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Exploring Speech Act of English and Tshivenda Representatives and Directives

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Abstract. Competence in English pragmatics enhances the use of English in social contexts throughout the world. However, using English as a second language is always problematic particularly when it comes to the interpretation of speech act in English. The differences in structure and function between English and other languages such as Tshivenda are conspicuous. The current research explored Speech Act of English and Tshivenda representatives and directives among the Tshivenda-speaking people. The findings revealed that the Tshivenda-speaking people faced difficulties utilising English Speech Acts such as representatives, and directives. The research recommends frequent interaction between those proficient in English and Tshivenda-speaking people.

Keywords. Appropriateness, communication, misinterpretation, speech act

1. Introduction

The Speech Act theory is a philosophical phenomenon dealing with social behaviour and conventions for communication throughout the world. It involves a connection between “meaning and action with language” (Salleh & Yusof, 2021:78). In Speech Act, the speaker is committed to the hearer to act on propositional content (Geurts, 2019) in various activities including educational, economic, social, political, and religious domains. Its interpretation encompasses the way the intended meaning is conveyed among the interlocutors (Zhabotynska & Slyvka, 2020). It can produce enormous and far-reaching results or consequences on the hearers, negatively affecting people’s lives, and denying them their freedom (Anyanwu & Abana, 2020) of speech. Also, it commits the hearers to a course of action (Ezeifeka, 2018), urges them to execute a piece of instruction or change an existing state of affairs.

The misinterpretation of Speech Act by the non-native speakers of English is challenging. Even though they would like to use the language eloquently and fluently, unfortunately, few of them have enough command in this regard. Numerous studies on Speech Act have consistently been carried out all over the continents. In China, Tai and Chen (2021:1) found that second language (L2) users “may have the knowledge of a linguistic item but still fail to express its illocutionary force appropriately, or they may adopt a particular linguistic form to convey its pragmalinguistic function in an unconventional way”. In Indonesia, Wijana (2021) established that “illocutionary acts constitute the focal point of pragmatics” while the Malaysian Salleh & Yusof (2021) and Krishnan, Mello, Arumugam, Paramasivam & Ibrahim

(2021) discovered that illocutionary acts are used inconsistently. In South Africa, about six million people use English even if its variety reflects indigenous-language phonology, syntax, lexis, and fixed expressions (Lanham, 1984).

The University of Venda comprises multicultural community speaking different South African languages and remnants of other African languages. However, there is a lack of a single indigenous language that is accepted by all population groups (Gramley & Patzold, 1992) in South Africa. English is used as a principal *lingua franca* essential for oral or written communication (Wiana & Khairani, 2020). It is supposed to eliminate misunderstanding and fosters national unity and peace among various speakers of thirteen official languages in South Africa. Tshivenda-speaking people are expected to construct meaningful and complete sentences.

However, they still compose sentences that cannot represent the ideas they intend to convey in English because Tshivenda is not mutually comparable with other language (Paulos, 1990). The differences in the structure and the function of grammar between English and Tshivenda influence Speech Act misinterpretation (Lukáčová & Pavelová, 2017). In their attempt to use English grammar appropriately, most Tshivenda-speaking people transfer their first language knowledge into English. In the process, the interpretation of Speech Act (Lukáčová & Pavelová, 2017, Geurts (2019) results in the misunderstandings between the interlocutors resulting in the intended meaning of the propositions made being distorted.

