FUNCTIONAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES
OF APOLOGY SPEECH ACT
(BASED ON THE ENGLISH FICTIONAL DISCOURSE)

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The article presents the description of the functional and semantic features of apology speech act on the basis of the English fictional discourse. The authors analyse the speech act not only within the frames of Politeness Theory, but it focuses attention on the functional and semantic properties of apology speech act. The researchers attempt to study the functions of conventional phrases for speech realisation of apology as well as other communicative meanings of the same phrases. The article also provides the description of apology speech act's status in taxonomies of illocutionary speech acts of different scientists (J. Austin, J. Searle, G. Leech, W. J. Edmonson). The results show that apology speech act can function as a behabitive, convivial or expressive in speech. This has allowed us to single out primary and secondary illocutionary aims of apology speech act. Besides, there is a detailed description of the pragmatic situation of realisation of apology speech act in the article. We classify apology speech act on the basis of sincerity criterion, according to which we distinguish sincere, phatic and official apology speech act. We also describe the communicative means that are used to express apology speech act. The article dwells on the apology formulae such as "Pardon me" or "Excuse me" which include the semantic component of "apology" but are never used as such. They serve to realise other pragmatic functions.

Keywords: politeness; speech act; apology; illocutionary aim; illocutionary act behabitive; expressive; convivial.

Introduction

From the last quarter of the previous century up to the present day, the phenomenon of apology has been attracting much attention of both foreign and Ukrainian linguists. Investigating various aspects of communicative interaction, scientists try to understand how the usage of certain words and expressions after performing some action which, in the speaker's opinion, might have caused moral or physical harm to the hearer, lead to remediation of the current situation. The way the question is put places the problem of defining the communicative action "apology", related to revealing the circumstances for its realisation and its consequences, in the focus of scientists' attention as well as determining the social significance of this action. Search for the answers to these questions is carried out within the frames of Politeness Theory, as a rule.

Indeed, in numerous works of linguists, the apology speech act is studied from the point of view of Politeness Theory and strategies of conflict-free behaviour. For example, according to Brown and Levinson's theory, the apology speech act functions as a tactic of negative politeness strategies that are used to mitigate "threat" against the hearer's "negative face" (Kadar, 2013). Another linguist, Leech (2016; 2014), defines apology as recognition of existing disbalance in relations between the communicants as well as the attempt of restoring harmony between them (Leech, 2016, p. 104, 125; Leech, 2014). In the same way, the apology speech act is regarded by Holmes (1990). The scientist states that apology serves to restore the disturbed communicative balance between the communicants (Holmes, 1990, p. 159). Olshtain (1989) agrees with Holmes (1990) and notices that communicative relations can be restored only in a certain way that exists in the given culture and is meant for this specific purpose (Olshtain 1989, p. 156). The same viewpoint is expressed by Jackson (2014). Ogiermann (2006) conducts his investigation of apology speech act comparing it in Russian, Polish and English simultaneously. At first, the linguist denotes the universal character of apology speech act. Besides, he singles out the following features of this speech act: in the situation of apologising the English-speaking communicants use the language expressions of regret most frequently, while the Polish give preference to the performative expressions and the Russians prefer the requests for forgiveness (Ogiermann, 2006). When studying the apology speech act from the point of view of Politeness Theory, some linguists emphasise the features of apology functioning in the public sphere

(Augoustinos, 2011; Hatipoglu, 2003; Murphy, 2015). Nevertheless, up to now, linguists have not conducted the complex analysis of functional and semantic peculiarities and illocutionary aims of the apology speech act. This fact defines the *topicality* of our research.

The *object* of our investigation is the apology speech act. The *subject* of the study includes semantic and pragmatic features of the apology speech act based on the English fictional discourse.

The main *purpose* of the paper is functional and semantic description of apology speech acts.

To achieve the purpose of the study the following *tasks* have been resolved:

– to define the status of apology speech act in taxonomies of illocutionary acts;
– to determine the illocutionary aims of apology speech act;
– to describe the communicative conditions of successful realisation of apology speech act;
– to apply the sincerity criterion to apology speech act;
– to describe communicative means of apology speech act realisation.

