THE SPEECH ACT OF REFUSING INVITATIONS BY THE VIETNAMESE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

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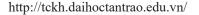| Article info	Abstract
	Like other speech acts in all languages in the world, one of them that occurs with the high frequency is the speech act of invitation and its refusal of invitations in conversations. This article focuses on invitations, declining an invitation and some criteria in identifying the speech act of refusal of invitations by the Vietnamese in the perspective of speech act theory. Besides, the writer also makes differences between this speech act with denial. It enables learners to distinguish the speech act of refusing invitations with other speech acts to improve the effectiveness of efficiency in the communication process.

HÀNH VI TỪ CHỐI LỜI MỜI CỦA NGƯỜI VIỆT
DƯỚI GÓC ĐỘ LÝ THUYẾT HÀNH VI NGÔN NGỮ

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Thông tin bài báo	Tóm tắt
	Giống như các hành vi ngôn ngữ khác ở các nước trên thế giới, hành vi mời và hành vi từ chối lời mời được xem là một hành vi xảy ra thường xuyên trong trong giao tiếp. Trong khuôn khổ của bài viết, nhóm tác giả dựa vào lí thuyết của hành vi mời, hành vi từ chối lời mời để đưa ra các tiêu chí giúp nhận diện hành vi từ chối lời mời và phân biệt hành vi từ chối lời mới với hành vi phủ định của người Việt. Kết quả nghiên cứu của bài viết giúp người học dễ dàng nhận diện hành vi từ chối lời mời với các hành vi khác nhằm nâng cao hiệu quả trong quá trình giao tiếp.

1. Introduction

The theory of speech act has been a subject of interest for researchers since the early 1960s. By the early 1990s, it was introduced in Vietnam and applied in the works of Do Huu Chau (2001) and Nguyen Duc Dan (1998), Diep Quang Ban (1998), Do Hu Chau (2001), etc.

According to J.L. Austin (1962, pp. 101-102) in "How to Do Things with Words," there are three types of speech act when speaking such as locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. The locutionary act refers to the act that a person speaks using linguistic elements such as phonetics, vocabulary, and sentence structure to create utterances with clear form and meaning. The illocutionary act is the one that the speaker performs when speaking to create a linguistic expression within a social institution or cultural-linguistic environment. These acts include thanking, apologizing, promising, commanding, requesting, swearing, and rejecting, among others. The perlocutionary act is the use of linguistic expression formulas to achieve an effect beyond the language. This non-linguistic effect is manifested in the psychological impact that the utterance has on the listener.

In addition, Searle (1969, pp. 23-24) argues that when a person performs a speech act, they can perform three acts: the utterance act, the

propositional act, and the illocutionary act. The utterance act is the act in which the speaker uses a stream of sounds, words, and grammatical structures to produce a communicative utterance. The propositional act is the meaningful content of the utterance, which can be evaluated as true or false. The illocutionary act is the expression of the speaker's illocutionary intention in uttering the statement.

According to Austin (1962, pp. 150-163), illocutionary acts can be classified into five broad categories including Verdictives, Exercitives, Commissives, Behavitives, and Expositives. This classification has a certain significance for the identification of speech acts in general and for the establishment of speech acts of refusing invitations in particular. Austin's classification is considered a vocabulary-based classification based on performative verbs. However, it is only a suggestion for further research and not a fully comprehensive and accurate basis for classification. Additionally, Austin (1962) did not provide any specific criteria for the classification, so the results still have a subjective character. Moreover, the boundaries of each group are not clear, leading to overlapping actions that belong to multiple groups or the omission of intermediate cases between groups.

Searle (1969, pp. 150-163) argues that Austin's classification was based on overlapping and unclear criteria, leading to the inclusion of incompatible elements in the same class, as well as the classification of essentially similar acts into different classes. Searle also suggests that a system of criteria needs to be established before presenting the classification results.

Searle (1969, pp. 150-163) proposed twelve criteria or dimensions, with the four most important elements such as illocutionary point, direction of fit, expressed psychological state, and propositional content. Based on these criteria, Searle classified illocutionary acts into five

main categories: Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declaratives.

