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Research article

MITIGATION IN INDIRECT COMMUNICATION: IMPLICIT SPEECH ACTS

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to consider the mitigative characteristics of implicit speech acts used by the speaking subject in indirect communication. The relevance and scientific novelty of the work are due to the unrelenting interest of researchers in the study of various aspects of the indirect representation of intentions, among which the issues of distinguishing between implicit and actually indirect speech acts remain insufficiently studied to date. The appeal of communicants to implicit ways of verbalizing their intentions is due both to the individual and personal characteristics of the interlocutors, and to the socially determined norms and rules of communication that ensure its effectiveness in situations of cooperative communication.

The correct interpretation of implicit speech acts in indirect communication requires complex interpretation procedures and depends on a number of factors. These include, in particular, the level of formation of the communicative competence of the addressee, his desire or unwillingness to correctly read the hidden intentions of the communication partner, the attitude towards cooperativity or confrontation in communication, as well as the presence of a common zone of intersection of the individual cognitive spaces of the interlocutors.

As a result of the study, it was possible to establish that implicit speech acts, in contrast to indirect ones, are less conventional and are the result of the linguo-creative activity of the speaking subject. Implicit speech acts used in mitigatively marked indirect communication contain an implicit phatic intention that reflects the speaker's attitude towards maintaining and developing communicative contact.

Keywords: communication, speech act, mitigation, indirect, implicitness, speech behavior

Introduction

Studies of various aspects of the generation and interpretation of implicit information, communicative meanings, ways of transmitting the latter and the reasons for their occurrence in the process of communication do not lose their relevance to this day [Gogotishvili 2006, Gurochkina 2019, Dementyev 2018, Hidden meanings... 2007, Kobozeva 2000, Nesterova 2015, etc.].

The way of expressing meaning in communication is closely related to the linguo-creative competence of the speaking subject and involves certain intellectual efforts both on the part of the addresser in the implicit realization of their intentions, and on the part of the addressee in their adequate interpretation. At present, it is axiomatic that in the process of communication the speaker realizes not only the main intention that determines the leading strategy of the communicants' speech behavior, but also additional intentions, often implicit, which, however, largely determine the success and effectiveness of communicative contact. The relationship and hierarchy of intentions play an important role in the formation of the discursive "intentional

space” [Maslova 2007]. And since intentions are changeable and sometimes quite complex, there is a need for a non-standard way of expressing them. One of the most studied methods of indirect transmission of content to date is indirect speech acts [Baranov 2006, Gak 1994, Maslova 2007, Romanov 2005, Searle 1986, Tarasova 2005, etc.].

Materials and Methods

We share the opinion of the majority of linguists about the need to distinguish between two types of indirect speech acts – actually indirect and implicit. In this paper, we confine ourselves to considering the mitigative possibilities of one of these two main forms of indirect representation of intentions, namely, implicit speech acts, without setting as our goal the creation of a consistent classification of indirect speech acts. The study of implicit speech acts, in contrast to the actual indirect ones, characterized by conventionality in the verbalization of hidden meanings, is still given insufficient attention. In this regard, the study of this multifaceted phenomenon is very relevant, is of particular research interest and has undoubted practical significance.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the mitigative characteristics of the implicit speech acts as the most striking elements of indirect communication based on the material of British linguistic culture. The set goal is achieved by solving the following tasks: 1) determining the most essential characteristics of implicit speech acts; 2) analysis of mitigative parameters of implicit speech acts; 3) establishing the relationship between communicative mitigation and indirect communication.

The description of the mitigative potential of implicit speech acts is carried out using the methods of contextual analysis and intent analysis of the speech behavior of communicants in situations of indirect communication. As a result of the study, the mitigative characteristics of implicit speech acts in indirect communication are determined.

Results and Discussion

The problem of differentiating the indirect and implicit ways of verbalizing the communicative intentions of the speaking subject is one of the topical problems of the theory of indirect speech acts. The gradation of the illocutionary force of the utterance determines the degree of explicitness of the expression by the intention of the speaking subject. J.F. Allen and R. Perrault, analyzing the illocutionary force of the sentence “I’m tired”, note that the speaker’s goal may not be to report on the physical condition of the addresser, but to apologize for inactivity or complain [Alain, Perrault 1986: 326]. Among the indirect speech acts, the most studied at the moment are indirect directives, for example:

- *Actually, I just got a pain. Could you just grab me two pills? Considering what a light beer does to you, I think you’ll have one. Too weak to argue. Could you just turn on the tube for me, please? Thank you. I was wondering, could you grab a blanket? It’s kind of chilly in here.*

- *One blanket, coming right up.*

- *Oh, yeah, and could you just run down to the video place. A couple of good movies, you know, would just help ease my pain.* [Star 1990].

