



# The Relationship between Persuasion and Speech Act Theory



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## Abstract

The present paper aims at clarifying the relationship between persuasion and speech act theory. It has to show how each one is related to the other. There is a controversy whether the verb persuade is in itself an act or it is achieved by other acts. In this paper, the researcher is going to look at persuasion from the lens of speech act theory. Within the domain of speech act theory, persuasion can be realized from two dimensions. **First**, persuasion is itself as a macro-act that is achieved by other micro-acts not necessarily the verb persuade itself. **Second**, persuasion can be generated as the perlocutionary effect of the whole situation.

**Key words:** Speech acts, persuasion, perlocutionary effect, macro-act, micro-acts.

الخلاصة

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى توضيح العلاقة بين الإقناع ونظرية فعل الكلام. يقع الجدل فيما إذا كانت كلمة الإقناع بحد ذاتها فعل أو فعل يتحقق عن طريق أفعال أخرى. سيقوم الباحث بالنظر إلى الإقناع من خلال نظرية فعل الكلام. يتم أدراك الإقناع من خلال اتجاهين. الأول، أن الإقناع بحد ذاته هو الفعل الشامل الذي يتم تحقيقه من خلال أفعال أقل شمولية، ليس بالضرورة الفعل يقنع. الثاني، أن الإقناع يمثل التأثير الناتج من كل الموقف.

## 1.1 Persuasion

Persuade is one of the catenative verbs ,i.e., they refer to group of verbs that are followed by another verb within the same clause. The first verb in the sentence is a catenative, the other is a follower. Persuade takes the

construction (NP1 V NP2 [(NP2)] ). Semantically, it refers to someone's inducement to act. For example:

### 1. Ipersuaded John to meet Mary.

NP1: I, Catenative Verb: Persuade, NP2: John, Second verb: meet.

The catenative verb persuade requires the availability of subject and object. (Palmer, 1987: 172,193-2)

Individuals' differences in achieving goals necessitate the upbringing of persuasion. Persuaders are likely to guide people through reasons and emotional appeals towards the adoptability of what is favored by the persuader. The persuadee is given free will to choose and adopt certain beliefs, behaviors or attitudes. So, persuasion is "the activity of attempting to change the behavior of at least one person through symbolic interaction". (Reardon, 1991:1,3)

In fact, persuasion refers to "all linguistic behavior that attempts to either change the thinking or behavior of an audience, or to strengthen its beliefs". So, it is concerned with the employment of linguistic strategies to achieve a

persuasive effect. (Halmari and Virtanen, 2005:3)

Accordingly, persuasion is a conscious intentional activity, which is initiated out of the persuader's realization of a threat to an existed state. The threat is for the persuader's self-concept. So, persuasion carries an implicit message to the persuadee to change his\her inadequate or wrong thinking. Hence, it is a reciprocal process, i.e., actions that are produced from both participants can affect the process. For instance, when the persuader is speaking, the persuadee's use of body language can affect the former. (Reardon, 1991:2,210)

Moreover, persuasive communication requires the availability of some variables: Recipient, message, source and context.(Baumeister and Finkel,2010 :217). More important, attention is also required in persuasive communication. Winans states that persuasion "is the process of inducing others to give fair, favorable, or individual attention to propositions". Each person cannot be stimulated without certain stimuli. (Mccroskey, 2016:237)

Generally, Lakoff (1982) mentions that persuasive discourse is the "nonreciprocal attempt or intention of one party to change the behavior, feelings, intentions or viewpoint of another by communicative means". Similarly, Scheidel (1967) defines persuasion as "the activity in which the speaker and listener are conjoined and in which the speaker consciously attempts to influence the behavior of the listener by transmitting audible and visible symbols". (Altikriti,2016:48). So, the intention of persuasion is in the mind of one participant ,i.e., the speaker who uses communicative means to persuade the other participants ,i.e., the hearer.

The researcher concludes that persuasion is a process that necessitates the existence of a persuader, a message and a persuadee ,i.e., other participants or the persuader him\herself. Also, the process of persuasion requires change in attitudes, actions or behaviors.

## 1.2 Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory (henceforth, SAT) is specified typically with actions that

require performance throughout certain utterances. (Yule,1996:47). It refers to all kinds of actions from aspirating a sound to constructing a clause. All acts that cannot be completely covered under the territory of phonology, grammar and semantics, SAT is concerned with them. (Sadock,2006: 53)

SAT refers "to the whole communicative situation". It includes the context of what the participants utter and the features of paralinguistics. As a result, the process of interaction will be clarified.( Black, 2006:17)

"To say something is to do something", this is the first implication about speech act which is initiated by Austin(1962:18). His posthumous book How to Do Things with Words (1962), which is in fact a series of lectures, has great impact on linguistics especially on the pragmatic domain.(Mey, 1993:92)

Primarily, Austin(1962:3,8) distinguishes between constative and performative acts. Constatives refer to utterances that might be true or false. They do not reflect an action, but they denote merely statements and assertions. Conversely,

performatives denote a kind of action. For example:

## 2. I give and bequeath my watch to my brother

This sentence expresses an act of bequeathing in uttering a will.

For such a performative sentence to occur, Austin(Ibid.:14-15)

convincingly proposes a set of conditions or what he calls happy conditions:

1. There must be a convention in determining the specification of words, persons and circumstances.
2. There must be appropriateness between the chosen person and circumstance on the one hand and the invocation of uttering on the other.
3. All participants should invoke their own feeling and thoughts behind uttering.

