

A SPEECH ACT APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH SENTENCES IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Citation: Akinkurolere, S.O., Ayodele, V.O., Kumuyi, O.O., Ogidan, O.F. & Ijadimine, O. (2020). A speech act approach to the teaching of functional classification of English sentences in selected secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 1-11

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of speech act as a pedagogical impetus in the teaching and learning of English Language. The focus on using speech act approach in teaching sentences in English among Secondary Schools attracted this study, with the view to achieving better and effective academic performance among the This paper examines the concept of speech act as a pedagogical impetus in the teaching and learning of English Language. The focus on using speech act approach in teaching sentences in English among Secondary Schools attracted this study, with the view to achieving better and effective academic performance among the Secondary School students. New effective methods are being employed by teachers of English to teach the subject. Hence, the application of a functional approach in consonance with Searle's classification is crucial in the research. Adequate attention is focused on locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, which are relevant in defining the functional classification of the English sentences. The results of the research work form the basis of the discussion and recommendations to provide a further contribution to effective teaching of sentences of English language among Secondary Schools in Ondo State.

Keywords: pedagogy, Speech act, locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary

INTRODUCTION

A sentence is the highest level of grammatical rank-scale because any grammatical analysis regards a sentence as the highest. Apart from tenses, another crucial aspect that students need intensive and extensive knowledge is the functional classification of sentences.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "a sentence is a set of words expressing a statement, a question or an order, usually containing a subject and a verb. In written English, a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop/period (.)". This submission has given an insight yet it does not capture the classification of the sentences effectively. Hence, a sentence is a clause that makes a complete thought. Meanwhile, it does not matter whether a subject is well-stated or not.

The speech act approach to the teaching of English sentences is premised on the linguistic approach of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1994) through the linguistic framework of Speech Act Theory (Mey 2006). This theory allows teachers to understand the underlying acts of sentences and apply the same in teaching the students which promote wider and better understanding. Gasparatou (2017) posited that Speech act theory is supposedly applicable to all human communication and education is probably its very best arena.

Applied Linguistics is a sub-linguistic field of language that focuses on the application of theories of language and communication in the teaching of language; hence, it has been observed that the speech act approach to the teaching of English sentences has not received much attention as scholars have examined speech acts in other discourses. Among these are political speeches of Presidents (Ayeomoni & Akinkurolere 2012; Abuya 2012), editorial comments (Ijadimine & Aminu 2014) and Houses of Assembly Speakers' speeches (Akinkurolere 2016). These studies are pragmatic in orientation. Therefore, this study intends to pay attention to the gap that has been observed in Applied Linguistics.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at applying the speech act approach to the teaching of English sentences in selected secondary schools in Ondo State. Thus, the main thrust of this research is to achieve the following objectives:

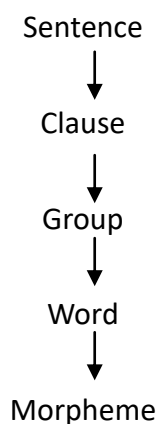
1. The teaching of the functional classification of English sentence through the speech act approach;
2. The teaching of structural classification of English sentences;
3. Assessment of the students; and
4. Comparison of students' performances as a basis for appropriate recommendations

LITERATURE REVIEW

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) was a shift from Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG). According to Lamidi (2000), the rule is an important aspect of TGG, which captures the linguistic behaviour of the native speaker or hearer. Indeed, such rules are descriptive because they focus on structural change and the intuitions of native speakers about their language (Egbe, 2005). Also, there was no consideration for the second language speakers of English using English sentences.

Systemic grammar is a total shift from previous grammatical theories that attempted a description of the structure of grammar. Systemic grammar developed from scale and category linguistic practiced in the early years of 1960s. The model was propounded by M.A.K. Halliday. However, Bamisaye (2000) claims that the systemic grammar employs the terms 'Rank Scale' and 'Rank Shift' to explain the relationship among units, while Asiyanbola (2006) defines rank scale as the basic units into which grammar can be divided while rank shifting implies a linguistic occurrence in which a smaller grammatical unit encapsulates or contains a higher unit.

The units can be arranged on a scale according to their sizes, using rank scale.



No wonder, SFL became more popular and acceptable. According to Akinkurolere (2012):

Systemic Linguistics is significant among other grammatical models because of the high premium placed on meanings in the analysis of language and its perception of language as a social activity.