We agree with the opinion of E.S. Issers, according to which the high frequency of indirect requests in communication is due to the “effect of exceeding communicative efforts”. This effect is manifested in the fact that when verbalizing a request, the speaker expects maximum resistance from the addressee and therefore chooses the tactics “with a margin of safety” [Issers 2006: 128].

The differentiation of indirect and implicit forms of verbalization of the intentions of the speaking subject is based on the degree of discrepancy between the meaning of the statement

and its communicative meaning, as well as the level of standardization of the secondary illocutionary function. So, in indirect directive acts, the actual directive meaning practically replaces the direct one, becoming the main one in any context. Question *Could you give me salt?* does not imply an answer – *I can*. The addressee immediately correctly interprets the directive intention of the speaker and adequately responds to it in cooperative communication.

The degree of remoteness of the meaning realized in an indirect statement from the literal meaning underlies the classification of indirect speech acts by E.V. Miloserdova, which includes three groups of indirect statements: indirect speech acts proper, with a minimum distance, bifunctional statements perceived by the addressee in at least two senses - literal and indirect, and hidden or implicit speech acts, the interpretation of the true communicative meaning of which is possible only in a strictly defined context [Miloserdova 1991: 155–156].

E.A. Tarasova proposes to differentiate directives into two groups – direct directives and indirect incentives, which, in turn, include two subspecies – explicitly indirect and implicitly indirect incentive statements [Tarasova 2005: 103].

Also, two subgroups in the group of indirect speech acts, depending on the level of conventionalization of the secondary illocutionary function, are distinguished by N.I. Formanovskaya, namely, conventional and contextual-situational indirect statements [Formanovskaya 2007: 268].

Despite the differences in the names of the identified types of indirect speech acts and their number, most researchers agree that indirect speech acts are united by the conventionality of the forms of verbalization of their actual meanings. While implicit speech acts are characterized by situational and personal conditioning of the forms of representation of the intentions of the speaking subject in communication.

The presence of conventional behavioral patterns that are obvious and natural for communicants in a given communication situation is one of the main factors for the adequate interpretation of indirect statements, allowing the addressee to easily read the interlocutor's hidden intentions in them. However, the speaker, using implicit speech acts, is forced to trust the communicative competence of the addressee, his ability to correctly understand the intentions of the sender of the message, veiled in the utterance. According to V.V. Bogdanov, communication at the level of implicatures is a more prestigious type of verbal communication, since in order to understand many implicatures, the addressee must have an appropriate level of intellectual development [Bogdanov 1990: 21]. In this regard, it can be argued that the appeal of speakers to implicit speech acts allows the speaker to increase in the eyes of the addressee both his status as a communicatively competent interlocutor, and the status of the addressee. The purposeful increase in the communicative status of interlocutors noted above is defined in linguistics by the term “glorification” (communicative elevation) and serves to ensure positive communication [Zhang 2020].

Thus, the variation of the illocutionary function of the statement formed in the process of communication can be explained both by the individual communicative style of one or both communicants, and by certain norms, conventions of speech behavior in a particular ethnic society, among which communicative mitigation occupies a special place. Thus, in particular, K. Valtl defines indirectness, and, above all, various forms of indirect verbalization of directive intentions, as one of the forms of mitigation (*Abschwächung*) [Valtl 1986: 139]. Let us further consider how implicit speech acts and communicative mitigation are interconnected.

As noted above, the pragmatic functions of implicit speech acts can be very diverse – tact, showing respect, disposition and attention to the interlocutor, mitigation of directive, and much more. According to E.V. Miloserdova, the different relationship between the meaning

of the statement and its meaning is determined by two tendencies that define the process of communication in the modern world:

1) a socially conditioned tendency, which is characterized by depersonalization, averaging of speaking subjects and their communicative interaction, which determines the minimum discrepancy between meaning and sense and the desire of communicants for pragmatic unambiguity;

2) a psychologically conditioned tendency, manifested in the disclosure and consideration of the individual-personal qualities of homo loquens in communication, which, in turn, entails the speakers turning to implicit speech acts, making it possible to avoid undesirable categoricalness and unambiguity [Miloserdova *ibid*: 136]. The appeal of speakers to implicit forms of verbalization of their intentions, determined by this trend, is one of the key factors in the transition of communication from direct to indirect communication.