The objectives of this research were to identify misinterpretations of Speech Act, to discuss the identified misinterpretation, and diagnose the causes of misinterpretations. Thus, it attempted to answer the questions relating to the types of misinterpretations identified them, and established the possible causes made by the Tshivenda-speaking people. To examine these misinterpretations, the Speech Act theory was used.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The speech act theory

The research was underpinned by the Oxford philosopher named John Langshaw Austin's (1962) Speech Act theory. Austin distinguishes between constative language (*locution*) – things and reports on reality with truth condition; and performative language (*illocution*) realised through Speech Act incorporating the speaker's communicative intention underpinning locution and targeting the listener (Zhabotynska & Slyvka, 2020). Speech Act was further developed in the work of Searle's (1965:221) who attempted to answer the questions on Speech Act and argues that "speaking a language means immersing oneself into a form of act bound by rules" (Salleh & Yusof, 2021:78). In addition, Allan (1986) asserts that Speech Act theory deals with how a language works when used by interlocutors in different contexts.

Speech Act is involved, yet a generally trivialised aspect of language study and can be potentially misleading. Its misinterpretation is complicated as every linguist has different insights about its category, classification, and strategy (Wijana, 2021). It is not only limited to verbal or written communication as non-verbal means also convey messages. Neither Austin nor his followers seem committed to the perception that gestures and other signals are part of the Speech Act (Lyons, 1988). Interpreting the intended meaning of the Speech Act label requires one's ability to match its patterns. Since Speech Act is enormously long and possibly boundless (Allan, 1986), utterances must be hypothesised when making predictions, requests, commands, advice, permission, thanking, condoling, effecting, baptism and greetings.

2.1.1. The notion of Speech Act

For the past decades, various scholars have tried to tackle the issue of Speech Act but unfortunately, no one seems to have ever made a convincing discussion. They give a detailed study of Speech Act, but their discussions are mostly scanty. They approve or disapprove of one another's views. In their discussion of the classes of Speech Act and their felicity conditions, they could only give the very same classes of felicity conditions with different names. Hence, the works of Finegan and Besnier (1989), Traugott and Pratt (1980), Allan (1986), and Lyons (1988) are more invaluable, unlike that of Parker (1986) and Coulthard (1994).

Finegan and Besnier (1989) claim that Speech Act entails actions that are carried out through the language because people occasionally *do* things including proposing a marriage, declaring a mistrial, swearing to tell the truth, firing an employee, greeting, complimenting, insulting, flirting, and seeking and supplying information. A great deal is accomplished using verbal acts; however, non-verbal actions can also convey meaning. Also, they argue that Speech Act involves actions that the speaker performs in a context concerning the hearer but they do not elaborate on their position any further. For them, Speech Act only deals with an utterance produced by the speaker to the listener and indicates the speaker's meaning. but cannot explain anything about the meaning of the 'sentence'. Allan (1986) quoted part of Searle's (1965:221) views as follows:

'It is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol or word or sentence which is the unit of linguistic communication, but rather it is the production of the token in the performance of the speech act which constitutes the basic unit of linguistic communication.'

Allan figures that hypothesis must be utilised to regard any utterance as a Speech Act because it operates in people's mental capabilities. He credits Austin, the Oxford philosopher (Serenio & Velasquez, 2019) in proposing that in every utterance, the speaker can state a fact or opinion or declare an umpire's decision. However, Lyons (1988) does not directly define Speech Act, instead, he only states that it renders explicit recognition to the social or interpersonal stance of language behavior. Therefore, he argues that Austin rarely used the term Speech Act as it is unfortunate and abstract. However, when Austin uses it, there is no clarity as to how much of Speech Act has been utilised regarding the utterances it intends to be cover. Here, Lyons argues that Speech Act does not refer to the act of speaking as a production of a spoken utterance but to something more abstract as non-linguistic communicative acts also fall within the category of Speech Act. To substantiate his argument, Lyons gives the next example:

'If X summons Y by using a manual gesture, X may be said to have performed a particular 'speech act' in Austinian sense.'

Eventually, he criticises Austin by arguing that although he developed his theory of Speech Act regarding English language, he did not accept the principle of the priority of the phonic medium as Speech Act does not simply entail an action done through the language, but also through actions.

