THE ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN THE DIDACTIC DISCOURSE OF FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE - STUDY APPLIED AT THE BEGINNER LEVEL[1]

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Abstract: *Since the early 1980, the didactics of French as a Foreign Language has been significantly marked by the pragmatic-enunciative approach. It postulates that grammar is only taught for the benefit of the enunciation and that any form is equivalent to a function in communication. In the teaching of FFL, in regard to the access to the language, the preference for the use of speech acts is recognized. In this study, we investigated the occurrence of speech acts as a teaching / learning unit in the A1 level French textbooks published in Romania. We analysed to what extent the presented acts of language activate the grammar or vocabulary previously exposed in the supporting texts of the teaching unit where they are integrated.*

Keywords: *speech act, French as a Foreign Language, textbook.*

1. Introduction

In the last decades, the concept of "speech act" has become one of the objects of study of language didactics and it has become the new unit around which linguistic and thematic contents are organized. The speech act having become a basic notion of language teaching, the curricula of French as a Foreign Language in Romania have been revised and reworked many times. The purpose of our mini-study is to examine the implementation of speech acts in some A1 level FFL textbooks published in Romania. This paper proposes an overview of speech acts in textbooks for beginners, according to the taxonomies proposed by Austin and Searle and their disciples. The conclusion will be drawn after having analysed to what extent the presented acts of language activate the grammar or vocabulary previously exposed in the supporting texts of the teaching unit where they are inserted.

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[1] Paper presented at the International Conference "Contemporary Perspectives in Psychology, Education and Social Work" – 3rd edition (COPES 2019), Constanța, 24-26 May 2019

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2. Speech Acts Theory and Taxonomies

The first theory that has most influenced pragmatics is Austin's theory of speech acts (1962). This theory was partially taken up by Searle (1972), then by Searle and Vanderveken (1985), Brown and Levinson (1987), Vanderveken (1992) and Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992, 2008). All these linguists-researchers agree that any statement produced in a communication situation corresponds to the realization of a social act that they call a *speech act*. From this point of view, language gives the possibility of acting on others; language would therefore be action (Bracops, 2010).

For Austin (1962), producing an utterance means performing three types of acts: a locutionary act (what is said explicitly), an illocutionary act (what the speaker means by his utterance), and a perlocutionary act (the effect of the message on the recipient).

By basing his classification on four criteria, respectively the illocutionary goal, the direction of adjustment between words and the world, the psychological state expressed and the propositional content, Searle (1972) establishes five categories of illocutionary acts: the representatives, the directives, the commissives, the expressives and the declarations.

The representative sentences: the speaker commits to the truth of the stated content, so the sentence can be judged in terms of True and False. The directive sentences: the speaker tries to get something done by the interlocutor. The commissive sentences: the speaker obliges himself to perform an act or to adopt a behaviour. The expressive sentences: the speaker wants to manifest his/ her psychological state in relation to the content expressed by the sentence. The declarative sentences: sentences that, by being uttered, arise the truth of the content they express by referring to an extralinguistic institution and by implying specific statuses for the speaker and the interlocutor.

Vanderveken (1992), continuing the reflections of Austin (1962) and Searle (1972), identifies five types of speech acts, according to their illocutionary purpose: the assertives, the directives, the promissives or the commitments, the expressives and the declarations.

The assertives: the speaker commits himself to the existence of a state of things, to the truth of a proposition expressed (*to assert, to testify, to assume* etc.). The directives: the speaker tries to get the listener to do something (*to ask, to question, to order, to suggest* etc.). The commitments or the promissives: the speaker adopts a certain future conduct (*to promise, to threaten, to make a wish, to make an oath* etc.). The expressives: express a psychological state about a state of the world (*to apologize, to thank, to congratulate* etc.). The declarations determine, by their actual fulfilment, the mapping of their content to reality.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2008) argues that this categorization is also conceivable for non-linguistic behaviours: pointing out can be interpreted as a directive act and a smile as an expressive act. In addition, to identify the category in which the acts of language are classified, the one that provides clues is the context. The context brings together all the clues outside the language, but which are part of the enunciation situation (the spatio-temporal setting, the age, the sex, the moment of the enunciation, the social status of the interlocutors etc.).

