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Article



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## PRAGMALINGUISTIC FEATURES OF THE SPEECH ACT OF A QUESTION (BASED ON THE MATERIAL OF THE AMERICAN VERSION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE)

**Abstract:** The pragmalinguistic features of the question as an act of speech are considered. Being similar to motives in relation to illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, the questions differ significantly from them in their locative and propositional components, which makes it possible to separate the questions into a separate group of speech acts. A study of the question based on the material of modern American films shows that 70% of interrogative statements are used as direct speech acts, directly to request information. Among them, about a quarter contain secondary illocutions. Questions as indirect acts of speech (mainly to express a sentence) are implemented in 20% of statements. Rhetorical (false) questions made up only 10% of all interrogative statements.

**Key words:** pragmalinguistics, speech acts, questions, the American version of the English language.

**Language:** English

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### Introduction

Already at the stage of formation of pragmalinguistics, researchers became interested in the characteristics of the question and its potential as a speech act [1-3], however, many of the pragmalinguistic features of the question are still controversial. It was noticed that questions are always associated with the impact on the emotional-volitional sphere of the interlocutor and in this sense are similar in their pragmalinguistic characteristics to the motivational acts of speech, such as advice, requests, orders, suggestions. On the other hand, it is impossible not to agree that the intention to encourage someone to perform an action differs from the intention to obtain the necessary information [4-7], although both intentions can be embodied in speech both explicitly and implicitly [8].

The purpose of this article is to identify the pragmalinguistic features of the question as a speech act, using the material of the American version of the English language.

In the already classical taxonomy of speech acts, proposed by the American linguist J. R. Searle, the

question relates to directives, i.e. to motivational speech acts. J. R. Searle offers twelve criteria for distinguishing speech acts, the most significant of which he calls: 1) the difference in purpose; 2) the difference in the direction of adaptation between words and the world; 3) the difference in expressed psychological states. According to J. R. Searle, the features of motivational acts of speech are the following:

1) the illocutionary goal consists in attempts on the part of one subject "to ensure that... [another subject] has done something", where "something" is a mental, physical or verbal action;

2) the direction of adaptation - "from the world to words";

3) a pronounced psychological state - the desire or need of the subject [2, 182].

J. R. Searle believes that, first of all, the similar illocutionary component, the intention (and not the locative, propositional or perlocutionary components) of motives and questions allow them to be attributed to the same class of speech acts. When prompted, one subject tries to get the other to perform some action.

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By asking a question, one subject tries to get the other to answer [9]. This is confirmed, for example, by the fact that the following statements have the same illocutionary force:

(1) Tell me the name of the first President of the United States.

(2) What's the name of the first President of the United States? [9, 182].

According to J. R. Searle, the similarity of motives and questions in relation to illocutionary force partially explains the fact that the verb *ask* in English is used both for questions and requests [9, 69]:

(3) He asked me to do it.

(4) He asked me why.

Example 3 contains a request, example 4 contains a question, but in both cases the verb *ask* is used.

J. R. Searle also identifies two types of questions:

1) real questions, i.e. questions that one subject asks in order to get an answer from another subject;

2) test questions ("exam questions"), i.e. questions that one subject asks to check whether another subject has any information [9, 69].

The German linguist D. Wunderlich offers a different point of view on the questions. Recognizing that the illocutionary force of questions and motives is the same, he notes the most important differences in their propositional content. Motives, in his opinion, contain an indication of a causable action, but questions do not. On this basis, D. Wunderlich argues that the question should not be included in the class of motives, and suggests considering questions as a separate class of speech acts, calling this class "erotetives" [1].

The German sociologist, the largest representative of the Frankfurt School J. Habermas explores the content of statements from the point of view of linguistic, intentional, propositional and collocative components [10]. Taking the relation to the world, listening or speaking, and the claims arising from this as the basis for the classification of speech acts, J. Habermas singles out communicatives, constatives, representatives and regulatives [11]. Thus, the motivational speech acts of J. Habermas refers to regulatives, since they explicate the coordination of the actions of the addressee of the causated action by the speaker. Claims regarding regulations are that they are directed at the addressee and must be correct and appropriate. The mode of communication is interactive. However, it should be noted, also to the regulations of J. Habermas refers both promises and apologies. Questions in the classification of J. Habermas belong to another group, these are communicatives. They explicate the content of the utterance qua utterance and are aimed at promoting mutual understanding between communicants. According to J. Habermas, they should be understandable to the addressee.

Thus, if we perceive the question as an incentive, it is impossible not to recognize that the question is an incentive to an informative answer, i.e., as E. K. Teplyakova rightly asserts, to verbal action [14]. Although, of course, the answer may be nonverbal, such as a negative or affirmative shaking of the head. A. M. Peshkovsky also wrote, "if we wish to influence our interlocutor with the thoughts we communicate, to act on his will, to encourage him to act one way or another, our speech can be called a motivational speech. The latter case is divided into two: we can encourage the listener to tell us what we do not know, to answer our question - the speech is interrogative, and we can encourage him to do exactly what we order him or ask for - the imperative speech" [15, 128].

With regard to the propositional content, we agree with D. Wunderlich that motives contain an indication of a causable action, and questions may not contain an indication of an answer.