It can be said that the classification of illocutionary acts is a highly relative issue. The number of speech acts is immense and there cannot be a single set of acts common to all languages. In this article, we primarily use Searle's criteria and classification results to identify the acts of refusing invitations in Vietnamese, as his approach is considered more comprehensive and effective for the recognition and classification of speech acts.

2. Invitations and Refusals

2.1. The Concepts of "Action" and "act"

According to Hoang Phe (2003, p.422), "action: 1) The specific act of a person aimed at a specific purpose. For example: a courageous act. Unity of will and action. 2) Doing a specific task, more or less important, consciously, with a purpose..."

Hoang Phe (2003, p.423) defines "Act is the way of conduct expressed outwardly of a person in a specific situation."

Thus, "action" is usually understood as a specific, purposeful act of a person. It is often related to a goal or a desired outcome. "Act" is a broader concept, encompassing all the observable activities and reactions of an individual. Act can be intentional or unconscious, and includes physiological responses as well.

2.2. Invitation and speech act of invitation

An invitation is a verbal expression of the friendly, polite, respectful and hospitable attitude of the speaker, and it stems from the interests of both the speaker and the listener. According to Hornby, A.S. (2000, p. 685), the verb "invite" means "to call comes; invited attend (meetings, banquets, etc.)". Suzuki (2009, p.87) states that "When inviting someone verbally, the inviter utters a speech to convey an aim of inviting. Therefore, speech acts of invitation arise when a speaker showed their intention to request the participation

or presence of the hearer to the certain event, especially which being held by the speaker."

According to Austin (1962, p. 79), when using the verb "to invite," the speaker often lowers themselves a bit, being humble to show politeness, even though their social status may be higher, equal, or lower. In general, inviting is a ritual in which the speaker (S) highly regards the hearer (H) and shows them a lot of friendly feelings. According to G. Leech (1983, pp. 124-125), while requests may somewhat impinge on H, invitations, from various perspectives, can only benefit and respect H.

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary edited by Professor Hoang Phe (2003, p. 645), the act of inviting is "1. To express a desire, politely and respectfully requesting someone to do something. *Invite you to come visit. Offer a seat. Respectfully invite, invitation to a meeting, intimate invitation to a meal* (formal: invite to a meal); 2. To eat or drink (said politely about the person being addressed). (*Please have a drink. Have you all had a meal yet*?). Thus, the purpose of the speech act of inviting is to prompt a future action by the hearer.

According to Searle's (1969, pp. 66-67) classification of speech acts, the speech act of inviting belongs to the category of Directives. The illocutionary point is to place the hearer (H) under the responsibility of performing a certain future action. The direction of fit is world-to-words. The expressed psychological state is the speaker's (S) desire. The propositional content is the future action of the hearer (H).

Example 1: A dialogue between the landlady and a young artist renting her house

Landlady: …. We'd like to invite you have dinner with us.

(… *Chúng tôi mời cậu ăn cơm tối*.)

Young artist: Thank you, ma'am. Maybe another time. Tonight, let me take the young lady

out for a simple meal. She might enjoy eating at a crowded local restaurant more.

(*Cám ơn bà. Để bữa khác. Tối nay cho phép tôi mời cô bé đi ăn cơm bình dân. Biết đâu ăn ở quán đông người cô bé sẽ thích hơn.*)

(Doan Thach Bien, p.3)

In this example, the landlady's utterance is an invitation, using the performative verb "invite". The illocutionary point is to place the hearer (the young artist) under the responsibility of carrying out the invitation in the future. The direction of fit is world-to-words (the invitation). The propositional content is the future action of the young artist.

The young artist's response "Thank you, ma'am. Maybe another time. ..." expresses the content of refusing the invitation that the landlady proposed in the conversational interaction.

2.3. The speech act of refusing an invitation

According to the Hornby dictionary, A.S. (2020, p. 1283), "*Refusing an invitation means you are not willing or reject to do something when someone invites you to do. It also means you don not accept the invitation of someone*." Thus, the speech act of refusing an invitation can be seen as "telling the inviter that you will not accept what is mentioned in the invitation or will not do what is mentioned in the invitation."

According to Searle's (1969, pp. 150-163) classification of speech acts, the speech act of refusing an invitation belongs to the category of Directives. The illocutionary point is to place the hearer (H) under the responsibility of performing a certain future action. The direction of fit is world-to-words. The expressed psychological state is the speaker's (S) desire. The propositional content is the future action of the hearer (H).