Material and Methods

The material we have analysed includes speech episodes representing the pragmalinguistic situations of apologising which have been chosen from the texts of modern English literature: D. Brown "The Da Vinci Code", H. Fielding "Bridget Jones's Diary", S. Kinsella "Shopaholic and Sister", L. Weisberger "The Devil Wears Prada".

To fulfil the tasks and to achieve the purpose of our investigation, taking into consideration the theoretical background of the research, the following methods have been used: functional and semantic method aimed at studying speech realisation of a certain meaning by verbal means; contextual method, method of text interpretation, and pragmalinguistic method.

Results and Discussions

Definition of the illocutionary aims of apology speech act (further ASA) requires the determination of its status in taxonomies of illocutionary acts of different linguists. As a rule, ASA is referred to different groups of illocutionary acts according to the illocutionary aim which is considered to be prevalent on realising the studied speech act.

In the taxonomy of Austin (1975), ASA belongs to the class of *behabitives*. This class of illocutionary acts includes speech etiquette formulae. The behabitives imply the close connection to the social relations of people. As Austin (1975) notices: "Behabitives include the notion of reaction to other people's behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes and explicit expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct" (p. 159). The class of behabitives encloses such speech acts as approval, gratitude, congratulation, praise, greeting as well as the object of our investigation – apology.

The classification of Searle presents ASA as an *expressive*, the illocutionary aim of which is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. The paradigm of expressive verbs are "thank", "congratulate", "apologise", "condole", "deplore", and "welcome" (Searle, 1979, p. 15).

Leech's taxonomy of speech acts is based on the social goal of communication: seeking opportunities for comity. In other words, the social goal of communication is to establish communicative contact and support polite conversation. His taxonomy of illocutionary acts includes four types of speech acts. ASA belongs to the class of *convivials*. It means that the illocutionary aim of ASA coincides with the social goal – to support a non-conflict communication by expressing regrets for some offence committed by the speaker against the listener. Such a function of convivials is aimed at realisation of positive politeness which contributes to the harmony in communication between people (Leech, 2016, p. 125).

Following Searle (1979), another linguist, Edmonson (1981), regards ASA as an *expressive* speech act, the prepositional content of which implies the truth of the performed speech act. He assumes that in a particular situational context the members of some social group have certain expectations about the type of conversation which may unfold in this particular context, and investigates how such interactions can be initiated (Edmonson, 1981, p. 273). Moreover, according to his observations on apology functioning in discourse, Edmonson (1981) suggests the following scheme of ASA: APOLOGISE – S did P, P bad for H (p. 278). According to this scheme, the speaker (S) has performed some action (P), which has negative consequences for the hearer (H) (Culpeper, 2011); thus, the speaker uses ASA which he/she considers being an attempt to restore the social harmony. In situations when the speaker performs an apology, his behaviour is regarded as socially sanctioned and supportive for the hearer, i.e. it is aimed at supporting the social image of the hearer (Edmonson, 1981, p. 280). If apology is accepted, the cause of the conflict disappears as it is no longer the topic for discussion. In such situations, the communicative event, being earlier initiated by some conflict, ends with the so-called

"Forgive" expression, according to Edmonson. Besides, the scientist investigates the situations in which apology is used as "disarming strategy", i.e. ASA forecasts the possible harm and serves as an apology for the intention of the possible future harm to the hearer (Edmonson, 1981, p. 283).

There are also a lot of works devoted to the research of ASA as purely a polite formula of speech etiquette or social speech ritual. For instance, Formanovskaja (1982) asserts that apology is "a verbal redemption of offence committed" and notices that the degree of guilt defines the use of this or that speech utterance for an expiation of guilt (p. 68). According to her viewpoint, ASA is a ***sociative speech act***. Its illocutionary aims are the same as the ones determined by Leech (2016; 2014).

