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TEXT-ACT THEORY

0.0. I shall try to review the Speech-Act Theory and the Text-Act Theory and the assumptions behind them critically. I will not dispute the validity of either theory, but I would like to point out certain undesirable consequences of the speech-act theory and offer some suggestions in the light of text analysis. In the first part of this paper I will give a brief description of the above mentioned theories in the traditional framework and compare them with each other. In the second and last part of this paper, I will try to show the superiority of the text-act theory and classify texts in the light of the text-act theory, an application of speech acts to texts.

1.1. The Theory of Speech Acts

It has long been recognized, by linguists and philosophers alike, that the referential or cognitive meaning is not the only kind of meaning available in a language and linguistic communication is not exclusively a matter of producing and recognizing statements which convey information. Consequently, there has been a change of focus from cognitive meaning as an inherent property of words and sentences to the acts and actions performed by virtue of using language. This is pointed out by Searle.

> It is not, as has been generally supposed, the symbol or word or sentence, or even the token of 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 constitutes the basic unit of communication.
>
> (Searle, 1971, 39)

J.L. Austin in «How to Do Things with Words» distinguished between three kinds of acts one does in speaking.

1.1.2. Locutionary Acts: Acts one does in uttering a sentence with a determinable sense and reference. These acts are performed to communicate. They can also be called linguistic acts. The study of the surface structure i.e., the study of the fields like phonetics, phonology, syntax and semantics. The scientific and technical information about the units of language. It is the propositional meaning of a sentence. The basic meaning, literal meaning of an utterance which is conveyed by the particular words and structures which the utterance contains.

1.1.3. Perlocutionary Acts: Non-linguistic acts which are intended consequences of what one says. Perlocutionary acts are hearer-oriented. One may convince someone by arguing, and may frighten him by warning, one may get him to do something by making a request etc.

By uttering the sentence «You don't look a day over fifty» one may flatter an elderly lady to it was addressed. The effect of such utterances may be intentional or unintentional.

1.1.4. Illocutionary Acts: Acts we perform in uttering a sentence. This includes a variety of acts we perform in speaking such as questioning, requesting, ordering, performing, apologizing and the like. These acts are performed by more than one thousand performative verbs. Some common of them are 'state, describe, assert, approve, welcome, comment, command, order, request, criticize, apologize, object, demand, argue etc. These are speech acts that we accomplish by communicating our intent to accomplish them.

Speech-act theory deals with language on the basis of utterance or sentence. The components of an ideal speech-act model are speaker, hearer, message, intention and proper chaneel. Speech-act is an intersection between speaker's belief and hearer's belief. There is a shared belief between speaker's and hearer's belief of world.

2.0. The Theory of Text Act

The studies in linguistics and language philosophy have been focused on text rather than sentence recently. Some linguists and language philosophers gave up the view that the ultimate unit in language is sentence, instead, they tended to accept the view that the ultimate unit in language is text. Text is taken as any piece of written or spoken language by definition. Brown and Yule (1983:6) defined text as the verbal record of a communicative event. Some other linguists have attempted to provide a more formal account of how speakers of English come to identify a text as a forming text. van Dick, de Beaugrande, Dressler, Halliday and Hasan are concerned with the principles of connectivity which bind a text together. I will confine the subject to a brief outline of the account provided by de Beaugrande and Dressler. They consider a text as a communicative occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality; cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality.

These standards defined by de Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 3-10) as a mechanism which combines texts as single contributions into discources as sets of mutually relevant texts directed to each other are:

Cohesion: It concerns the way in which components of the surface text are mutually connected within a sequence. It rest upon grammatical dependencies.

Coherence: It concerns the way in which components of the textual world, i.e., the configuration of concepts and relations underlie the surface text, are mutually accessible and relevant. A concept is definable as a configuration of knowledge which can be recovered or activated with more or less unity and consistency in mind. Relations are links between concepts which appear together in a textual world.

Intentionality: It concerns the text producer's attitude that the set of occurrences should constitute a cohesive and coherent text having some use of relevance for the receiver, e.g. to acquire knowledge or cooperation in a plan.

Informativity: It concerns the extent to which the occurences of the present text are expected v.s. unexpected or known v.s. unknown.

Situationality: It concerns the factors which make a text relevant to a situation of occurrence.

Intertextuality: It concerns the factors which make the utilization of one text dependent upon knowledge of one or more previously encountered text.