2.1.2. Classifications of Speech Acts

Finegan and Besnier (1989) state various Speech Act identified by philosophers taking a functional approach to sentences in use, namely: representatives, commissives, declarations, directives, expressives, verdictives, and representational declarations. Traugott and Pratt (1980) classify Speech Act into different types, which do not significantly differ from those of Finegan and Besnier, especially in the labels used, for example: 'representatives', 'commissives', 'declarations', 'expressives', 'directives' and 'verdictives'. The difference between them is that

instead of using the term Speech Act they prefer to use the term ‘illocutionary acts’, and do not have ‘representational declarations’ in their classification. These scholars differ in the details of the applications. They state that ‘representatives’, ‘expressives’, and ‘verdictives’ are all intended to affect the addressee’s mental sets (representatives), their social attitudes (expressives), their judgments (verdictives) only indirectly intended to modify behaviour. ‘Directives’ are designed to get others to do something. ‘Commissives’ and ‘declarations’ establish states of affairs with few consequences for the addressee in ‘vows’; and with immediate consequences in ‘arresting.’

Allan’s (1986:190) discussion of the classes of Speech Act appears fullest. He indicates that in Lecture XII regarding the questions relating to doing things with words, Austin tentatively proposed a classification of Speech Act, however, there is no consistent principle for the classification. He has two major areas of Speech Act classification based on values, namely: Interpersonal acts such as constatives (truth values), predictives (probable – truth values), commissives (genuineness values), acknowledgments (appropriacy values), directives (compliance values), authoritatives (authority values); and declaratory acts (authority values). Unlike Traugott and Pratt’s (1980) six or seven Speech Act, Allan (1986) mentions eight.

His classification criteria comprise differences in the:

- (a) point or purpose of the ‘illocution’, for example, a request attempts to get the hearer to do something;
- (b) direction of ‘illocution’ between the words uttered and the world they relate to, as in: statements have a words-to-world fit; requests have a world-to-words fit;
- (c) expressed psychological states like a promise expresses the speaker’s intention to do something;
- (d) strength with which the ‘illocutionary’ point is presented, for example, ‘*I insist that ...*’ is stronger than ‘*I suggest that ...*’;
- (e) relevance of the relative status of speaker and hearer; for example, some ‘illocutionary acts’, like commands, are sensitive to participants’ status; others, like stating, are not;
- (f) orientation between speaker and hearer; for example, ‘boasts’ and ‘laments’ are speaker-oriented, but ‘congratulations’ and ‘condolences’ are hearer-oriented;
- (g) cohesion with discourse context in ‘*I command*’ versus ‘*I reply.*’;
- (h) propositional content indicated by ‘illocutionary’ force indicating devices like a report is about the past or present, and a prediction entails the present or future;
- (i) acts that can only be performed as ‘speech acts’ and those that cannot; as in: promising versus classifying;
- (j) acts that require institutional conditions to be satisfied and those that do not like baptizing does, but stating does not;
- (k) style of performing the ‘illocutionary act’ as the difference between announcing and confiding; and that
- (l) not all ‘illocutionary’ verbs are performative verbs; for example, *boast* and *threaten* are not.

They never stated ‘authoritatives’ and ‘predictives’. Allan makes a slight concept change and adopts Austin’s term ‘constatives’ in place of ‘statement’. He argues that a ‘statement’ has ‘fuzzy truth values.’ Also, he adopts the term ‘expressives’ in place of ‘acknowledgement’ as it has ‘acknowledgment values.’ However, Searle, Lyons, and Parker do not consider the principle of the classes of Speech Act; instead, they concentrate on the other

aspects of Speech Act. Most scholars recognise John Searle's expansion of the Speech Act concept.