The most complete presentation of ASA is given in the research work of the Austrian scientist, Ratmajr (2003) who describes the functioning of apology in Russian. The linguist investigates apology in a traditional way and regards it as one of the ***forms of speech etiquette*** that is addressed to the addressee with the request to pardon. Ratmajr (2003) defines apology as "a performative speech act, the perlocution of which consists in pardoning in case of success; still, the advantage of choosing perlocution is on the part of the addressee" (p. 63).

Hence, occupying various positions in taxonomies of illocutionary acts of different linguists, we believe that ASA is performed with the purpose to explicit the reaction to the behaviour or actions of an individual, thus we deal with a behabitive (according to Austin (1975). Obviously, ASA contributes to establishing harmonious relations between communicants, avoiding conflict situations and not violating maxims of politeness category and speech etiquette. Then, this speech act serves as a convivial or speech etiquette formula. ASA can function as an expressive as well, i.e. it can explicitly express the feeling of guilt experienced by the addresser of apology. As a result, ASA realises the following illocutionary aims in speech:

– it expresses the feeling of guilt for the offence committed by the addresser to the addressee;
– it restores the communicative harmony between the communicants;
– it helps avoid the loss of face of both communicants;
– it expresses the true emotional state of the addresser of apology;
– it helps the addresser admit their guilt before the addressee;
– it serves as a verbal redemption of the offence committed.

Thus, ASA is a syncretic speech act that combines the properties of expressives, behabitives and convivials. The illocutionary aim of every particular ASA varies from the speaker's desire to follow the social ritual to the wish to admit and redress the guilt before the hearer for the offence committed to him. The phatic or emphatic character of the uttered apology is defined by the communicative situation, by the relations between the communicants and their intentions.

It is obvious that ASA is a socially meaningful speech act, aimed at achieving or restoring the social harmony between the addresser and the addressee. To come to the mutual understanding between the communicants, it is necessary to adhere to the felicity conditions on performing ASA in discourse:

– condition of propositional content: the speaker admits commitment of certain harm, real or potential, and fully recognises the severity of his action;

– preliminary condition: the happened action is regarded as irrelevant, inappropriate or wrong, the speaker causes harm to the addressee which can be either moral or material. The speaker is sure that the addressee expects the speaker to perform an apology, otherwise, the speaker is likely to face possible unpleasant consequences in the nearest future;

– sincerity condition: the offence committed leads to the appearance of some psychological discomfort experienced by the speaker; the latter regrets what he has done and longs to change the current situation, thus, influencing the addressee's evaluation of his (i.e. speaker's) actions;

– essential condition: apology is a linguistic means which serves to restore the violated cooperation and achieve the previously existing communicative harmony before the negative event.

Thus, the essence of ASA consists in the fact that when uttering certain words in certain circumstances the speaker performs three simultaneous actions: he takes responsibility for the offence committed to the addressee, expresses regrets on this issue and offers the addressee to preserve the existing balance in their relations by accepting his verbal compensation for what has been performed.

After that, it is on the part of the addressee whether to accept or not the speaker's apology. But this is crucial for the statement of ASA success. In other words, ASA is considered to be felicitous if the addressee accepts it and expresses his forgiveness.

The communicative situation of apology realisation necessarily includes the condition that precedes this speech act: there is always an action which, from the addresser's viewpoint, is negative, inappropriate and wrong towards the addressee. Moreover, the addresser realises the need to perform ASA as it will help him

to avoid unfavourable consequences in the future, save his *social face* and the one of the addressee as well, thus, restoring the communicative harmony and preventing conflict. Taking into consideration all the facts preceding ASA realisation, we suggest our own classification of the studied speech act based on the sincerity criterion. From the viewpoint of the sincerity criterion, we distinguish three types of ASA: *sincere*, *phatic* and *official*.