Vanderveken (1999) returns to the categorization proposed in 1992 which, in his view, limits the analysis of speech acts to the level of utterances that come out from a single enunciation context, whereas the analysis should have focused on the structure of the speech. Consequently, he reworked his classification of speech acts, proposing another classification based on the types of speech according to their illocutionary purpose: the descriptive, the deliberative, the declarative and the expressive.

The descriptive allows us to analyse the speech of the interlocutors who describe what is happening in the world. The deliberative ones aim at the exchange that interlocutors can have about the future actions that they will or should do during negotiations, engagements etc. The declarative combines the declarations that the interlocutors make to transform the world. The expressive brings together the exchanges where the interlocutors say or express their moods.

For Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is a conversation strategy that makes it possible to respect the "face". The one who introduced the notion of "face" was Goffman (1974), who was concerned with the drivers of social interaction and who noted the difference between speech acts that endanger communication and those that do not, based on a rule that he considers to manage any interaction: to spare his face and that of the others. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992) also embraces this theory. The "face" is the image of oneself, the identity that one has forged during one's personal development and that is expected to be recognized by the others.

Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize the importance of three sociocultural variables that determine the level of politeness in interaction: the social dominance (implies imposing or not imposing one's plans and face on the interlocutor), the social distance (relates to the intimacy or distance perceived by the speakers during the interaction) and the classification of the imposition between the speaker and the interlocutor (concerns the culture and is defined by each communication situation). These variables refer to the relationship and to the knowledge of the interlocutors.

According to Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992, 2008), politeness is expressed through verbal, nonverbal and para-verbal behaviours that combine the system of speeches, the system of addressing and the marking of the interpersonal relationship, the formulation of speech acts and the functioning of ritual exchanges (for example, greeting, starting and closing a conversation).

Brown and Levinson (1987) established a taxonomy of threatening speech acts based on Goffman's (1974) theory. According to them, each interlocutor has two faces: a negative face consisting of body territories (the body and its extensions), spatial territories (the "bubble" in which we evolve), temporal territories (our speaking time); and a positive face corresponding to the set of positive images that each speaker builds about himself / herself, images that the speaker tries to impose during the interaction.

The threatening speech acts can be classified according to whether they target the positive or negative face of each interlocutor. Among the threatening acts for the negative face of the speaker, there are acts that can harm his / her own territory (*to promise, to offer something* etc.). Among the threatening acts for the positive face of the speaker, we find self-degrading behaviours (*to apologize, to self-criticize* etc.). As for threatening acts for the negative face of the interlocutor, there are the intrusive

questions, the intrusive behaviours (*giving orders, making queries* etc.). The actions threatening the positive face of the interlocutor are those that threaten the narcissism of the other (*to criticize, to blame, to mock* etc.).

Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1992) adds to the classification of Brown and Levinson (1987) the flattering or threatening acts for the face of the interlocutor by explaining that the interlocutor can opt to soften the threatening acts (to minimize the demand) or to exaggerate the flattering acts (to give a gift and to make a compliment), depending on the context.

The theory of speech acts has a greater interest in the teaching of oral pragmatics. It helps to explain where "speech acts", "context", "politeness" etc. come from.

3. Occurrence of Speech Acts in FFL Textbooks, Level A1

In the corpus of this paper, we will refer to the classifications of speech acts presented previously, to identify those that have been transposed into school context, in the Romanian textbooks of FFL, beginner level.