Parker (1986:18) states that Speech Act consists of three separate acts: an act of 'saying' something, an act of 'doing' something, and an act of 'affecting' something. An act of saying something in the full sense of 'say' is called an 'illocutionary act' (Wiana & Khairani, 2020). An act performed 'by or because of saying' is called a 'perlocutionary act'. Lyons (1988:730, 731) states that a 'locutionary' act is "the production of the meaningful utterance;" an 'illocutionary' act is performed when one makes a statement or promise, issues a command, or makes a request, asks a question, or christens a ship. A 'perlocutionary act' is performed when people get someone to believe that something is so, persuade someone to do something, move someone to anger, or console someone who finds oneself in distress.

Every utterance performs one or more 'illocutionary acts' at the same time (Finegan & Besnier, 1989), as in: 'Can you bring me the red book?' comprises a 'locution' and an 'illocution' of Speech Act. They argue that its 'locution' part involves a 'polar' requiring a 'Yes' or 'No' while its 'illocution' entails the assumption of a request that the addressee recognises, and an action to be complied with or not is expected. Traugott and Pratt (1980) define a 'locutionary act' as the act of producing a recognisable grammatical utterance in the language while 'illocutionary act' entails the attempt to accomplish some communicative purposes including promising, reminding, greeting, warning, informing, and commanding. Besides 'utterance acts' and 'denotational acts' proposed by Allan (1986: 177) are dissimilar although they fall within the category of the acts that constitute Speech Act. He claims that although Austin does not distinguish between them, Searle realised this need. Further, he argues that recognising these differences is not different to identifying sentences from a language with an identified prosody.

Although different Speech Act scholars deal with the appropriateness of the utterance, their comments are similar. Finegan and Besnier (1989:330) postulate that a "declaration depends on well-established conventions" (appropriateness conditions) including a question, a marriage, a promise, an arrest, and an invitation. They are classified into four categories: preparatory condition, sincerity condition, essential condition, and propositional condition. Parker (1986) differs from and other Speech Act scholars regarding the category of appropriateness conditions. He argues that appropriateness conditions make each Speech Act valid and non-defensive, and knowing them constitutes knowledge of the rules of language use. Coulthard (1994:22) calls them "constitutive rules for the 'illocutionary act' of promising." They include 'propositional content rule', the 'preparatory rule', the 'sincerity rule', and the 'essential rule'. In Speech Act, when the speakers make utterances that are incongruent with their beliefs, intentions or conduct themselves in some non-compatible intentions to which they are committed, they may be judged guilty of breach of commitment (Lyons, 1980).

The Speech Act theory involves Cooperative Principle enunciated by Paul Grice in 1975. Cooperative Principle represents the "knowledge that verbal communication is an activity in which individuals work together to accomplish shared mutual and beneficial goals" (Traugott & Pratt, 1980:237). Being a cooperative speaker means speaking with a viable communicative purpose *vis-à-vis* the hearer in context; whereas being a cooperative hearer means trusting that the speaker has a reliable and reasonable purpose in speaking and doing the necessary work to discern that purpose. Cooperative Principle is crucial to all communications, whereas failure to cooperate, gives rise to communicative misfires. Finegan and Besnier's (1989) Cooperative Principle consists of the 'maxim of quality', the 'maxim of quantity', the 'maxim of relevance', and the 'maxim of manner. The maxim of 'quality' states "a truth, and based on sufficient evidence" (Parker, 1986: 22). The maxim of 'relevance' involves the maxim of 'relations Lyons

(1988). Therefore, speakers and writers must say only what they believe to be true; and they must have evidence for whatever they say. The maxim of ‘quality’ is central, and without it, the other maxims are of little value. The maxim of ‘quantity’ is said to require speakers to refrain from contributing more information than is required.

Sometimes the speaker quietly and unostentatiously ‘violates’ this maxim by giving as much of the relevant information as they could, or they may lie (Lyons, 1988). The maxim of ‘relevance’ requires people to be relevant to the subject of conversation. To avoid ambiguity and obscurity regarding the maxim of ‘manner’, speakers must be brief and orderly in their utterance. However, the maxims are violated if speakers *float* i.e., fail to fulfil the maxim (Coulthard, 1994). Thus, speakers can be faced with a *clash* between two maxims and fail to be specific as they ought to be in saying something. Thus, listeners must infer what is being conversationally implicated.