3. Criteria for identifying the speech act of refusal of invitations

3.1. Situational Context

The first criterion for identifying the speech act of refusing an invitation is the presence of a real-life situational context that impacts the needs and interests of one of the two interlocutors, providing the premise for the speech act of refusing the invitation to emerge.

In the example 1 above, the conversational interaction between the landlady and the young artist when he came to ask permission to take the landlady's daughter out, and was then invited to dinner, provided the premise for the young artist's utterance refusing the invitation made by the landlady.

3.2. Propositional Content

In some cases, the speaker expresses the content of refusal by not accepting any changes proposed in the conversational interaction. The refusal and the invitation form an adjacent pair in the dialogue.

Example 2: A dialogue between Mrs. An and Mai in the living room

Mrs. An: Please have a seat.

(*Mời cô ngồi.*)

Mai politely: Ma'am, I don't dare.

(*Bẩm bà lớn, con không dám.*)

(Khái Hưng, p.58)

In this dialogue, Mai directly refused Mrs. An's invitation, who had a higher social status, by using the negative expression "I don't dare" along with the polite phrase "Ma'am".

3.3. Formal Markers of Refusal Intention

To recognize the illocutionary force, in addition to the situational context and propositional content, one must look at the formal markers of the utterance. According to Searle (1969), a speech act is recognized when it contains one or more formal illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) such as performative verbs (refuse), direct or indirect refusal expressions, and specialized

words like "no," "not," "never" in English, and "không," "thôi," "không cần," "không thể" in Vietnamese.

Some formal markers of refusal intention in Vietnamese include direct refusal using negative words like "không," "chưa," "không thể," "thôi"; indirect refusal by providing reasons or explanations; postponement using vague time expressions; offering alternatives; expressing regret ("tiếc thế"/ "rất tiếc"); or through body language (gestures, facial expressions to indicate disagreement).

In reality, these forms can be used alone or in combination, depending on the context and the level of politeness the speaker wants to convey. In Vietnamese, refusal is often accompanied by face-saving strategies to avoid hurting the listener.

Example 3: A dialogue between Mrs. Thu and Mr. Ham in the living room

Mrs. Thu: Uncle, please stay and let me cook for you.

(*Bác ở đây chơi, em nấu cơm bác.*)

Mr. Ham: No, I'll just meet him for a bit and then go, I have something to do.

(*Thôi tôi gặp chú ấy một tý, rồi về ngay có việc.*)

(Nguyen Khac Truong, p.40)

In Mr. Ham's refusal of the invitation, the word "Thôi" (No) is an illocutionary force indicating device.

3.4. Direct Refusal and Indirect Refusal of Invitations

Direct refusal of an invitation is an act where the listener can recognize the purpose of the invitation through the explicitly expressed words, without the need for further thought or reliance on the context. Based on the classification system of Beebe et al. (1990, pp. 72-73), direct refusal of an invitation is often expressed using performative

verbs (e.g., "I refuse"), negation words like "no," and negative expressions (e.g., "I can't").

Example 4: In the captive's hideout, Du offers Hoang Guitar a piece of bread.

Du: Eat it! (*Ăn đi!*

Hoang Guitar: I'm not hungry. (*Tôi không đói.)* (Duyen Anh, p.15)

In this example, Hoang Guitar directly refused Du's invitation to eat the bread by using the negative expression "I'm not hungry" to clearly express the intention to refuse, fulfilling the illocutionary point of not carrying out Du's invitation in the future, in an appropriate situational context. Thus, the speech act of direct refusal of the invitation creates a definitive illocutionary force.

In everyday communication, refusing an invitation is often carried out through indirect refusal, because refusal always belongs to the category of "sensitive," "delicate" speech acts that threaten the face of the listener. Therefore, indirect refusal of an invitation helps the speaker achieve their communicative goal, reduces the level of face-threat to both interlocutors, and maintains the conversation. Indirect refusal of an invitation is a speech act performed in the form of another speech act. That is, an illocutionary act is carried out indirectly through another illocutionary act. The same illocutionary act can create different indirect speech acts.

Example 5: A dialogue between Kim and Chi in the living room

Kim: How about a little whisky soda? (*Một chút whisky soda nhé?)*

Chi: That stuff is really strong. I'll get sleepy and pass out, and I still have work to do.