For the French language discipline, our corpus of study consists of a textbook for the 5th grade *French language. Modern Language 2*, authors: Gina Belabed, Claudia Dobre, Diana Ionescu, published by Booklet Publishing House in 2017. This textbook was produced in accordance with the School Program approved by the Order of the Minister nr. 3393 / 28.02.2017 and it was approved by the Order of the Minister of National Education nr. 5263 / 03.10.2017.

To continue the acquisition of the A1 level, the textbook that we have chosen to study is the one addressing pupils of the 6th grade, the preferred textbook in the practice of teachers of FFL L2, whose authors are Mariana Popa, Micaela Slăvescu, Angela Soare, and published by Cavallioti, in 2015.

The speech acts enrolled in the French curriculum, as the second language of study, for the 5th grade, are: *to greet, to introduce oneself/ to introduce someone, to identify an object, to locate, to describe something / to describe someone, to congratulate, to thank.*

In the table below, we make an inventory of the situational contexts given in the content of the 8 units that make up the textbook published by Booklet:

Situational contexts   Table 1

Title of the Unit	Situational contexts
Mise en route : Bienvenue en France ! (p. 9)	• Dire bonjour / to say hi • Dire son nom / to say his / her name • Communiquer en classe / to communicate in the classroom
U 1: Bonjour, ça va ? (p. 17)	• Saluer et prendre congé / to greet someone • Se présenter / to present oneself • Demander et dire son âge / to ask and say his / her age • Épeler son prénom / to spell his / her name
U 2: Voilà mes copains ! (p. 31)	• Identifier des personnes / to identify people • Présenter quelqu'un / to introduce someone • Parler de ses passions / to talk about his / her passions • Dire sa nationalité / to say his / her nationality

Title of the Unit	Situational contexts
U 3: Dans la salle de classe (p. 45)	• Identifier des objets / to identify objects • Exprimer la date / to express the date
U 4: Mon sac à dos (p. 59)	• Décrire des objets / to describe objects • Faire une demande polie / to make a polite request • Remercier/ répondre aux remerciements / to thank / to respond to thanks • Exprimer l'appartenance / to express the belonging
U 5: Ma famille (p. 77)	• Décrire des personnes / to describe people • Exprimer la possession / to express possession • Présenter sa famille / to present his/ her family
U 6: Chez moi (p. 91)	• Localiser dans l'espace (I) / to locate in space (I) • Décrire son logement / to describe his / her home
U 7: Ma chambre (p. 105)	• Localiser dans l'espace (II) / to locate in space (II) • Décrire sa chambre / to describe his / her room
U 8: Ma saison préférée (p. 119)	• Féliciter quelqu'un / to congratulate someone • Parler de sa saison préférée / to talk about his / her favorite season

We notice that all the speech acts of the school program appear in the textbook, but it still adds the acts: *to express the date, to express belonging, to express possession*, the last one can be found again in the curriculum for the 6th grade, second language of study.

From the current pedagogical perspective, the textbook and, in this case, the modern languages textbook, should primarily develop capacity / competence and support functions to help learners integrate knowledge into real life situations. We consider that the analysed textbook fully fulfils this requirement by the rigorous and harmonious organization of the teaching contents within each teaching-learning unit. We illustrate the coherence that characterizes the organization of this textbook by the detailed analysis of the first unit: *Bonjour, ça va ?*.

In the *I mark* section, the authors propose the launching of communicative activities through dialogues and role plays. The dialogues are accompanied by images that illustrate the gestures of greeting. The speech acts identified in this dialogue of departure, with function of identification, are those announced in the table of contents: *to ask and say one's age*, *to greet* and in addition, we observe the resumption of the act *say hello* (act studied in the start-up unit).

Just after this initial dialogue, the current register / polite register distinction is made for the salutation formulas, in an exercise of discrimination.