2.1.3. Indirect speech act

‘Indirect speech act’ is the “speech performed indirectly through the performance of another Speech Act (Coulthard 1994:27). However, this idea is complicated as sentences that can be used to perform Indirect Speech Act may be used to perform the direct ones. Similar words can be used to perform different Speech Act different words can be used to perform the same Speech Act. An Indirect Speech Act demands the speaker’s and hearer’s knowledge of lexical structure, vocabulary, and phonology. Since different situations requires different ways of uttering similar things, the hearer must hypothesise the speaker’s proposition. Hence, the interlocutors must know that an “utterance consists of sentences spoken with prosody” (Rajar 1980:131) in languages.

Finegan and Besnier (1989) postulate that Cooperative Principle is indirectly cooperative for it involves an apparent violation of Speech Act. They argue that Indirect Speech Act violates the literal meaning of the ‘locution’ as it differs from its intended meaning. The hearers and the readers identify Indirect Speech Act in terms of its similarity to direct Speech Act, an assumption that the interlocutors follow the Cooperative Principle, and identification of its intended meaning with the help of knowledge of the context and the world around them. They argue that to interpret Indirect Speech Act, hearers must use the maxims to sort out the discrepancy between the literal meaning of the utterance and the appropriate interpretation intended by the addresser. However, Parker (1986) argues that Indirect Speech Act consists of the literal meaning and non-literal meaning in Speech Act. One example of literal Indirect Speech Act is:

‘Sitting at a table in a café, butter on his side, but out of his reach, John could say ‘I’d like some butter’.

This utterance is literal as ‘John’ means what his words say, and his utterance is ‘indirect’ as he uses a ‘declarative structure’ to perform an indirect ‘illocutionary act’ of requesting which would require the structure of an imperative sentence, or often an interrogative one. The non-literal level of utterances poses challenges (Kaburise, 2012) to the L2 learners, for example, if the little child is in a doctor’s waiting room, playing and yelling at the top of the voice, and someone remarks: ‘Why don’t you yell a little louder?’, it is a non-literal ‘indirect Speech Act’. The speaker does not mean what the words say, but may mean that there must be no ‘yelling at all (Parker, 1986). The speaker utilised an interrogative structure to perform the ‘indirect illocutionary act’ of requesting the child to be quiet.

Finegan and Besnier (1989) posit that there is a relationship between Indirect Speech Act and shared knowledge that offers a sufficient background about the context of the interaction and the society in which the interlocutors live. They estimate that the amount of background information about language, culture, and environment needed to interpret Indirect Speech Act is considerable. The listeners' knowledge helps them to recognise the propositional links between appropriate linguistics sentences (Raja, 1986). They claim that "metaphors violate the maxim of quality" as the literal meaning and the intended meaning are different. Thus, the speakers' utterances are not likely known, but it can be hypothetically understood.

The view that the mental processes used by the hearers or readers to interpret metaphors are the same as those used to arrive at the meaning of Indirect Speech Act is flawed. To interpret Indirect Speech Act, English users go through a complex reasoning process. Apart from asking and answering questions, issuing directives, making statements; Indirect Speech Act may be used humorously or often politely, as in: 'Can you bring me the blue book' is perceived polite, less confrontational, and abrasive than a command 'Bring me the blue book.' It concerns social background, culture enabling the interlocutors to mutually understand a language activity, the speaker's piece of language and action, the intended meaning, the listener's perception, and the meaning necessitating Speech Act interpretation. Indirect Speech Act depends upon the interlocutor's knowledge of the speaker's intention in making utterances, the performer's intended action and the utterance or action itself. It is an efficient tool of communication as it conveys two or more messages simultaneously. Thus, it involves an "act of uttering something, an act of performing something" (Salleh & Yusof, 2021:78), an act of affecting something, and how both (or all) interlocutors understand them.