(*Thứ đó mạnh lắm. Say rồi ngủ mất, tôi còn phải làm công chuyện.)*

(Duyen Anh, p.135)

In this example, Kim's utterance expressed an invitation for Chi to have a drink, but Chi indirectly refused the invitation by citing the unsuitability (That stuff is really strong) and the unavoidable reason (I'll get sleepy and pass out, and I still have work to do). This indirect refusal can be understood as Chi either not being able to drink alcohol or his health not being able to handle it, and it also expresses an unavoidable reason (I'll get sleepy and pass out, and I still have work to do).

4. Distinguishing Refusal from Negation

Opposing affirmation is negation. There are two types of negation: descriptive negation and rejective negation. According to Nguyen Duc Dan (1998, p.395), descriptive negation is "*the act of affirming the non-A attribute of an object, and it can appear at any time in the thought process about the object and the relationship between them*." Rejective negation is "*the rejection of a conclusion A, which only occurs when there was prior affirmation of A, whether direct or indirect, or even non-linguistic affirmation*." Negation performs three main functions: Accepting the factuality of a proposition; Indicating that an emotion does not occur when affirming an event; Disregarding someone else's opinion.

Therefore, negation is both a speech act and a modality from the semantic-logical perspective. In speech acts, negation has two semantic features: the act of rejecting and the act of describing the existence or non-existence of a state of affairs. Rejection is primarily expressed in responsive dialogue within the structure of negation.

Example 6: A dialogue between two sisters in the kitchen

Older sister: Please come watch the house for me tomorrow.

(*Ngày mai sang trông nhà cho chị nhé)*

Younger sister: I can't watch it tomorrow. I have to go to school tomorrow.

(*Ngày mai em không trông được đâu. Ngày mai em đi học mà*)

(Extracted from TV films)

In the example above, the younger sister's response is a negation structure used to refuse to carry out the requested content. The preceding request is often related to the act of refusal. The generalization of it is negation to refuse. In Vietnamese, words like ***đâu, sao, được*** are used to create rejective sentences with a meaning of refusal, such as ***đâu, có đâu, sao được***.

Example 7: Dialogue between two brothers in the kitchen

Younger brother: Brother, can you help me wash the dishes?

(*Anh giúp em rửa bát nhé*)

Older brother: I can't wash them, I'm busy.

(*Anh rửa sao được, anh đang bận mà*)

(Extracted from TV films)

In reality, it is difficult to determine the boundary between rejection and the speech acts of refusal. There are some dialogues using clear forms of denial and rejection that are not related to the speech acts of refusal.

Example 8: Dialogue between two colleagues at the office

Colleague 1: This blouse looks so beautiful on you.

(*Chị mặc cái áo này trông thật xinh*)

Colleague 2: Beautiful? I am already old, you know.

(*Xinh gì nữa, già rồi cô ạ*)

(Extracted from TV films)

Example 9: Dialogue between two neighbors in the village square

Neighbor 1: What are you doing?

(*Bác đang làm gì thế?*)

Neighbor 2: I'm not doing anything.

(*Tôi có làm gì đâu*)

(Extracted from TV films)

In example 7, the older brother's statement is considered a descriptive utterance, and it is denied using negative words like "no- không" or "not- có... đâu". All of the responses above do not imply rejection. In example 9, the neighbor 2's response is only intended to deny. With the act of asking, the act of responding by simply answering or replying cannot be considered the speech acts of refusal when the question does not have a compelling meaning in the specific context.

5. Conclusion

In conculsion, the speech act of refusing an invitation can be performed directly or indirectly depending on the situation, role in communication, the communication partner, and the purpose of the communication. From the perspective of behavioral theory, the act of inviting and the speech act of refusing an invitation can be identified based on criteria such as the contextual situation; the content of the proposition; and the forms of marking the intention to refuse, such as performative verbs, negative words, etc. Furthermore, the research has also identified the difference between the speech act of refusing an invitation and the act of negation. Through this article, the writer hopes to provide readers with information related to the identification of inviting behavior and refusing invitations of Vietnamese people based on behavioral theory, thereby contributing to enhancing the effectiveness of communication to the highest degree.

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