

A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF THE USE OF FELICITY CONDITIONS IN THE LANGUAGE OF COMMERCIAL DRIVERS IN WASOBIA MOTOR PARK, GAGWALADA AREA COUNCIL, FCT - ABUJA, NIGERIA

Obeya, Nora Alewo

&

Alani, Ebenezer Akinyele

Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the use of Felicity Conditions in the language of commercial drivers in WASOBIA Motor Park, Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT-Abuja. This is achieved through the identification of the different types of felicity conditions in the language use of the commercial drivers under study. Anchored on the Speech Acts Felicity Condition. The data for the study were collected in the WASOBIA motor park, Gwagwalada, Abuja via recording and writing of the conversation and interactions of the interlocutors involved. The data were then transcribed and translated for analysis. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the data analysed. The study used a descriptive and qualitative method of data analysis in analysing the data.. The findings revealed five types of felicity conditions which are: essentiality condition, sincerity condition, preparatory condition, propositional content condition and general condition. Among all, the finding showed that sincerity condition, essentiality condition, and propositional content condition were majorly observed by the commercial drivers but the most obeyed by the drivers is the sincerity condition. The study therefore concludes that felicity and infelicity condition are a significant part of the language use of the commercial drivers under study.

Key Words: Language, Pragmatics, Speech Act, Felicity Condition,

Infelicity Condition.

Introduction

The need for people to communicate with each other has become crucial in expressing ideas, feelings, and thinking. Communication takes place by using spoken or written language. Spoken language is a primary way of expressing feelings and ideas in day-to-day activities. People create utterances daily in asking and delivering meanings. Spoken language is also a way of asking someone to do something. It means the utterance is about the statements and the meaning and what is done by the utterance which is called speech act in the field of pragmatics.

Language in its capacity as a means of communication is essential to the successful facilitation of interpersonal interactions. A society's ability to engage in social contact, which can take place anywhere at any time, is made possible by its linguistic infrastructure. People are able to communicate with one another and others through the use of language. It is possible to communicate either verbally or in written form, and it has a strong connection to the felicity conditions as a standard for appropriate speech acts. The phrase "felicity requirements" refers to a set of criteria that must be satisfied before a speech act can be considered to have been successful. Language is one of the most important things in the life of every human being. Humans are of course, inseparable from language. According to Purba, N et al (96) "When a child is born, the first language a child gets is the language that is heard directly from the father or mother. As the child grows, he acquires a language other than the language taught by the mother and father, in the form of a second, third, foreign language etc. and this is called language acquisition. It depends on the social environment and cognitive level possessed by these children through the learning process in their environment".

The field of study known as Pragmatics focuses on analysing and determining the meaning of utterances as they move from the speaker to the addressee or hearer. According to Kreidler (18), "Pragmatics is a

subfield of linguistics that is concerned with meaning”. This leads us to believe that the meaning of a language form should not be predicted solely on linguistic information; rather, we ought to take into account any concerns regarding social world knowledge as well. This paper is interested in learning whether the felicity condition of an utterance as used by the commercial drivers in motor park under study really has an impact or not on the language users, and at the same time, whether the commercial drivers under study really obey these felicity conditions as proposed by J.L. Austin.

The nature of the problem which gave rise to this paper lies in the fact that to the best of the knowledge of the researchers and available scholarly evidence at the disposal of the researchers, no definite research publication on the Use of Felicity and Infelicity Conditions in the Language of Selected Commercial Drivers in WASOBIA Motor Park, Gwagwalada Area Council, Abuja. Though, some studies have been carried out on Pragmatics and Speech Acts , but these were done on other aspects rather than on commercial drivers of the specific motor park under study. This problem as stated here above deserves a scholarly investigation.

The aim of this paper is to conduct a pragmatic study of the Use of Felicity conditions in the language of selected commercial drivers in WASOBIA Motor Park, Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT – Abuja FCT, while the main objectives are to: Identify the various types of felicity conditions employed by commercial drivers in WASOBIA motor park. Examine the effects of felicity and infelicity conditions on the language use by commercial drivers in the Motor Park understudy. Determine the extent at which the language of commercial drivers in WASOBIA motor park operates within the various types of felicity conditions.

This study is limited to the Use of Felicity and Infelicity Conditions in the Language of Selected Commercial Drivers in WASOBIA Motor Park, Gwagwalada Area Council, FCT – Abuja. The content scope of the study covers only the language of commercial drivers in WASOBIA motor park Abuja, excluding other happenings

in the parks while the linguistic scope covers felicity and infelicity conditions as an aspect of speech act.

