and if intransitive some other complement. The subject element is left out on the surface level but it is present in the deep level (you) unless special reasons (for example, emphasis) require an overt subject. The verb has the base form as in:

-You, take a cake

Arab learners tend to use imperatives to encode offers which is considered more polite than English, on the other hand using imperative as a direct strategy only in restricted context when the relationship between speaker and hearer is very close or in informal context whereas in formal context, an indirect strategy is preferred such as interrogative construction (Al-Sha'baan, 1999; Agha, 2005).

Interrogatives are types of sentences which are typically used in the expression of questions by using inversion of the order of the subject and auxiliary as in:

- Do not you want a drink?

Or by the use of interrogative particles:

-Will you have a drink?

Interrogative constructions are used for a wide range of illocutionary acts. However, what is note-worthy here is that the majority of offers are performed by using Interrogatives.

Interrogative-negative constructions in general constitute different speech acts (Sifiano, 1992: 146). In offers, interrogative-negative are those cases which presume a yes answer and function as a positive politeness device because they indicate that speaker knows the addressee's tastes, wants, habits and so on. (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987: 127).

Declarative offers are sentences which have the form of declaratives but have been claimed not to have the force of declaratives or the so called "explicit per-formative". Thus, when making an offer by using a declarative form the hearer's inference is that the speaker was making an offer rather than assertion. These utterances are to be treated as indirect speech acts.

Searle (1975, 1979) claims declarative-questions have the form of a statement in that they have no subject-operator inversion. These questions are realized by means of rising intonation, e.g.:

-I cannot take you to your hostel?

Having discussed the possible offer constructions we shall proceed types of modifications or strategies that are available to the speaker on various levels of politeness to perform the speech act of offering:

1. Imperative Mood:
  - Have a drink.
2. Hedged Per-formatives:
  - I would like to take you to your hotel.

3. Interrogatives:

A-Operator Inversion (yes no questions):

-Is there anything I can do tonight?

B-Modals:

-Can I help in any way?

4. Negative-Interrogatives:

-Won't you have an ice-cream?

5. Conditional Clauses:

-If you are in a trouble, I can help you.

6. Making Assertions:

-I can drive a while.

7. Making permissions:

-You can stay here as long as you wish.

8. Elliptical utterances:

-Just one.

9. Justifications:

-I don't think it will hurt you, drink it up.

10. Using Future Tense:

-We'll drink another cup of tea.

11. Using Past Tense:

-Should we get a drink?

12. Intonation:

-Another?

#### VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Having done a detailed analysis of the speech act of offering, the researchers have arrived at the following concluding points:

1. Speech act theory gives explicit recognition to the social or interpersonal dimensions of language behaviour. It reflects a new perspective of language and the way it operates. This discipline of pragmatic inquiry has emerged to study the real world conditions under which a sentence may be appropriately used as an utterance.

2. Conversation is a goal oriented cooperative speech act when people are engaged in a conversation, they normally have goals of communication in mind such as establishing social relationships or expressing emotions or directing people to do something.

Offers are pre-event commissive-directive acts expressing the speaker's expectation of the hearer with regard to prospective action, verbal or non-verbal.

3. When a given culture allows for more special directness in a particular situation than the other, a similar indirect strategy then, might lose its effectiveness when transferred from one culture into another simply because it is not blunt enough for the occasion. Western culture is prone to make offers by using indirect strategies, whereas in Eastern culture this mechanism might not always be effective.

4. The most common strategy used to encode offers in English includes the interrogative use of modal verbs "can, could, will, would, shall, should". These modals may further emphasize the addresser's recognition of the addressees freedom of action by using softeners such as "perhaps, if clauses etc.

5. English language is prone to use diminution to minimize the cost on hearer in English "some, little, a bit of" are commonly used.

6. Commonly, elliptical utterances are common in making offers and stand as complete sentences. This strategy is used frequently

when offering something to close friends (i.e. in informal contexts).

#### IX. CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to provide a detailed analysis of the speech act of offering grounded on the Theory of Speech Acts introduced by introduced by Austin's (1962) and which was later developed by his successor, Searle (1969) to understand the way utterances are and should be understood in pragmatic context. It was concluded from the paper that offers are pre-event commissive-directive acts expressing the speaker's expectation of the hearer with regard to prospective action, verbal or non-verbal. Moreover, it was also concluded that the most typical strategy used to encode English offers includes the interrogative use of modal verbs "can, could, will, would, shall, should". These modals may further emphasize the addresser's recognition of the addressees freedom of action by using softeners such as "perhaps, if clauses etc. Finally, it is believed that culture plays an important role in the variance of the speech act of 'offer'. Thus, the study recommends that speech acts in general and the act of 'offer' in particular should be validated in cross-cultural contexts.

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