Although there are five categories of Speech Act classification, namely: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, the focus was on the statements and requests since they are frequently used in Speech Act. The following differences between Tshivenda and English regarding the structure, and the functions are recognisable:

3. Differences between English and Tshivenda Speech Act

3.1.1. English versus Tshivenda representatives: statements

In Tshivenda, the main verb *bika* (to cook) does not indicate the form of tense. Tense is indicated by a tense marker *khou* (am/is /are and their past forms); *do* (going to / and will or shall and their past forms); adverbial phrases of time *mulovha* (yesterday), *matshelo* (tomorrow), *mahola* (last year), and 2021. Thus, Tshivenda differs from English significantly. It has three tense forms (Milubi, 1985), namely: simple present, continuous and progressive. However, Paulos (1990) argues that Tshivenda has four tenses:

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Simple present | : | <i>U a lila</i> (He/she cries). |
| 2. | Present continuous | : | <i>Vha khou lila</i> (They are crying). |
| 3. | Future | : | <i>Ndi do lila</i> (I shall cry). |
| 4. | Perfect | : | <i>O lila</i> (He/she has cried). |

In Tshivenda, a "complete verb does not usually stand on its own in a sentence" (Paulos 1990:208). It is used together with a tense marker *khou* (am/is/are) and their past forms or *do* (going to/and will or shall and their past forms), for example, *Vha khou shuma*, (They are working) and *Vha do shuma* (*They will work*). In this situation, a complete verb can stand on its own in the imperatives, as in *Shuma!* (Work!). English has more than four tenses including the simple present tense, the simple past tense, the present perfect tense, the pas perfect tense, the progressive tense, and the future tense related to the verbs. The main verb

can stand on its own, for example, ‘He moves’, and ‘They come’. The comparative aspects between the two languages are:

Tshivenda	English
(a) Simple present:	Simple present:
(i) <i>Ndi a nwa tie.</i>	I drink tea.
(ii) <i>Ndi nwa tie.</i>	I drink tea.

In (a), (i) is optional while in (ii) it is not.

(b) Present perfect:	Present perfect:
<i>Ndo nwa tie.</i>	I have drunk tea.
(c) Future:	Future:
<i>Ndi do nwa tie.</i>	I shall drink tea.
(d) Progressive:	Progressive:
(i) Continuous:	
<i>Ndi khou nwa tie.</i>	I am drinking tea.
(ii) Progressive:	
<i>Ndi kha di nwa tie.</i>	I am still drinking tea.

In (i) and (ii), Tshivenda has two distinct forms of the simple present tense while English has one. and referred to as ‘long’ and ‘short’ forms. The ‘long form’ has a characteristic vowel sound *a* /a/, while the ‘short form’ lacks it. Tshivenda distinguishes between the present continuous and the progressive forms, while English does not. English discerns between the present habitual verb form following at least the third person singular subject noun phrase. The third-person singular subject adds a basic /-s/ whose allomorphs are /-s/, /-z/ in rest/rest-s/, beg-s/beg-z/ and kiss-es /kIs-Iz/.

Tense is marked in the form of the verb in the simple present tense and simple past tense, for example: ‘They come’ (present) and ‘They came (past). An adverbial phrase of time can be added to specify time in ‘They come on Sunday’ (present) or ‘They came last Sunday’ (past). In Tshivenda, there is no formal change in the verb between the present and the past simple forms. Only the adverbial phrases of time and the form of the subject noun phrase (NP) may differentiate the two tenses, for example, ‘Vha da nga Swondaha’ (They come on Sunday) or *Vho da nga Swondaha*’ (They came on Sunday). Tshivenda can also take *Vho da Swondaha yo fhelaho* transferrable into ‘They came last Sunday’ (past). In the first utterance, the subject NP *Vha* makes the verb *da* the present tense; while the second has *Vho* to go with the same form of the verb *da* for the past. Vhavenda frequently use the simple present verb forms when they have adverbial phrases of the past times, as in *‘Last week I bring my shoes’ instead of ‘Last week I brought my shoes’.