The resort to the inductive method can be noticed, since, after role plays for the practice of the speech acts studied, the linguistic realizations for all the speech acts of the unit are gathered:

Saluer	**Prendre congé**	**Se présenter**	**Demander et dire son âge**
Salut, Luc !	Au revoir !	Tu t'appelles comment ?	Quel âge as-tu ?
Bonjour, Madame !	À bientôt !	Comment t'appelles-tu ?	Tu as quel âge ?
Bonsoir, Monsieur !	À demain !		
		Je m'appelle … .	J'ai … ans.
Comment ça va ?		Moi, c'est … .	
Comment vas-tu ?			
Comment allez-vous ?			
Ça va (bien).			
Très bien, merci.			
Très bien, et toi ?			

The *I train in the grammar* section organizes grammar boxes to systematize the linguistic structures that are related to the speech acts used along the didactic unit: *the alphabet - to spell, the present of the verb avoir in the singular - to express the age, the numbers - to express the age.*

The central text of the unit (page 24) retakes the speech acts of the unit, in a forged dialogue.

In the section *Civilization* (page 27), we find explanations concerning formulas and greeting gestures: • *To greet each other, we say "Hello!" and we shake hands or kiss each other.* • *How many kisses do we make? It depends on the country or the region: only once in Belgium, twice in Paris, three times in Auvergne, four times in some French regions and in Switzerland.*

We can conclude that the connection within the teaching unit is ensured by the speech act which constitutes the unity of the lesson and makes it possible to preserve the communicative orientation which presides over the teaching of language.

Currently, there is a strange situation in the Romanian education system, in the sense that in 2017 the new school programs for the college were adopted, but no FFL textbooks that follow the guidelines of the new curriculum have been published, so teachers use old textbooks.

The speech acts enrolled in the French curriculum, second language of study, for the 6th grade, published in 2017, are: *to solicit and to offer information (as regards numbers, prices, expressing time), to make a simple description (person, character), to express tastes and preferences, to express possession, to place / to locate in time and space, to give instructions.*

In the table below, we make an inventory of the speech acts identified in the content of the 10 units that make up the textbook published by Cavallioti Publishing House:

Speech acts Table 2

Title of the Unit	Speech acts
U 1: Venez tous! (p. 6)	• Saluer / Répondre / to greet / Answer to greetings • Se présenter / Présenter quelqu'un / to introduce yourself / to present someone
U 2: Mon cousin, l'aviateur (p. 18)	• Décrire une personne / to describe a person
U 3: Les voisins du troisième (p. 30)	• Demander / donner des informations pratiques (I) / to ask / to give practical information (I)
U 4: Du matin jusqu'au soir (p. 42)	• Proposer / Accepter / Refuser / to propose / to accept / to decline
U 5: Le jardin de grand-mère (p. 52)	• Relater des activités (au présent) / to report activities (in the present)
U 6: Ne raccrochez pas! (p. 64)	• Demander / donner des informations pratiques (II) / to ask / to give practical information (II)
U 7: Boutique ou grande surface? (p. 74)	• Exprimer la quantité / to express the quantity
U 8: À l'école, comme à l'école (p. 84)	• Demander à quelqu'un de faire quelque chose / to ask someone to do something
U 9: Un défilé de mode (p. 96)	• Parler de son état physique / to talk about one's physical state
U 10: Le tour du monde … en 15 jours! (p. 108)	• Inviter / Accepter / Refuser / to invite / to accept / to decline

A problem that we have identified in the textbook for the 6th grade is the relationship between the theme of unity, the speech acts and the construction elements of communication (grammar). This grammar must be functional, that is to say it must be used dynamically to carry out the intended acts of speech. Looking at the educational planning of unit 4 *Du matin jusqu'au soir*, we notice that, if the first sessions are devoted to lexical work (*current activities: the moments of the day, expressing time*), the inserted speech act being *to propose / to accept / to refuse*, the grammatical content *le passé composé + être* presented in the same unit and used to tell past things is not necessarily well placed.