Sincere ASA occurs when the severity degree of harm committed to the addressee is high. In such a case, the speaker longs to take all the responsibility for the harm committed. In such a way, the speaker expresses their true emotional attitude towards the offence committed and his desire to make verbal amends to the addressee. The communicative intention of the speaker, i.e. the speaker's desire to reveal his/her attitude towards the offence committed and readiness to take the responsibility for his deeds, differs sincere ASA. It is important to emphasise that *Sincerity Condition* is always in the communicative focus of the situation of expressing sincere ASA as a speaker must feel regret to be able to apologise felicitously (Murphy, 2015, p. 185). Sincerity condition is targeted at achieving the desirable result, i.e. receiving forgiveness. Besides, this factor turns out to be crucial when it comes to choosing language means to express apology. As a rule, they are non-conventional and non-stereotyped phrases that can combine with traditionally excepted utterances which intensify the illocutionary function of sincere ASA.

Phatic apology is considered to be neutral from the point of view of sincerity criterion. This kind of apology occurs when the addresser, despite his personal attitude towards his own actions, assesses the degree of the offence committed as minimal, but still enough to violate the existing balance in relations with the second communicant. Such parameters as social and psychological distance between the communicants, their communicative status and extralinguistic situation influence the choice of forms for phatic apology. As a rule, these formulae are selected from the list of acceptable in the language culture variants which are regarded as conventional and stereotyped, so they do not determine the essence of the apology communicative action. *Essential condition* turns out to be in the focus of phatic apology. Its aim is to help the speaker adhere to the traditional social ritual.

Another kind of ASA singled out on the basis of sincerity criterion is *official apology*. Official apology functions in a special communicative sphere. Certain context parameters of its realisation place *Condition of propositional content* into the communicative focus of the situation of official apology, thus, neutralising *Sincerity Condition* and *Essential Condition* as the acts of official apology imply asymmetrical communicative relations between the participants of interaction and are aimed at fulfiling specific social goals which are related to special rituals of social life organisation in this peculiar language culture. The core criterion for the official apology functioning is a specific atmosphere of communicative interaction which is usually defined either as "official" or "public". Within the frame of such a situation, every communicant acts according to their social role, assigned to him by society, and his communicative status. Official apology is realised in accordance with certain order; it is preceded by a certain reason; it is expressed in a certain regulated by social rules form. The relations between the communicants as well as their attitude to the harm committed and the responsibility degree for it are left in the background. These are the situations when officials offer apologies to the injured party on behalf of themselves personally (as they are responsible for what has happened) and on behalf of the organisation as well. The latter may also imply that a person performing ASA has nothing to do with the offence committed. Official apology often serves as a common device for restoring the public image of political figures (Augoustinos, 2001, p. 511).

The most widely used speech clichés of realising ASA are as follow: *(I am) sorry, Forgive me, I apologise / (My / Our) Apologies, Pardon (me) / I beg your pardon, Excuse me*. Nevertheless, Pletneva (2007) notices that these utterances do not always serve as expressions of apology. Despite the fact that these language forms contain the corresponding "apology" component in their semantics, many of them are used for realising other communicative intentions in speech. It is worth emphasising that the traditional lexical and semantic analysis makes it impossible to think over thoroughly the usage of apology formulae in speech, because this kind of scientific analysis places the literal lexical meaning of a language unit, used in a certain context, in the centre of researchers' attention. Due to this, the most productive method to reveal the whole variety of discursive meanings of apology formulae in true communication is the pragmalinguistic analysis. Within the frames of pragmalinguistic analysis, we believe that the language forms serve the instrument for fulfiling particular communicative actions whereas the process of communication is described in terms of speech acts performed by the participants of communicative interaction in relation to each other. Following this approach, the semantics of language forms stops being crucial in determining the communicative intentions, expressed by them, as these intentions, realised in speech by the same apology formulae, are defined only by the extralinguistic situation and specifics of interactive organisation of communication. Consequently, the communicative meaning of these speech forms is determined by their usage (Pletneva, 2007, p. 21).

According to our observations, in situations of sincere apology, speakers choose such speech formulae as *Sorry, I'm sorry, I'm awfully sorry, I'm so / very / really / sincerely / terribly / extremely sorry, I apologise, Please forgive me.* They fully actualise the semantic content "apology". Intensification of sincerity degree as well as of illocutionary force is achieved by means of adverbs-intensifiers. The function of the latter is significant as they make the utterance less clichéd and formulaic, they add more sincerity to the speaker's words and completely show his longing to amend the current negative situation.