T.A. van Dijk also notes that an indirect speech act can become strategically necessary if the “direct” speech act turns out to be too negative for the subject of speech, or, one way or another, socially undesirable [Dijk 1989: 290]

In this regard, it can be argued that the interpersonal component of communicative contact and the individual-personal characteristics of communicants acquire special significance when verbalizing personally marked implicit meanings. The appeal of communicants to implicit forms of verbalization of their intentions is often ultimately aimed at maintaining and further developing communicative contact, ensuring its effectiveness, as well as protecting the communicative image of the interlocutors. These pragmatic characteristics of implicit speech acts are closely related to the category of communicative mitigation, the main content of which is the prescriptions of anti-conflict, non-categorical, non-impositive, glorifying and emotional restraint, determined by the maxims of politeness and aimed at minimizing communicative risks in interaction [Takhtarova 2008: 59]. Thus, we can conclude that mitigative strategies are actively used by speakers to represent hidden meanings in indirect communication.

It should be noted that communicative mitigation refers, in our opinion, to planned indirect communication, the purpose of which is to program the interpretation of the addressee in the direction desired by the addresser, in contrast to unplanned indirect communication as a consequence of the unpredictability of the communication process itself [Dementyev 2018: 142].

Planned illocutionary mitigation underlies the creation of indirect and implicit speech acts. At the same time, in our opinion, of particular interest are not conventional questions-requests, which, as noted above, have become practically speech clichés, but implicit speech acts, which are characterized by special linguo-creative efforts not only of the addresser when veiling their intentions, but also of the addressee in the process of decoding the latter, for example:

- *So why are you keeping Mark all to yourself?* - *Tess persisted.*

I love Tess dearly, but sometimes she can be awfully nosy.

- *We're talking about family matters,* - *I said, hoping she would go away.*

- *Are there wedding bells in the future?* - *Meaning between Mark and Sandra.*

I said, I'll tell you all about it later.

Tess looked miffed, but at least Wesley could take a hint. He guided her to another table [Cook 2004: 6].

However, in the planned indirect communication, not only directive speech acts can be subjected to mitigative modification. Speech acts that contain criticism of the addressee or persons associated with him, refusal to respond to a request, as well as other speech acts, the use of which in communication in a direct, unveiled form, can either lead to the termination

of communicative contact or the development of communication are also potentially conflictogenic in a confrontational, dissonant direction. By stating a fact related to the sphere of the addressee, these statements express the divergence of interests of the speaker and the addressee, the demarcation of personal spheres, the psychological distance and estrangement between them, which contradicts the phatic intention aimed at maintaining the positive nature of the interaction and, thereby, at maintaining speech contact. In this regard, the speaker, guided by mitigative prescriptions in situations of cooperative communication, resorts to means of indirect communication, mitigation the categoricalness of his statements.

Based on this, I.N. Borisova proposes to distinguish between the pragmatic meaning of speech behavior, correlated with the practical purpose of communication, and the communicative meaning, which is directly the communicative intention or intention of the speaking subject. At the same time, the same pragmatic meaning (for example, to distract the addressee from unwanted emotions) can be expressed through different communicative meanings (consolation, joke, compliment, anecdote, switching topics, etc.), embodied in various speech ways [Borisova 2009: 67].

As noted above, for implicit speech acts, the addressee's communicative competence, their ability to correctly decipher the speaker's true intentions, is of particular importance. And when implementing this type of indirect speech acts, there is a high probability of communicative failure when the implicit intention is interpreted incorrectly.

- *That was a nice little speech about the medicine Mother sent him.*

- *He meant the blancmange, I suppose.*

- *How stupid you are, child! He meant you, of course.*

- *Did he? - And Jo opened her eyes as if it had never occurred to her before* [Alcott 2021: 41].

In this regard, it is of particular importance to study the conditions for the success of implicit speech acts containing mitigation strategies. According to V.Z. Demyankov, the understanding of the implicit content of statements is provided by the principle of cooperation, which can be formulated as follows: "Understand in accordance with the expectations of the speaker at a particular stage of the conversation, the general (for the interlocutors) purpose and the direction of the exchange of remarks" [Demyankov 2005: 29]. N.D. agrees with this opinion. Pavlova, who notes that misinterpretation of the interlocutor's intentions can have various reasons - both possible interference in the communication process and uncooperative communicative attitudes of partners [Pavlova et al 2015: 17], for example:

- *At the first intersection, a policeman stopped him.*

- *Where are you off to like this?*

- *I'm going to work.*

- *Your work permit?*

- *You know very well that it doesn't exist.*

- *Yes, I know. But it can exist in other forms.*

Mohamed pretended not to understand.