As for the locative component, the questions differ significantly from other speech acts. So, in English, the question is marked with a certain word order and intonation, for example, the following question from the book by the American writer Jane Hazelain "The Last Time She Saw Him", borrowed by us from the corpus of the American version of the English language on the [https website://corpus.byu.edu/coca](https://corpus.byu.edu/coca):

(5) What are you talking about?

This question has a distinct structural and grammatical specificity. Unlike other statements in this statement (in question), the modifiable part of the verb are is in preposition with respect to the subject you, after the interrogative word What.

It should be noted that the question also differs from other acts of speech in illocutionary and perlocutionary components. The question (in comparison with other speech acts, including motivational ones) has a lack of information as an impulse. The realization of the speech act of the question is connected with the desire to make up for this ignorance, to learn something or to make sure of something. This is the illocutionary component of the question. In an effort to make up for ignorance, the initiator of the question tries to regulate the behavior of another subject by exercising communicative pressure, invading the personal sphere of the interlocutor in the process of achieving the goal. In this sense, questions are similar to motives, but the intention to encourage someone to perform some action aimed at changing the state of things in the world is different from the intention to get the necessary information that corresponds or does not correspond to the state of things in the world. Although, of course, there are some similarities in the perlocative effects of motives and questions. In the case of an incentive, this is: 1) performing a causable action or 2) refusing to perform it, and in case of a question, this is: 1) the answer to the question or 2)

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avoiding the answer, translating the conversation to another topic, references to ignorance, references to forgetfulness, omissions, etc.

As T. E. Yanko [16], E. P. Hidesheli [17] and other researchers rightly point out, the question (in addition to primary illocutions) may also have secondary illocutions that seem to "overlap" with the primary ones, such as surprise, bewilderment, irritation, reproach, indignation, pleading, indignation, etc. [16, 177].

In addition, questions can be used not only to request information, but also as indirect acts of speech. For example, R. Conrad notes the use of questions to express intentions to ask, advise, suggest, etc. [18].

Rhetorical questions, which are called "false" or "imaginary" due to the fact that they do not contain the actual request for information, but report on the state of affairs, still cause particular controversy [19]. The illocutionary power of rhetorical questions is the same as that of statements - to fix the speaker's responsibility for ensuring that his message truly reflects the current state of affairs.

Using the continuous sampling method, we selected about 1,000 questions from American films created over the past ten years. Questions containing a request for information made up 70% of the total body of interrogative statements. Such statements are accompanied by answers, evasions or references to ignorance on the part of the addressee of questions. Speech responses are accompanied by more than 2/3 of interrogative statements. Questions containing secondary illocutions (such as surprise, irritation, reproach, bewilderment, indignation or pleading) made up about 1/4 of all interrogative statements. For example, an excerpt from the movie "Love by the rules and without" ("Something's Gotta Give"), containing a conversation between the main characters Erica and Harry:

(6) Erika: So, Harry, what do you do?

Harry: I'm an owner of a record company...

In this case, Erica's interrogative statement contains a request for information, followed by Harry's answer.

Or, for example, from the movie "The Big Wedding" a dialogue between the former spouses of Ellie and Don:

(7) Allie: Don, Can you even hear what I'm saying?

Don: Not remotely...

In this case, Ellie asks a question with a request for information (i.e., she wants to know if Don hears her), and Don answers it, however, in addition to the

primary illocution (the desire to find out if Don hears her) Ellie puts a secondary illocution into her question, namely irritation and reproach, which are expressed in the presence of the word even in the question and the corresponding intonation.

Rhetorical (i.e. false) questions made up only 10% of the total body of interrogative statements, for example, the question from the movie "Michael Clayton":

(8) How many times did I ask you to put me back on a litigation team?

The main character Michael Clayton uses a rhetorical question as a way to once again focus his boss's attention on the fact that he would have more success in court compared to the success he currently has as a lawyer for pre-trial dispute resolution.

Another example from the movie "Michael Clayton":

(9) I'm crazy, right?

This is the statement of lawyer Arthur, who realizes that his actions seem inadequate to his colleague Michael Clayton. However, Arthur utters this statement not in order to request information (to make sure from Michael that he is crazy), but in order to give himself a negative assessment, calling himself "crazy", to make Michael pay attention to his words and reflect on the fact that the information reported by Arthur can be not the delirium of a crazy person, but the truth.

In turn, questions used not to request information, but as indirect acts of speech, made up 20% of the total corpus of interrogative statements. Most of these questions are used for suggestions and less often for advice. For example, from the movie "Premonition":

(10) Why don't you take the girls out for a while?

The main character Linda offers her husband to spend the weekend with the children and implements her intention not directly (for example, through an imperative), but indirectly in the form of a question.

Thus, questions should be considered a separate group of speech acts and distinguished from other speech acts by their locative, illocutionary, propositional and perlocutionary components. The results of the study of the question on the material of modern American films clearly demonstrate that most of the questions are used directly, i.e. to request information. About a quarter of them contain secondary illocutions. Questions as indirect acts of speech (mainly to express a sentence) are implemented only in 20% of statements. In turn, rhetorical (complex) questions make up only 10% of all interrogative statements.

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