It is important to pay attention to the fact that expression of ASA with the phrase *(I am) Sorry* often occurs in combination with conditional clause. The conditional clause shows that the addresser has a thought of inadequacy of the behaviour towards the surrounding people. This idea is illustrated in the speech interaction given below: Andy knows that her boss hates being bothered with little things. However, the assistant persists in trying to find out if she has completed another task successfully:

*"Miranda, **I'm sorry if** this is a bad time, but I'm calling to ensure that you received the Harry Potter books. I heard your message saying that you hadn't yet received them, but I've spoken to everyone and…"* (Weisberger, 2003, p. 57).

Besides the construction *(I am) Sorry if* ..., there is another one with a conditional clause, but this time the latter precedes the main clause. Therefore, we have the following apology formula *If..., then I am sorry / I apologise*. The actual diversion of the utterance, i.e. precedence of the conditional clause, signals the speaker's reluctance to be responsible for the offence committed to the hearer or his indirect disagreement with the fact that his actions could do any harm to the hearer. In such situations, it seems as though the addresser makes a concession before the addressee, but at the same time, the speaker wants to follow the pragmatic Politeness Principle and preserve the cooperative character of communication.

Another speech formula of ASA is *Forgive me*, which serves to express mainly sincere apology. Moreover, *Forgive me* frequently combines in speech with other apology expressions. This intensifies the sincerity of the utterance expressed and the speaker's desire to receive forgiveness from the addressee. It is demonstrated in the following example: Nathan Temple is a businessman who has got used to dealing with people quickly without making any fuss. His current affairs require some services from another businessman, Luke. The latter does not want to work with Nathan, but finally gives up due to polite and courteous behaviour of Nathan:

*Luke starts to reply, but Nathan Temple lifts a hand to stop him. He carefully lights his cigar and puffs on it a few times. "**Forgive me for** turning up here out of the blue," he says at last. "But when I want something . . . I don't hang around. I go and get it. Much like your good wife here."* (Kinsella, 2004, p. 138)

The performative verb *apologise* as well as speech formulae which include it, i.e. *I apologise, My / Our apologies, I owe you an apology*, usually occur when the communicants do not know each other well enough or they know each other, but their relationships are far from being close or those of friends. In other words, the relationships between the speakers are distant socially and psychologically.

Special attention is paid to the speech formulae *Pardon (me)* and *(I) beg your pardon*. According to Pletneva, these phrases have certain functioning features in British English. From the viewpoint of semantics, they are the language means of expressing apology and appeal to the hearer with the purpose of gaining forgiveness. But this component of their meaning has turned out to be excluded from the apology situation in modern British linguistic culture, and their newly acquired communicative meanings have nothing to do with the apology semantics.

Pletneva states that if *Pardon (me)* and *(I) beg your pardon* are pronounced with rising intonation, then they are used to ask the addressee to repeat and / or explain what has been said, when the speaker has not heard or has not understood what the second communicant has uttered (Pletneva, 2007, p. 178). This statement can be demonstrated in the following dialogue: Andy does not understand if her boss approves the article she's just read or Andy's outfit, that's why the assistant asks her boss trying to fix the emerged misunderstanding:

"Fine. This is fine. Certainly nothing groundbreaking, but fine. Let's go." She picked up a matching quilted Chanel purse and placed the chain handle over her shoulder.

"Pardon?"

"I said, let's go." (Weisberger, 2003, p. 193).

Besides this function, the speech formula *I beg your pardon?* serves for other pragmatic purposes. It may express the emotional resentment along with reproach.