The police officer said, - Too bad for you. That response may cost you a lot more. See you later [Jelloun 2009: 79].

According to V.V. Krasnykh, one of the important conditions for the success of the implementation of intentions in cooperative communication, including implicit ones, determining the success/failure of speech communication, in general, is the presence of a certain community of "knowledge" of communicants, including the community of symbolic means and social experience, defined by the author as the intersection zone of individual cognitive spaces (knowledge funds) of communicants [Krasnykh 2003: 84–85]. The larger the

area of intersection of individual cognitive spaces of communicants, the higher the probability of success of mitigation strategies in indirect communication - the addressee will be able to correctly decode not only explicit, but also implicit intentions of the subject of the utterance. Thus, the ultimate goal of a passive speech action will be achieved – the prevention of possible communicative risks and the preservation of communicative contact, which, in fact, is the implementation of a phatic function.

In this regard, the study of the relationship between mitigation and phatic in indirect communication is of undoubted interest. Intentions determined by mitigative prescriptions can be attributed to the communicative goals of the “second plan”, among which J. Dillard, K. Sergin and J. Harden distinguish 4 types of secondary intentions:

- 1) goals related to the ethical standards of the addresser, his self-esteem, self-expression;
- 2) goals that contribute to the effectiveness of communication, in particular, aimed at preserving the face of both the speaker and the addressee, obtaining social approval from the interlocutor;
- 3) goals that reflect the desire of the addresser to preserve and increase the values that are significant to him;
- 4) goals related to the addresser’s desire to control the situation, to avoid negative emotions [Dillard J., et al. 1989].

We believe that mitigation strategies serve to achieve all of the above goals in communication. In mitigative prescriptions, attitudes and rules, the following are reflected: the speaker’s desire to save face, both his own and the interlocutor (glorification prescription); the intention of self-presentation, since the speaker, using mitigation strategies, hopes to create the impression of a communicatively competent, tactful interlocutor; reflecting the speaker’s attitude to prevent or mitigate possible communicative risks, mitigative strategies represent the speaker’s desire to avoid unwanted negative emotions in the process of communication; and, finally, the appeal to mitigative strategies is due, in our opinion, to such communicative values as positive communication, cooperativeness, tolerance, tact, and so on. These intentions, reflecting in the aggregate the phatic macro-intention, form the intentional subtext of mitigative statements.

In phatic communication, truth, accuracy and objectivity in the verbalization of intentions give way to other parameters that determine phatic communication, namely, orientation to relationships, establishing and maintaining communicative contact [Vinokur 2005]. Proceeding from this, it can be assumed that implicit speech acts in the mitigatively marked indirect communication contain, along with illocutionary mitigation, implicit phatic intention, as an orientation to the preservation of communicative contact, determining the choice of the speaking subject in favor of implicit forms of verbalization of its main intention.

Conclusion

Thus, the speech choice of communicants, that defines which of the intentions will be presented explicitly in the utterance, and which will be implemented indirectly, implicitly, is determined, on the one hand, by the social norms and rules of a particular society or social group, and on the other hand – individual and personal characteristics of the interlocutors, various psychological parameters of communicative contact.

The appeal of speakers to mitigative strategies and tactics is a conscious verbalization of certain intentions of the speaking subject, aimed at ensuring conflict-free, cooperative communication. Mitigatively marked indirect communication, which includes implicit speech acts, is characterized by an increase in implicit phatic intention, carried out at the expense of mitigation.

The conducted research is of undeniable practical importance, as it allows a better understanding of the nature of implicit meanings, conventional and linguo-creative forms

of their verbalization, which, in turn, is important for the formation of the communicative competence of homo loquens.

The phenomenon of implicit speech acts, despite their active use in interpersonal communication, is still insufficiently studied. Various aspects of the formation of implicit meanings and their decoding, psychological, social, pragmatic and ethno-cultural characteristics of implicit speech actions, being increasingly involved in the focus of research interest, will, in our opinion, make it possible to better understand the cognitive-discursive mechanisms underlying the creation and interpretation of this type hidden meanings.

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