Here text in its simplest version is taken to mean any utterance, spoken or written, whatever length that fills the place text, the linguistic bridge between the speaker and hearer. Consequently, either «Oh» or any considerably long essay could equally appropriately fit in the category text. The text begins under conditions involving a certain speaker and a certain hearer within a certain situation and the end of the text is signalled by a shift or change in speaker or hearer or situation. In accordance with the assumption underlying the speech-act model in order for the sentence to carry meaning, the hearer either assumed or constructed for himself a context of speaker intention.

Ross, in 1970, suggested the possibility of a pragmatic analysis which would claim that certain properties are present in the context of the speech act and that syntactic elements can refer to those properties. The contextual elements such as a subject «I» and an indirect object «you» and a verb like saying would be presumed to be more or less in the air. It has been well substantiated that such elements are somehow peresent in the circumstances around the speech act, but speech act theory represents the first serious effort to bring the contextual properties 'down to earth'. Searle objects to the phrase 'in the air' in reference to speakers and hearers insist thatthe «I» and «you» of the speech act are very much 'on the ground' speaker, hearer, time, and place belong, the term *context* as it will be used here, must be defined.

> It seems to me that one can investigate
> these questions by grabbing the bull by
> the horns of the dilemma, and trying to

state the principles of pragmatics which
influence linguistic form...

(Georgia Green, 1974: 194)

2.1. Etimologically context means anything and everything with or around the text, the segment of language under consideration. It includes the entire set of properties related to any one communication act. Traditionally, a distinction between the verbal and non-verbal context is made. The verbal context includes the sentences and words before and after the utterance and the non-verbal context includes all else in the speech situation.

2.2. Having defined context, main constituent both in the speech act and text act, we can define the text act. The text act model, with the addition of the text act reader, perceives the speech act as a wave thus a part of real communication process. The text act reader in reconstructing the orginal context makes certain assumptions about the identity of the writer and reader, the sincerity of the writer and time and place with the context. For example, under the identity condition the text writer, whether he appears in overt structure or covert structure is identical to the writer or source in context.

The speech act theory, with its simple duality of speaker-hearer relations, fails to make adequate allowance for irony and mistaken interpretations. The text act theory, however, with its adition of text writer and text reader and the individual text act reader in a complex of relations allows for such language realities.

Text act theory enlarges and extends the speech act theory by building a framework which identifies the participants and selected elements of their contextual hierarchies to allow for certain phenomena of written texts. In place of the simple speaker-hearer participants, it suggests a writer and reader in a context, a text writer and text reader within the text itself, and individual text act reader who stands outside the text within his own contextual hierarchy. Among these participants there is a complicated network of relations all of which are involved in the act of communication.

3.0. In the last part of this paper I will consider the context in four kinds of discourse, and the means available to the participants by which they conventionally identify the speaker, hearer, time and place within these discourses.
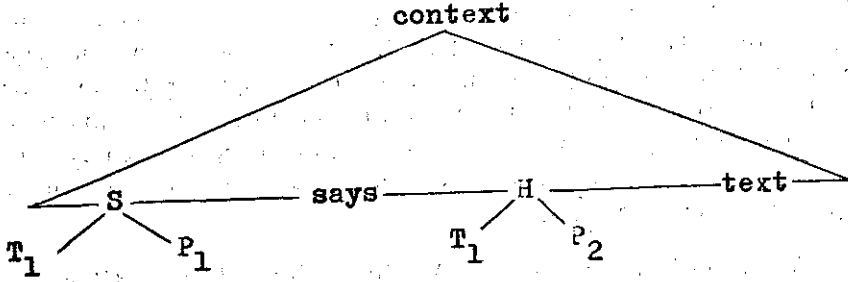
3.1. Ordinary Spoken Discourse