In Tshivenda, the past simple and the present perfect forms are used interchangeably indicated by the vowel sound –o /o/ (Paulos, 1990) in the subject or tense marker. They both refer to a point in the past time. In English, only the ‘simple past’ tense does; the perfect tense indicates a period stretching from the past and including the present in ‘I saw him once last year’ (past and complete), ‘I have seen him once this year’ (perfect and incomplete). Tshivenda uses *Ndo mu vhona* (I saw/have seen him). The adverb phrase of time may be added, whether the past of the perfect is intended, for example, *Ndo mu vhona mulovha* (*I have seen him yesterday or I saw him yesterday).

In Speech Act, the Tshivenda-speaking people make a wrong transfer as in: *‘She has seen them yesterday’ (ungrammatical) instead of ‘She saw him yesterday’ (grammatical) or *‘He has passed his examination last year’ (ungrammatical) instead of ‘He passed his examination last year’ (grammatical). Some tenses, are not marked in the verb; and only realised in the adverbials of time. In English, the speaker is mentioned last in a list of the NP order, especially the subject in ‘John, Mary and I went’. However, in Tshivenda, the speaker (first person) comes first, as in: ‘I and John’. Although this is not ungrammatical (Salleh & Yusof, 2021); it is unidiomatic.

In Tshivenda declaratives, the subject NP is often repeated in the same clause in *Mulalo na munna wawe vho ya hayani* (*Mulalo and husband her they went home) translatable into ‘Mulalo and her husband went home’ in English. The subject *Mulalo na munna wawe* (Mulalo and her husband) is repeated as the third person plural pronoun *vho* (they) indicating the intended meaning. In English, ‘they’ is omitted. The subject NP is repeated in *‘The man he hates my father’ (The man hates my father) as ‘The man’ is repeated in the pronoun ‘he’.

The possessive pronouns come after the noun in Tshivenda, but in English, it comes before it like in *Vele and cousin his they fought translatable into ‘Vele and his cousin fought?’ In English, the modified noun phrase, and the subject NP may be compound, for example, ‘The man and his wife’, or an NP modified by prepositional phrase such as ‘The man with his wife’. In Tshivenda, the two NPs *munna* (the man) and *musadzi wawe* (his wife) are often split before and after the main verb. English accepts: ‘The man and his wife visited the patient’ or ‘The man with his wife visited the patient’. Tshivenda takes *Munna o dalela mulwadze na musadzi wawe* (*The man he visited the patient and his wife) changeable into ‘The man visited the patient and his (visitor’s) wife’, ‘The man visited the patient and the patient’s wife’, or ‘The man and his wife visited the patient’.

3.1.2 English versus Tshivenda directives: interrogatives

In English polar question, the operator comes after the subject NP; it is moved to a position before the subject NP in polar questions. A declarative question ‘He will come’ can be a polar question ‘Will he come?’ In Tshivenda, the operator does not come before the subject. The polar question structure has essentially the same word order as that of the declarative sentence from which it is transformed. The rise on the final item signals the declarative question *U do da* (He will come) becomes a polar question *U do da?* (He will come?). When forming a polar question that may often sound like a declarative statement (Chakim & Dibdyaningsih, 2019), an affirmation, or a surprise rather than a regular and appropriate question; it is common for Vhavenda say: ‘It is true?’