However, performatives can be viewed in explicit or implicit ways. Explicit utterances consist of performative verbs, but implicit utterances require a realization of the speaker's intention to grasp meaning. (Lyons, 1997:728-729)

Substituting the original distinction between constatives and performatives, Austin(1962:108) anatomizes the process of uttering acts. He

distinguishes between three types of acts:

1. Locutionary acts: They refer to the pure utterances that are produced throughout speaking in a meaningful way. They involve the uttering of certain sounds to that of full sentences.
2. Illocutionary acts: They refer to the function that is indicated by utterances.
3. Perlocutionary acts: They refer to the effect that accompanies the uttering of words.

Austin(Ibid.:101) illustrates the role of the above acts in the following examples:

### 3. He said to me "Shoot her!".

It expresses a locutionary act. It means by shoot to shoot and refers by her to her.

### 4. He urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her.

It expresses an illocutionary act which presents an act of real shooting

### 5. He persuaded me to shoot her.

It expresses a perlocutionary act which its effect is apparent in persuading the hearer.

Modifying what have been stated by Austin, the philosopher Searle (1969:12-17) states that "all linguistic communication involves linguistic acts". Each symbol,

word, or sentence that is represented under certain conditions can be regarded as a speech act. His privilege pours out from his unique classification of speech acts into:

1. Assertives or representatives: They refer to the speaker's commitment of the expressed proposition. So, the speaker has to check whether the proposition is true or false by testing his\her ability to characterize it. The assertive verbs are such as state, boast, complain, conclude, deduce, describe, call, classify, identify, etc. For example:

**6. I state it is raining.**

The speaker asserts the truthiness of his/her proposition by showing the ability to describe the state of the weather.

2. Directives: They require some sort of action on the part of the hearer who has to act in accordance with the speaker's attempts of attraction. Directive verbs are such as ask, order, command, request, beg, plead, pray, entreat, invite, permit, advice, etc. For example:

**7. I order you to leave.**

The speaker makes an order that is of leaving, so the speaker has to commit action and leave.

3. Commisives: They refer to the speaker's willingness to do an action in the future. Commissive verbs are such as promise, vow, pledge, etc.

**8. I promise to pay you the money.**

The speaker makes a promise that is of paying the money, so s\he takes the responsibility to do the action.

4. Expressives: They reflect the inner psychological state of the speaker. The expressive acts have to be presupposed from the content. Expressive verbs are such as thank, congratulate, condole, deplore, welcome, etc. For Example:

**9. I apologize for stepping on your toe.**

The speaker expresses an apology which the hearer has to presuppose from the situation which has been already happened.

5. Declaratives: They represent the realization of affairs in the illocutionary force-indicating device. There is a correspondence between the propositional content and reality. The performance of these acts relies on extra-linguistic institutions, i.e., church, court, and private property. For example:

#### 10. War is hereby declared.

An authoritative person declares the coming of war, for example, the president. (Searle, 1979:12-17)

Convincingly, all the acts that have been mentioned show that when a speaker utters a sentence, he/she means literally and exactly what he/she says. Such acts are described as direct speech acts. However, there are cases in which the speaker utters a sentence intentionally but means something more than the apparent meaning. For example:

#### 11. Can you pass the salt?

Obviously, the sentence carries the meaning of a question but in reality, it is an indirect request. It tests the hearer's ability to infer the request. Such acts are described

as indirect speech acts. (Searle, 1979:32,36)

### 1.3 Speech Act Theory and Persuasion

There are different kinds of speech acts in everyday communication such as asserting, compliment, greeting, etc. According to Austin(1962:102,116-8) ,the verb to persuade is also a speech act. Austin distinguishes between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. The former has expected "bringing about the understanding of the meaning and the force of locution." And the later has expected "bringing about states of affairs in the normal way" that is demanded "inviting a response". So, persuasion is related to the perlocutionary act which is the act that is performed "by saying something".

Accordingly, Bach and Harnish (1979:15,81) state that speech acts are communicated successfully when the speaker's intention is recognized by the hearer. This is due to the shared context between participants. Assuredly, this is the concept of mutual contextual beliefs (MCB) that is existed between

speakers and hearers. In some respects, this is a parallel to Aristotle's notion of common ground between persuader and persuadee. In addition to that, Bach and Harnish mention that perlocutionary acts are intended acts that cause effects called "intentional action." Eventually, in order to get others persuaded by using speech acts, the hearer must understand the speaker's utterance which represents the illocutionary force, and then s/he has to give the suitable response which represents the perlocutionary effect.

From the classes of speech acts, Searle(1969:21) regards persuasion as directive speech act. Directives require the speaker's intention to direct the hearer to make some sort of action. In relation, persuasion is in essence requires the speaker's ability to direct the hearer to take action. Directives are the commonly used class in persuasive discourse. They can be used in their direct or indirect force. The pragmatic strategies that delocalize or distance the speaker from his/her deictic center can be used to soften the

illocutionary force of directives. (Hardin,2010:158)

Relatively, persuasion can be realized through mutual speech acts. Persuasive utterances are not merely functioned as directive speech acts but also occur within the other classes: Assertives, commissives, expressives and declaration. As a result, directives are classified as directives in the form of direct utterances and in the form of indirect utterances, i.e., other acts that are not directives, but they carry out the sense of directness. (Taufik,2014:192)

Further, an act of persuasion is described as a stimulus that changes, reinforces or shapes a response. The response actually is a change in the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the topic of the act of persuasion. So, an act of persuasion is really an input that can be observed and an output that can be observed by change in audience's behavior. (Walton, 2007:48)

## Conclusions

The present paper has arrived at the following remarks:

1. According to speech act theorists such as Austin(1962) and Searle(,1969,1979), persuasion is an act by itself that can be
2. . Persuasion can be achieved by other acts not necessarily the verb persuade.
3. Persuasion is the perlocutionary effect that is generated from any situation that has a persuasive impact.

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