An Overview of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of Linguistics that evaluates how human language is utilised. Osisanwo (64) opines that “Pragmatics is the study of the general cognitive principles involved in the retrieval of information from an utterance. Pragmatics also investigates the meaning that language conveys by the speaker, addressee, and other factors of context utterance”. According to Wales (365) “Pragmatics is the study of language use which is concerned with the meaning of utterance rather than a grammatical sentences or proposition”. Mey (113), cited in Adewale (32) sees Pragmatics as the study of how context influences meaning in linguistics and allied fields. Mey (113) added that, “Pragmatics also includes phenomena such as implicature, speech actions, relevance, discourse, and nonverbal communication”. Fraser (209) said, “I define Pragmatics as the process by which a language user uses as sentence representation provided by grammar to identify what meanings and effects the speaker has transmitted given the context in which the phrase is stated”. According to Amira and Ervina (122), “Every word we speak has meaning and significance, and it is hard for somebody to say anything without having a reason for doing so”. The study of the relationship between language and context is known as Pragmatics. Therefore, Pragmatics can be inferred as the study of meaning. In addition, Pragmatics study is about many things including reference and inference, deixis, implicature, entailment and presupposition, cooperative principle, maxims, politeness and impoliteness theory, and face concepts. For this paper, speech act theory is deployed, especially the area of felicitous and infelicitous condition.

Speech Acts in Pragmatics

Austin (114) states that “When we engage in communication, we engage in the use of some acts formed through the constructive use of utterance which are formed too via composition of words. These acts we perform, however, with our words which are referred to as ‘speech acts’ are of different types”. In explaining this act of “doing things with words”, Aremu (26) stood on the authority of Adegbija (91) who cited

Searle, Keifer and Bierwisch (72) stating that “The minimal unit of human communication is not a sentence or other expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts for instance, describing, explaining, indicting, asserting, congratulating, apologizing, requesting among others”. Speech acts can be looked at in the pragmatic senses of locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is a sentence uttered with determinate sense and reference; and an act performed in order to communicate. Illocutionary act is a non-linguistic act performed through a linguistic or locutionary act. For instance, act of begging, commanding, resigning, threatening, warning, condemning, rebuking and so on. Perlocutionary act or force, according to Austin, is the effect of an utterance on the decoders. Levinson (98), in his view, asserts that “The perlocutionary force of an utterance is the intended consequence of, or reaction to what is said.

Theoretical Framework

Speech acts are actions that are carried out through utterances and are typically labelled with more specific terms such as apologising, complaining, complimenting, inviting, promising, or requesting. Yule (47) opines that, “Speech acts are actions that are carried out through utterances. Speech acts have more room for interpretation than simple utterances do because a single statement can have a variety of meanings depending on who you ask. According to Austin (60), “In every utterance, a person performs an act such as stating a fact, stating an opinion, confirming or denying something, making a prediction, or a request, asking a question, issuing an order, giving a permission, giving a piece advise, making an offer, making a promise, thanking somebody or condoling somebody. All these are speech acts.

Though, the focus of speech act theory has been on utterances, particularly those produced in conversation and other face-to-face circumstances, the term "speech act" should be interpreted broadly to refer to any type of language usage, whether oral or otherwise. This is because speech acts can take place in a variety of contexts. Speech acts, in whatever medium they take place, are included within the more general category of purposeful action, with which they share a number of characteristics. One quality that is

especially significant is the fact that when a person acts consciously, they typically have a set of nested intentions that they are working toward.

In the study of Speech Act, Austin was the first person to use the terms felicitous and infelicitous. According to him, all illocutionary acts can be said to be felicitous and infelicitous, depending on how such an act meets the categories of felicity conditions identified: General Condition, Essentiality Condition, Sincerity Condition, Preparatory Condition and Propositional Content Condition as we have discussed earlier in this paper. When it comes to linguistics and the philosophy of language, he maintains that an utterance is only considered felicitous if it is well-formed from a pragmatic stand point. Infelicitous utterances are those that are either insignificant, unimportant, or otherwise inappropriate for the context of the statement in which they are found. In other words, an utterance is considered to be felicitous if both the speaker and the audience understand each other's meaning. If this is not the case, then the utterance is considered.

Felicity Condition

For an utterance to accomplish what it sets out to do, it is necessary for certain requisites known as felicity requirements to be met first. It is possible that the speech act will not be successful if these prerequisites are not satisfied. According to Austin, there must be an existing and accepted conventional procedure with a certain conventional effect, and that procedure must include the utterance of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances. In addition, the particular person and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure that is being invoked. These procedures as identified by Austin refer to as types of felicity condition as discussed below.

There are a number of distinct varieties of felicity conditions. According to Searle(36), speaking a language is the act of performing actions in accordance with certain rules. Searle suggests that there are four different types of felicity conditions: propositional content, preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions, and essential conditions. According to Searle's theory, the general condition that must be met for any and all speech acts is that the speaker must not be pretending, and the hearer must both hear and understand the language being spoken. It will not be to the satisfaction of the listener if they are unable to comprehend the utterances of the speakers.