Curricula do not offer solutions for realizing the relationship between grammar and speech, but they insist that speech acts and the communicative approach should form the starting point and that grammar should be limited to the realization of these speech acts. It seems to us that such a guideline is not easy for most teachers, because even for specialists, the development of the relationship between speech acts and grammar in a communicative learning process is far from easy. The proof is that, in the unit we presented, the grammar part (*le passé composé + être*) could not really help students to develop a thematic on current activities or to make propositions and answer them in the affirmative or negative way.

4. Observations on the Occurrence of Speech Acts in FFL Context

Weaknesses can be noticed in their theoretical presentation. We are aware that most of the conversations are difficult to analyse in terms of actions, the human being being, by nature, a social and talkative animal. Yet the reality of conversational interactions cannot be reduced to a simple list of social acts drawn from a fixed and obviously incomplete nomenclature.

The linguistic realizations of speech acts inserted into FFL textbooks rarely exceed the dimensions of the sentence or utterance. However, in a situation of daily life, the speaker does not mount speech acts, but he / she realizes communicative intentions. More precisely, he / she must mobilize a dimension of language that is essentially superior to the sentence or statement, that is to say, previous knowledge according to his / her experience and his / her universe of belief, constant adaptation to the communication situation due to his / her inferences and interpretation, anticipation etc.

In the Romanian textbooks of FFL, the notion of act is often associated with the speaker's intention and the message's provisions. However, any action must go through the establishment of a relationship between two interlocutors.

Regarding the classification of speech acts that appear in the Romanian textbooks of FFL, level A1, we notice rather acts like *to introduce oneself, to thank, to congratulate, to invite / to propose / to accept / to refuse, to ask / to give practical information*, acts that imply a certain polite conduct in a social setting. Politeness is part of all human communication, as it allows the respect of the faces in interactions, one's own and of others.

At the syntagmatic level, a speech act is a functional unit, the same linguistic sequence that can be analysed differently, depending on the communication situation and the nonverbal channels involved. But on the paradigmatic level, it is sometimes difficult to clearly distinguish the nature of the acts performed, the limits not being clearly visible between order and request, advice and suggestion, offer and proposal. It is all more difficult to distinguish the nature of an act, because most acts are done indirectly. Or we can simultaneously produce several acts: we can advise and threaten at the same time (*I promise you that I will come back*, for example).

The social implications (the status of the protagonists, their role) are simplified as much as possible in the analysed textbooks. The didactic exploitation of the speech acts gives us the impression that the speaker acts consciously on the language and that he / she succeeds in mastering the modalities of his / her production only after the repetition of the prepared utterances.

As far as the interlocutor is concerned, the perlocutionary effect of the acts is completely ignored in the Romanian FFL textbooks. We are aware that the perlocutory act, being important in language interacting, is very difficult as object of teaching, only rarely coded linguistically, and therefore not easily describable.

5. Conclusion

In class situations, the development of a dialogue or a role play focuses, generally, in an objective way, on the external characteristics of the communication situation (place and moment, status, role of the interlocutors, object of the exchange). Thus, the dialogues are constructed for didactic purposes, the situation being presented as stable from the beginning to the end, which does not correspond to the natural conditions of the progress of real-life conversations, where stability is relative, where there are unpredictable elements that can lead to even theme changes along the chain of dialogue.

Thus, the speech act is analysed in a restrictive way, its para and extra-verbal environment not being exploited at all, while it plays an essential role in its production. However, its illocutionary value is rendered by the corroboration of all communication channels. An act is not defined by taking into account only the verbal aspect, but a smile or a wink, for example, can contribute to its realization (irony, disapproval etc.) or we can even produce non-verbal acts only (mimic and / or gestural behaviours of approval, refusal etc.). One solution that we could consider is the accompaniment of textbooks by video resources.

Given the influence and importance of the textbook in the teaching process, designing it in a systematic and clear manner should be a permanent concern for specialists.

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