BUSINESS DISCOURSE AS AN ILLOCUTIONARY ACT

Mukaddas Kodirova
Lecturer of Department of Philology, Termiz State Pedagogical Institute, Termez, Uzbekistan

ABOUT ARTICLE

Abstract: This article offers a comprehensive view of business discourse as a series of illocutionary acts, drawing on key theories and examples to illustrate the concept's relevance in business communication. Also, in this article, illocutionary acts of business discourse have been viewed as a series of assertives in business communication, directives and their role in business, commissives and commitments in business, expressives and corporate culture and declarations and changing business realities.

INTRODUCTION

Discourse is a text that is formed before the eyes of the speaker. As the Uzbek linguist U.I. Shukurov said, discourse consists of words or sentences, and the content of the speech is often gathered around the concept of "reference" called "speech topic" [6:12]. However, T.A.Shiryaeva emphasizes that the typology of the field discourse, including "business discourse", has not been developed, that the business discourse has not yet been fully comprehensively analyzed from the point of view of communication, and the systemic features have not been consistently studied [7: 54]. Therefore, we believe that it is important to conduct research on this topic.

Business discourse is a complex and multifaceted area of study that intersects linguistics, communication, and management. Understanding the dynamics of business discourse is essential in a globalized economy, where communication is a key driver of organizational success. One powerful way to analyze business discourse is through the lens of speech act theory, particularly focusing on the concept of illocutionary acts. This approach provides insights into how language functions not only to convey information but also to perform actions within a business context.

Business discourse involves the language and communication practices within a business context, including negotiations, meetings, emails, reports, and presentations [2: 9-13]. In this discourse, language is not merely a tool for exchanging information but a medium through which actions are performed. This concept is grounded in speech act theory, particularly in the notion of illocutionary

acts. Understanding business discourse as an illocutionary act provides insights into how language functions beyond mere statements, influencing decision-making, persuasion, and relationships within the business environment.

The pragmatic approach to business discourse emphasizes the context in which communication occurs and the intended illocutionary force behind utterances [5: 43]. For instance, in a business meeting, when a manager says, "We need to cut costs", the illocutionary act might be a directive for the team to find ways to reduce expenses. However, the effectiveness of this illocutionary act depends on how it is interpreted by the listeners, their understanding of the context, and the power dynamics at play.

Speech act theory, originally developed by philosopher J.L. Austin in his seminal work "How to Do Things with Words" (1962), and later expanded by John Searle, distinguishes between three types of acts performed when a sentence is uttered: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

Locutionary Act: This refers to the actual act of saying something and involves the utterance itself, including its phonetic, phatic, and rhetic aspects.

Illocutionary Act: This is the core of speech act theory. It refers to the intention behind the utterance and the social action it performs. For example, when a manager says, "You are fired," the illocutionary act is the act of dismissing the employee.

Perlocutionary Act: This refers to the effect the utterance has on the listener, such as persuading, deterring, or inspiring.

In the business context, the illocutionary act is particularly significant because business communication often involves not just conveying information but also executing actions such as making decisions, giving orders, making promises, and negotiating deals.

The concept of illocutionary acts originates from the work of philosopher J.L. Austin in his seminal book "How to Do Things with Words" (1962) [1: 37]. J.L. Austin proposed that when people speak, they do not only say things but also do things with their words. For example, when a manager says, "I approve this project", they are not merely making a statement but also performing the act of approving. This act is called an illocutionary act, distinguished from locutionary acts (the act of saying something) and perlocutionary acts (the effect on the listener).

John Searle further developed Austin's ideas, categorizing illocutionary acts into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations [4: 17]. Each category represents a different way in which language can function as an action. In business discourse, these illocutionary acts are prevalent and can significantly shape interactions and outcomes.

Business discourse can be viewed as a series of illocutionary acts that are embedded in the daily communication practices of organizations. These acts include:

1) Assertives in Business Communication. Assertives are statements that convey information, beliefs, or descriptions of the world, such as reports, updates, and analyses. In business, assertive acts are used to assert facts or viewpoints, as seen in statements like "The market share has increased by 10% this quarter". These acts serve to inform and build a shared understanding among stakeholders. However, beyond merely informing, assertive acts can influence perceptions and decisions, thereby functioning as strategic tools in business communication.

2) Directives and their Role in Business. Directives are illocutionary acts that attempt to get the listener to do something, such as requests, commands, or suggestions. In a business setting, directives are crucial for coordination and action. For example, a directive like "Please submit the report by Friday" not only communicates a request but also sets expectations and timelines. The effectiveness of

directives in business discourse often relies on the power dynamics and relationship between the speaker and listener.

3) Commissives and Commitments in Business. Commissives are acts where the speaker commits to a future course of action, such as promises, offers, or threats. In business, commissive acts play a critical role in negotiations and agreements. When a company representative states, "We will deliver the product by the end of the month", it is not merely a prediction but a commitment that binds the company to that timeline. The illocutionary force of commissives helps in building trust and accountability in business relationships.

4) Expressives and Corporate Culture. Expressives are acts that express the speaker's psychological state or attitudes, such as apologies, congratulations, or condolences. In the business context, expressives contribute to the maintenance of corporate culture and relationships. For instance, saying "We appreciate your hard work on this project" goes beyond acknowledging effort; it reinforces positive behavior and boosts morale, aligning with the company's values and culture.

5) Declarations and Changing Business Realities. Declarations are acts that bring about a change in the external situation through their utterance, such as appointments, resignations, or contract signings. In business discourse, declarations are powerful illocutionary acts because they directly alter the state of affairs. A CEO announcing, "I hereby appoint you as the new manager", is performing an act that changes the organizational structure instantaneously. Declarations are central to formal business procedures and organizational changes.

The Illocutionary Force in Business Strategy. Understanding business discourse as illocutionary acts highlights the strategic use of language in achieving business objectives [3: 28]. The illocutionary force of a speech act—the intention behind it and its effect on the listener — can be harnessed to persuade, negotiate, manage conflicts, and build alliances. Effective business communicators are those who can skillfully navigate these acts, aligning their language with the intended business goals and the context of the interaction. For example, in negotiations, the choice of assertive or commissive acts can influence the outcome. Assertive statements backed by data can establish credibility, while commissive acts can build trust and commitment. Similarly, understanding the nuances of directives and expressives can enhance leadership communication and employee engagement.

Misunderstandings in business communication often arise when the intended illocutionary force is not correctly interpreted by the listener. This can be due to cultural differences, ambiguities in language, or differing expectations. For example, a suggestion in one culture might be interpreted as a command in another, leading to unintended consequences.

Moreover, the indirectness often used in business communication can lead to misinterpretation. For instance, saying "It might be a good idea to revisit our budget" could be intended as a directive to cut costs, but it might be interpreted merely as a suggestion for future consideration.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing business discourse through the lens of illocutionary acts provides a deeper understanding of how language functions within an organizational setting. It highlights the performative nature of business communication, where utterances do not just convey information but also perform actions that can have significant implications for business operations. By recognizing the illocutionary acts in business discourse, managers and employees can improve their communication strategies, reduce misunderstandings, and enhance the overall effectiveness of their interactions.

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