In ordinary spoken discourse the context of the speech act is visually and audially apparent to the participants. The speaker is the person physically attached to the vocal organs who produces the utterance. The hearer category includes the person or persons to whom the utterance is addressed and the participants share the time of the utterance and; to varying degree, place. The time of the context of ordinary spoken conversation is shared by both speaker and hearer.
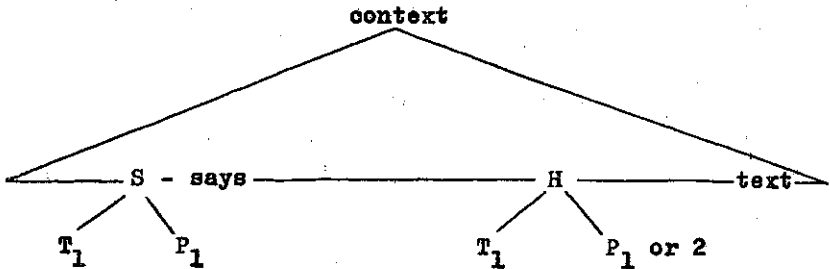
S : speaker
H : hearer
T : time
P : place

3.2. Displaced Spoken Discourse

Displaced spoken discourse where the praticipants use the other than human device to transmit the utterance. It is a recent and rapidly developing kind of language use and one that has vast social and cultural impact in the twentieth century in certain language communities. The distinguishing characteristic in these discourses is that within the context of the speech act, speaker and hearer share time but not place.

$$\text{context}$$

$$S \;\text{---}\; \text{says} \;\text{---}\; H \;\text{---}\; \text{text}$$

$$T_1 \quad P_1 \qquad\qquad T_1 \quad P_2$$

News, political speeches, spoken conversation come under this category.

3.2. Recorded Spoken Discourse

Recorded spoken discourse differs from ordinary spoken discourse and displaced spoken discourse in two important features. First, the immediate pragmatic context of speaker, hearer, time and place is no longer present. The visual or audial image of the speaker on the tape is not the real speaker. The context speaker has become a part of the text, in the same way the speaker in ordinary discourse becomes «I» in the sentence.

3.3. Written Texts

In written texts the participants share a common time and to some extent a common place. In ordinary spoken discourse the identity of the physical speaker is obvious. But in a newspaper article, one considers who the speaker is. On the other hand, who is the reader?

> Tarihi Evler Derneği (İstanbul)
> Türkiye Tarihi Evleri Koruma Derneği bugün
> ve Salı günü geleneksel Türk mimarisini ve
> içinde bulunduğu sorunları konu alan bir
> dizi konferans düzenleyecek......
>
> (Cumhuriyet, 26 Eylül 1988)

Consider the above - mentioned newspaper article. The reader is presumably the people of İstanbul. But if the article is read by someone in Sivas two days later, how does that reader relate to

the event or to the original reader or to the time «bugün» (today) and «Salı» (Tuesday)? How does he/she interpret «Tarihi Evler Derneği»? Is the reader in the model the people of İstanbul who read the article or is he/she the reader in Sivas who reads it two days later? Is it possible to eliminate any of these readers all of whom are so obviously participants in the speech act and still consider the model adequate?

Again with a text such as Atatürk delivered about fifty years ago, can Atatürk be considered to be performing an act about fifty years after he made the speech and the reader, the original audience, for which he delivered it, or do thousands of readers who have read it since participate in the speech act and, if so, in what relation to Atatürk and to the original audience? Taking account such cases, the speech act theory seems to be inadequate.

As a conclusion speech act theory as it is presently stated in linguistic studies does not appear to account for such cases. Its terminology in many instances has been too narrowly restricted. In spoken conversation - the speaker, the hearer, the time and the place - become far more complex as texts exist apart from their writers in different times and places with a succession of readers. In order to account for these phenomena speech act theory must be extended to encompass a text act theory which is an assumption that an adequate theory of language should attempt to account for all forms of discourse.
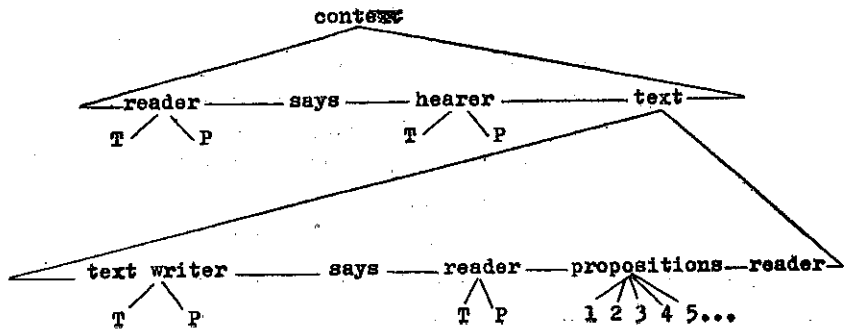
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