In Tshivenda, a WH-question (Q), an equivalent of WH-word including *mini* (what) and *lini* (when/how) usually comes at the end of a question. In English, it comes before the operator. For example, ‘What are you doing?’ (English), and *Ni Khou ita mini?* (You are doing what?) acceptable in Tshivenda where the order of words is like declarative sentences. However, the question word comes at the end of the sentence. The helping verb and the subject are reversed in English Q. They are fronted when Tshivenda structure is transferred into English, as in: ‘What are you doing?’ The Tshivenda-speaking people can say the unusual, or a surprise ‘You are doing what?’. Since the subject ‘You’ comes before the operator ‘are’, it is structurally a declarative sentence. What is intended to be a Q might just sound like a haughty retort in ‘You’re doing what?’ Interrogatives are not formed by either subject-verb inversion or a fronted Q word in Tshivenda like in English.

In English, when one needs something from someone, it is normally asked in the form of a polite request, taking the form of a polar question ‘Can you give me R5?’ or ‘May I please borrow your pen?’ or a declarative sentence ‘I wonder if you could lend me R5’. Tshivenda speakers normally use *Ndi khou humbela R5* (*I am asking R5 or I am asking for R5) instead of ‘Can you give me R5?’ or ‘May you give me R5?’ *‘I am asking...’ is the polite way of making a request in Tshivenda. Hence, misuse of Speech Act occurs as one cannot make its appropriate interpretation (Zhabotynska & Slyvka, 2020). ‘I am asking for R5’ is an announcement, rather than a request for R5. Else, it can be an answer to one who wants to know or a confirmation of the act being done.

3.1.3 English versus Tshivenda declaratives: negatives.

In English, negatives are formed by placing a negative word not after the operator. For example, ‘I am coming’ can be ‘I am not coming’. In Tshivenda *Ndi khou da* (I am coming) can be *A thi khou da* (I am not coming). Also, it is noticeable that the subject NP *Ndi* changes to *A* and the negation affects the subject NPs. A negative word *-thi/-si/-ha/songo*, the equivalent of ‘not’ is used to form negatives (Wiana & Khairani, 2020), however, it comes before, and not after, the operator. In English, it is ‘They are not coming’.

3.1.4 English versus Tshivenda declaratives: prepositions.

The preposition *nga* (in/on) is used before adverbials of time (especially those including nouns). For example, *Musumbuluwo* (Monday), or *Vhuria* (Winter). *Nga* is used for both prepositions: ‘in’/‘on’. Vhavenda often use them interchangeably, and frequently wrongly (Krishnan, et al., 2021). Nevertheless, English accepts ‘He will come on Monday’ and rejects *‘He will come on Monday/winter’. They frequently use ‘on’ in all forms of time adverbials. In Speech Act, they are likely to say *‘He sleeps on the bed’, and not ‘in’ it. In their uncertainty, they misinterpret the preposition ‘on’ in English. The conceptual paper explored the Speech Act of English and Tshivenda representatives and directives by synthesising the Speech Act Theory and information from other writers to present a new context that provided a springboard to fill knowledge gaps.

Conclusions

In line with the research question regarding the types of misinterpretations of Speech Act, the findings revealed that they could not differentiate between the structures and the functions regarding the use of representatives including declarative statements, the interrogatives, the negatives, and the prepositions between the two language; and directives. They could not use English word order correctly. The subject NPs were repeated more than enough. The position of possessive pronouns and the modified noun phrase were desecrated. They used continuous form in places where it was not required. Also, the Tshivenda-speaking people could not distinguish between the past tense and the perfect tense forms.

This research highlights pedagogic thinking not only around the academic writing social discourse, and further research but also to the interpretation of Speech Act. Also, it brings awareness and opportunities to minimise the misinterpretation of Speech Act. However, it was not an attempt to obfuscate reality by abstracting the perception of Speech Act theory, rather a suggestion of current innovative strategic interventions. Since misuse of Speech Act is not only limited to Tshivenda speakers in the University of Venda, this research is beneficial to all Tshivenda-speaking people. The noticeable differences between Tshivenda and English can never be a source of Speech Act misinterpretation as the Tshivenda speakers can no longer say or write what they do not mean or give different meanings to what they hear or read.

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