- i. **General Condition:** The overarching requirements that apply to one type of illocution must also be met by every other type. The person being addressed must understand the locution, and the person being addressed must not be behaving in an absurd manner or attempting to be someone else. Both the person who sent the message and the person who received it are just regular people in the previous scenario. They are able to have conversations with one another
- ii. **Essential Condition:** Essential conditions cover the fact that by act of uttering a promise, it creates an obligation to carry out the action as promised. According to Searle (323), the crucial prerequisite in conducting speech acts is the commitment of speakers and hearers to accomplish the actions represented by their utterances.
- iii. **Sincerity Condition:** Sincerity condition means that the speakers really mean what they say. According to Taiwo (43), sincerity condition requires that both the speakers and the listeners perform the desired speech act appropriately. Sincerity occurs when both the speaker and the hearer consider the utterance to be deliberate, to correctly represent the speaker's wish and the hearer's perception that the utterance conveys that wish. E.g., "I'm going to must encourage and finally propose to her."
- iv. **Preparatory Condition:** Preparatory condition speech is one in which the speaker must have command over the audience's ideas. According to Searle (322- 323), the preparatory condition of performative utterances means that these statements have obvious goals for being uttered. We cannot, for example, declare that we are commanding someone to do something when it is evident that this person is currently doing or is about to execute that activity.
- v. **Propositional Content Condition:** Propositional content condition or content condition for short is a speech act that requires the audience to comprehend the speech uttered by the speaker. According to Searle (326), propositional contentment ails that the performative speech components should fulfill the performed act. Therefore, a proposed future act undertaken by the

addressee is referred to as a propositional content condition.

Research Methodology

The data for this research was obtained from the conversations/interactions of the commercial drivers in WASOBIA motor park, Gwagwalada, Abuja. That is, the conversations and interactions of drivers and passengers in the park were collected through recording methods using mobile phone. The recorded conversations were then later transcribed and translated for analysis. Out of eight records of conversation and interactions, five of them were purposively selected for analysis. The instances of felicitous and infelicitous utterances in the conversations were purposefully identified and analysed. The descriptive method of data analysis was used to analyze the data while the Speech Act Theory, especially the aspect of felicity and infelicity condition served as the theoretical frame work for the study. The data for the research were collected and analysed using the five categories of felicity condition. That is, the affected felicitous and infelicitous utterances were categorized and described in line with the five types of felicity condition.

Data Presentation and Analysis

During this investigation, the researcher came across a number of utterances which are appropriate for evaluating the happiness condition of it. The utterances were arranged and analysed according to the types of felicity conditions. Because these utterances take the form of illocutions, it is appropriate to conduct an analysis on them. In addition to that, the research explains the utterances through the use of the coding method. The conversation (1) indicates the beginning of the first data; the conversation (2) indicates the beginning of the second data, and so on. The following is a list of the data and the conversations that were found in this research:

Essentiality Condition

Conversation 1

Passenger: don't delay us here and if you do, I promise you will not get your money

Driver: Mr. man, make you do your worst, na my work I dey do, I dey ready for you. (Mr. man, you can do your worst. It is my work that I am doing. I am ready for you)

Though, from the above, the driver's action is unconventional by telling the passenger to get ready for a fight, but he understood the passenger's intention that if he had delayed more than enough, the passenger's promise would have become a reality. Therefore, since both interlocutors understood each other and acted towards one another, this utterance is *felicitous*. In other words, the utterance is **felicitous** because the driver acted after passenger's action. The utterance again counts as an **essential condition** because in the conversation the passenger took action to say what he wanted to say.

Sincerity condition Conversation 2

Driver: madam, you want to put me for trouble ba? I no go gree o!
(Madam, do you want to cause trouble for me? I will not allow that)

Passenger1: I am sorry, but I have to go with the two of them, please!

Driver: I no feet take that risk o! na danger be that. Road Safety dey everywhere on the road. Make you go join another motor. (I can not take that risk. That is dangerous. Road Safety are on the road. you can go and join another motor)

Passenger2: make I help her carry one. Me too get children for house. (Let me help her to carry one. I equally have children at home)

Passenger3: I go help her carry the second one.... (I will help her carry the second one)

Passenger1: thank you ma. God go bless you. (God will bless

you)

Driver: I no feet take the risk, na danger be that.... (I cannot take that risk, that is dangerous)

In this conversation, the interlocutors are in the bus with several other passengers. A woman came with two children and the only seat left was the front seat. The driver, knowing the danger of carrying more than one passenger at the front, he did not want to allow the woman. It was at that point that two other women agreed to help the woman carry the children. It is clear from the conversation that the driver's utterance stated that he would not allow the woman with two children to sit at the front seat since it was too dangerous for him because of Road Safety. It is the understanding of the danger behind the driver's action that convinced the other two passengers (passenger2 and passenger3) to help their fellow passenger in carrying the children.