The systemic linguists owe it a duty to discover how the forms of language can be related to its social functions, therefore, attaching great importance to the sociological aspect of language. It is, therefore, pertinent to examine the grammar of a language before classifying

the various needs that it meets. The various options of meaning that are available to language users correspond with certain functions of language. The basic functions are:

- (i) **Ideational function** — This function revolves round the speaker's experience of the real world including the inner world of his consciousness.
- (ii) **Interpersonal function** — Language serves to establish and maintain social relations; that is, for the expression of social roles which include communication roles created by language itself.
- (iii) **Textual function** — Language provides the process of making links with itself, this enables speaker or writer to construct text or connect passages of discourse that is situationally relevant.

The three basic functions can be reflected in the structure of a clause or a sentence.

The Speech Act Theory has its roots in the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Indeed, language performs different acts: to appreciate, to promise, to insult, to appoint, to criticize, to nullify, to name, to educate, etc. and the more the purposes for the use of language, the more the functions that language serves (Akinkurolere, 2016). Speech Acts are 'verbal actions happening in the world' (Mey, 2006). Speech acts have three aspects: locution, illocution, and perlocutionary.

It is pertinent to note that Austin (1962) argues that actions are usually performed when an expression is uttered and these are performed in three ways: the process – locutionary act, the social act– illocutionary act and the effect on the hearer(s) (whether intended or unintended) – perlocutionary act. These are explained by Akinkurolere (2016) as follows:

A locutionary act is an act of saying something; that is, the act of producing an utterance...*The illocutionary act* is the social act performed by the speaker: making a promise or statement, commanding or requesting, asking a question, etc...*The perculotionary act* is the production of consequences on the hearer. It includes effect or influence on the feelings, thoughts or actions of the listener/hearer unlike locutionary acts. Perlocutionary acts could be inspiring, persuading, consoling, etc.

These aspects of speech acts are the linguistic tools that will be applied to the teaching of English sentences.

METHODOLOGY

This research study covered three selected secondary schools in Ondo State. The schools were selected on the basis of one from each of the three senatorial districts. Only one hundred students were chosen from each of the selected secondary schools. In the three zones, schools were selected by grades. The research subjects were drawn from Senior Secondary One (S.S.1) Class. The selected schools are Emure Grammar School, Emure-Ile (Grade B) -Ondo North, Methodist High School, Oke Aguda, Ondo(Grade C)-Ondo Central, and StellarMaris Grammar School, Okitipupa (Grade A)- (Ondo South). Students in each school were taught the functional classification of English sentences with the aid of a projector and assessed based on the objectives. This formed the basis for the discussion. Also, recommendations were based on the results of the students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There was no basis for pretest or post-test. Students were taught and examined on the basis of classes of sentences, that is, functional and structural classification. Students' test was based on 10 marks for each category of sentences. The scores of students were recorded as Score A under functional classification category while Score B reflected the scores of the students in structural classification test.

In the course of analysing the data, there was no basis for separating the scores of students according to schools. This is further premised on ethical considerations since comparing performances in schools is not within the scope of the research. However, one hundred and fifty students were selected randomly from the three schools on the basis of fifty students from each school and their scores are presented below:

Table1: Students' scores

S/N	Score A	Score B	Mean Score
1	10	09	9.5
2	05	03	4
3	04	03	3.5
4	08	05	6.5
5	06	03	4.5
6	07	03	5
7	07	01	4
8	06	03	4.5
9	07	05	6
10	03	05	4
11	08	01	4.5
12	07	01	4
13	03	03	3

14	05	03	4
15	10	05	7.5
16	04	05	4.5
17	07	05	6
18	04	03	3.5
19	06	07	6.5
20	10	03	6.5
21	07	05	6
22	04	05	4.5
23	06	01	3.5
24	03	03	3
25	07	03	5
26	09	01	5
27	05	03	4
28	05	03	4
29	07	01	4
30	08	01	4.5
31	04	05	4.5
32	10	05	7.5
33	09	05	7
34	09	05	7
35	06	09	7.5
36	07	05	6
37	05	05	5
38	03	05	4
39	07	05	2.5
40	04	01	2.5
41	04	03	3.5
42	05	01	3
43	07	03	5
44	03	01	2
45	07	03	5
46	08	03	5.5
47	06	03	4.5
48	04	01	2.5
49	06	03	4.5
50	04	01	2.5
51	07	03	5
52	05	07	6
53	10	07	8.5
54	10	07	8.5
55	10	05	7.5
56	04	01	2.5
57	05	05	5