The speech cliché *Excuse me*, as the ones with the "apology" semantics that we have already analysed, has a wide range of usage in the English language culture. This formula has lost its "apology" component. It mainly occurs in some special context circumstances. *Excuse me* does not imply that the speaker has done any harm to the hearer. Moreover, the speaker does not feel any psychological discomfort or guilt for having

done something wrong towards the hearer. This speech formula serves as a means to establish a contact in the British language culture. It can be used in conversations with acquaintances or when addressing strangers in public places in case the speaker wants to draw attention of the second communicant and open a new communicative interaction. We can illustrate this position with the example below: on ending the phone conversation, the man goes to the door, but his assistant stops him. The new interaction between the communicants opens with the communicative move, which includes the phrase *Excuse me*. As far as we can see, by means of this utterance the assistant restores the previously interrupted conversation, thus establishing a new contact:

> *He moved quickly toward the door.*
> *"**Excuse me**," Sophie called. "Could you clarify something before you go?"* (Brown, 2003, p. 94)

Besides, *Excuse me* serves as a special language instrument for breaking the communicative interaction on behalf of the speaker. Quite often, *Excuse me* is used in Future Simple Tense as the part of the conditional clause. The below given example shows how *Excuse me* functions to break the communicative contact:

> *"Lieutenant, I have another call coming in. Please **excuse me**. I will call you later."* (Brown, 2003, p. 170)

Another function of the speech formula *Excuse me* is to interfere with the ongoing conversation. As a rule, it occurs in situations when the speaker has the intention to interrupt the speech flow of the second communicant and join the interaction. For example, Bridget tries to interfere with the animated discussion between her friends, stating that her love is only 23. Bridget's statement excites everyone's bewilderment that is followed by absolute silence. Bridget's communicative move is realised by means of *Excuse me* to draw attention to herself:

> *"Really?" said Magda, rather too eagerly. "How . . . ?"*
> *"Yes, you're interested," interjected Jeremy, glaring at Magda. "But the point is they're not interested in you."*
> *"Um. Excuse me. My current boyfriend is twenty-three," I said, sweetly.*
> *There was a stunned silence.* (Fielding, 1996, p. 80)

Conclusions

The present article is an attempt to describe functional and semantic features of apology speech act based on the material of the English fictional discourse which have not been studied as a unity yet.

ASA is a socially significant syncretic speech act which includes the properties of expressives, behabitives and convivials. ASA is performed with the purpose to reveal reaction to the behaviour and actions of an individual, i.e. it is a behabitive. ASA is also aimed at achieving or restoring the social communicative harmony, which is necessary when the norms and standards of cooperative interaction are violated, i.e. it is convivial. Besides, ASA expresses the feeling of the speaker's guilt, i.e. it is expressive. The illocutionary force of every particular ASA varies from the speaker's desire to preserve the rules of the social ritual to the speaker's longing to admit his guilt verbally and receive the forgiveness of the hearer for the offence committed. Emphatic, phatic and official character of apology depends on the extralinguistic situation of communication, relations between the communicants, and their intentions.

The necessary conditions for ASA performance are as follows: the offence committed by the speaker to the hearer; realisation of the speaker's responsibility for what has been done and psychological discomfort; speaker's longing to restore the violated harmony of communication.

On the basis of sincerity criterion, we have singled out three kinds of ASA: sincere, phatic and official. The degree of sincerity of the uttered ASA directly depends on the degree of severity of the harm committed to the hearer and the degree of speaker's repentance.

The most widely used speech clichés of ASA realisation are *(I am) sorry, Forgive me, I apologise / (My/Our) Apologies, Pardon (me) /I beg your pardon, Excuse me*. Nevertheless, these speech formulae do not always serve to express only apology. They can also be used to express other communicative intentions.

Special attention is drawn to the speech phrases *Pardon (me)* and *(I) beg your pardon, Excuse me, If you'll excuse me*. From the viewpoint of semantics, they are the language means for expressing apology and they appeal to the hearer with the purpose to gain hearer's forgiveness. Despite this, their "apology" component does not exist any longer in the British linguistic culture, and they have acquired new meanings which have nothing to do with the semantics of apology.

The perspective of our investigation is to study ASA from the viewpoint of conversational analysis. This will allow us to describe the communicative structure of the studied speech act and observe the perlocutionary effect of the apology, reflected in the responding communicative moves.

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