The utterance is **felicitous** because the passengers understood what the driver meant by the utterance. The driver also meant it when he said he would not allow passenger1 to sit at the front because it will be dangerous, if she was to go with her two children in the front seat of the car. For that reason alone, the utterance count as a **sincerity condition**.

Preparatory condition conversation 3

Driver1: w a t i n you dey do here, 'emilokan' (it is my turn) people?"

(What are you doing here, people of emilokan – it is my turn)

Driver2: Isn't that obvious, big guy? My candidate, Tinubu and I are gonna (going to) fixe this country, bring everybody back.

Driver3: who you go bring back? (Who will you bring back?)

Driver4: I beg, make una help me ask him o.(I beg. Help me ask him)

In this conversation, driver1 is asking for why driver2 who turn out to be 'emilokan' person was in their mist. The driver2 replied that him and Tinubu were going to fixe the country knowing that Tinubu possesses the power to fixe the country as the President. Driver1

understood what driver₂ meant by fixing the country. However, driver₃ and driver₄ did not understand the full meaning of the utterance of driver₂; “bring everybody back”. Hence, the utterance is **infelicitous** and count as **preparatory condition**.

Propositional content conversation 4

Driver₁: you dey truly growing into the real pilot I dey train you to be.
(You are truly growing to be the real pilot I am training you to be)

Conductor: na so my oga. I don sabi am, thank you. I no go disappoint you. (That is true my boss, thank you. I will not disappoint you)

Driver₂: na only you dey train am? (Are you the only one training him?)

Driver₁: no be my boy or na your own boy? (Is he not my boy or is he your own boy?)

In this conversation, the driver₁ was proud of his conductor's action towards him now. He was proud of his conductor and himself for being able to successfully become a great driver he wanted him to be. In the conversation, the conductor promised his buss that he won't let him down.

It is safe to say that his bus understood his promise since he is willing to give him a buss as the conductor hasn't broken his promise. Since the driver understood his boy's (conductor) intention, the utterance is then **felicitous** and count as **propositional content condition**.

General Condition Conversation 5

Driver: your madam no go leave you alone for me... (Your madam will not leave you alone for me...)

Madam's girl: she no get choice now. (She has no choice now)

Driver: Watin you wan do? (What do you want to do?)

Madam's girl: “That one no be your business, my love. You done try well, well for me now! (that is not your business, my love. You have tried for me so much)

This conversation happened between driver and madam's girl

(a woman selling food in the park). The driver has just returned from his fight with the madam because of the girl. After that, he proceeds to report to the girl what just happened. After explaining what happened, madam's girl made a decisive decision on what to do without telling the details to the driver. In the utterance, the girl meant that she would do something to her madam that will make her to leave her and the driver alone. Confused, driver then replied to her by asking another question about what is she going to do, but madam's girl did not give the answer he wanted. Knowing that the driver did not understand what madam's girl meant by that utterance, the utterance is **infelicitous**. This utterance also counts as *general condition*.

Discussion of Findings

The study based on the analysis of the use of felicity conditions in the language of commercial drivers in WASOBIA motor park, Gwagwalada, Abuja showed the consistency and the frequently occurrence of felicity condition in the language of commercial drivers under study. Following the analysis, the study showed that three out of the five major types of felicity conditions were commonly observed by the commercial drivers under study. These include: Sincerity condition, Essentiality condition, and Propositional content conditions. Hence, General condition and Preparatory condition were less commonly observed by the commercial drivers.

The finding is therefore consistent with the Searles 1969 felicity condition which argues that an illocutionary Act can be felicitous or infelicitous depending on how such an act meets the felicity conditions. Based on the felicitous utterances found in the driver's conversations, the study revealed that the language used by the commercial drivers in WASOBIA motor park, Gwagwalada, Abuja is mostly understood within their domain and to some extent may be understood outside their domain. This is so because according to the study, the felicitous utterances are more observed than the infelicitous utterances.

Conclusion

This paper concludes, on the basis of the findings as well as the discussion that the commercial drivers in WASOBIA motor park, Gwagwalada, Abuja utilized the five (5) different categories of felicity conditions as identified by Searle 1967. These are: the essential condition, the sincerity condition, the preparatory condition, the propositional content condition, and the general condition. Above all, Sincerity condition is the type of felicity condition that is mostly observed. It is clear from the data that not all of the utterances made are profound or profoundly felicitous. In comparison to the infelicitous utterances, the form of language under study contains a greater number of felicitous utterances.

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