58	04	05	4.5
59	03	01	2
60	10	01	5.5
61	06	03	4.5
62	09	05	7
63	09	03	6
64	05	07	6
65	07	03	5
66	06	03	4,5
67	04	03	3.5
68	10	07	8.5
69	10	09	9.5
70	08	04	6
71	10	09	9.5
72	05	01	3
73	10	07	8.5
74	09	05	7
75	03	03	3
76	10	05	7.5
77	10	05	7.5
78	10	05	7.5
79	10	05	7.5
80	08	09	8.5
81	10	03	6.5
82	10	03	6.5
83	10	05	7.5
84	10	05	7.5
85	06	05	5.5
86	10	03	6.5
87	08	09	8.5
88	09	05	7
89	09	05	7
90	07	03	5
91	10	05	7.5
92	10	05	7.5
93	10	05	7.5
94	10	05	7.5
95	08	09	8.5
96	10	03	6.5
97	10	03	6.5
98	10	05	7.5
99	10	05	7.5
100	06	05	5.5
101	10	03	6.5

102	08	09	8.5
103	09	05	7
104	09	05	7
105	06	09	7.5
106	07	05	6
107	05	05	5
108	03	05	4
109	07	05	2.5
110	04	01	2.5
111	04	03	3.5
112	05	01	3
113	07	03	5
114	03	01	2
115	07	03	5
116	08	03	5.5
117	06	03	4.5
118	04	01	2.5
119	06	03	4.5
120	04	01	2.5
121	08	01	4.5
122	04	05	4.5
123	10	05	7.5
124	09	05	7
125	09	05	7
126	06	09	7.5
127	07	05	6
128	05	05	5
129	03	05	4
130	07	05	2.5
131	04	01	2.5
132	04	03	3.5
133	05	01	3
134	07	03	5
135	03	01	2
136	07	03	5
137	08	03	5.5
138	06	03	4.5
139	04	01	2.5
140	06	03	4.5
141	10	09	9.5
142	05	03	4
143	04	03	3.5
144	08	05	6.5
145	06	03	4.5

146	07	03	5
147	07	01	4
148	06	03	4.5
149	07	05	6
150	10	09	9.5
Mean Score	6.8	4.0	5.4

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The overarching aim of the study was to investigate the viability of the speech act approach in enhancing the learning experiences of the students. This was demonstrated through the scores of the students in the test on the functional classification of English sentences. The mean average score of one hundred and fifty students was 6.8 out of a total score of 10. This was quite impressive as the mean score of the same students for the structural aspect of English sentences was 4.0. Indeed, this made the mean score of the students in both aspects to be 5.4.

The implication of the study connotes the relevance of speech act approach to the teaching of the functional classification of English sentences. This value could never be overstressed due to the significant difference in the performance of the students. This would increase the performance of students, not only during internal examinations in their schools but during external examinations which include but not limited to West African Senior School Certificate Examinations, National Business and Technical Examinations Board and National Examinations Council.

It is noteworthy that the scores were not really on the high side. The reason for this may not be far-fetched as students perceive researchers as visiting teachers and there was an observed gap in students' engagement in one of the schools. It would have been more engaging assuming their regular teachers were the ones that taught them. It was also noted that the students were not familiar with technology-enhanced classroom teaching.

The application of the speech act approach to the teaching of the functional classification of English further justifies the fact that words are better understood through acts inherent in them. The demonstration of a functional classification of English acted out in video clips was consistent with the assertion of Austin (1962). Indeed, Gasparatou (2017)'s argument that education is the best context for the application of Speech act theory has been proved beyond a reasonable doubt. The outcome of this research further explains the argument that that is an interwoven relationship between words and actualities in the real world.

CONCLUSION

The study provides evidence to support the appropriateness of speech act approach to the teaching of English sentences; specifically, the teaching of the functional classification of the sentences. The crucial aspects of the approach are mastery of speech act theory and its basic aspects and demonstration of sentences according to the functions therein through video clips. The function identified acts demonstrated in the sentences was a central theme in the teaching and learning experiences. This makes the approach symmetrical and ideal as a teaching strategy.

It has further provided more intellectual insights into innovative pedagogies of teaching through the application of speech act theory in the teaching of English sentences. It would also enrich teachers' understanding of the application of speech act to English sentences in Nigeria. In addition, it will facilitate adequate learning and understanding on the part of the students

RECOMMENDATIONS

The application of innovative pedagogies into the teaching of English language would remain a continuum. More so, the world is embracing a new normal that requires less of traditional classroom teaching but online teaching. The creation of videos to support teaching is best explored in online and technology-enhanced settings. By this, students have engaged actively in the learning process as they watch video clips that simulate learning activities.

The speech act approach may not be relevant in the teaching of structural classification of English sentences but another strategy, which could be created from mathematical or statistical experience could enrich teaching and learning experiences on the structural classification. Furthermore, teachers are to the speech act approach and utilize it in the teaching secondary school students through a seminar that should be sponsored by the Ministry of Education.

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