



A Speech Act Analysis of English Utterances of Two Chinese Children in a Multilingual Setting

Wenjuan He*

College of Foreign Languages, Hengyang Normal University, Hengyang, 421002, China

Abstract: A lot of scholarship on speech acts has focused on the implementation of speech actions by foreign learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985; Yang, 2009). Most of these studies, however, adopt interview to conduct their study. This study explored 20 English utterances produced by two Chinese children in the Philippines, employing Speech Acts Theory of Austin and Searle. The results of the study concluded that illocutionary acts that are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative were employed by both of the kids; there were some similarities and differences in the two kids' speech acts; to some degree, speech acts can reflect the speaker's characteristics. From the results, we can see that assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative are effective pragmatic strategies in communication for children. It is strongly recommended that we should do more research on English speech acts performance produced by Non-native English children living in a multilingual setting.

Keywords: Speech acts, English utterances, Chinese children

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***Corresponding author:** Wenjuan He, 295960360@qq.com

1 Introduction

Speech acts are speakers' utterances which convey meaning and make listeners do specific things (Austin, 1962). Just as Yule (1996) pointed out: "speech acts are actions performed via utterances" (p. 47). Every utterances or speech acts produced by children in a multilingual environment indicates that they intended

specific things that will be done by the parents.

Many scholars have conducted some researches on children's utterances communication from various aspects.

Some focused on the categories of illocutionary force in children's free play. For example, Dore (1979) observed speech exchanges among 3-4 year-old children playing freely, revealing a total of 40 categories of illocutionary force. In their study, Feider and Desautels (1981) also got the same result that there were 39 subcategories in 5-6 year-old children in their free play. Feider&Saint-Pierre (1987) found that there was no difference between types of illocutionary acts used. However, the subjects appeared to use different acts with different relative frequencies.

Others focused on the forms and functions of speech acts of children. According to the research results of Arani (2012) children were likely to use certain strategies and special forms to protect their relationship with their interlocutors and develop the chance of success in their communication. Sadighi, Chahardahcherik, Delfariyan, and Feyzbar (2018) conducted a study on the influence of L2 English acquisition of request speech act on Persian preschool children, revealing that frequent use of English request strategy features in the first language was an indication of L2 students' beneficial experience in their L1.

What's more, some researchers did some comparative analysis on speech acts produced by teachers and students in the classroom. Kartika's (2016) study showed that the teacher produced more speech acts (152utterances) than the students (63 utterances). In addition, teachers' intentions and emotions can have a very powerful effect on students' emotional well-being. Gasparatou (2016) found that teachers' perlocutionary effects had an impact upon the building of students'

self-esteem.

In addition, some researchers focused on the understanding and development of children's speech acts. Chejnová (2015) conducted a longitudinal study on the development of directives in first-language acquisition, revealing that the child acquires communicative strategies gradually. Lohse, Grafenhain, Behne, and Rakoczy (2014) found that 4-year-old children have acquired a basic understanding of the underlying normative structure of future-directed speech acts. In their study, Zhang and Yan (2012) concluded that immersion instruction was more effective in cultivating children's English sociopragmatic awareness in the perspective of request strategies.

Speech acts, as an important part in philosophy and pragmatics, has drawn the attention of many linguists. However, most of the previous researches focus on these research content: its definition, classification and functions, development, and so on (Dore, 1977; Arani, 2012; Chejnová, 2015). And some researchers focus on the investigation of implementation of speech actions by foreign learners (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Olshtain&Blum-Kulka, 1985; Yang, 2009). In addition, a considerable amount of research has been carried out on presidency and inaugural speeches of some presidents (Okoro, 2017; Ayeomoni&Akinkuolere, 2012; Widiatmoko, 2017; Hashim, 2015; Sameer, 2017.)

But at present, no comparable research on the analysis of English utterances produced by Chinese children in a multilingual setting. It is urgent for the researchers to conduct more studies on it.

The current study, therefore, aims to fill in this gap by exploring 20 utterances produced by two Chinese children living in the Philippines from the perspective of speech act theory.

The study tries to answer the following questions:

(a) What are the speech acts features of the selected utterances?

(b) What commonalities and differences identified in relation to the application of speech acts in the utterances of two children?

(c) How the identified features project the characteristics of the two children?

The linguistic framework of research is regarded as the tool for the analysis of data.

In this study, to deal with the research questions more objectively and clearly, I choose the theory of Speech Acts as the linguistic framework for the analysis

and evaluation of data, which is a tool to interpret the meaning and function of words in different speech situations.

The theory of Speech Acts is also described as "How to Do Things with Words Theory" since it has its roots in the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). According to Austin (1962), speech acts are classified into three classes, which are: locutionary (saying something), the illocutionary force (what is intended to be done by speaking) and the perlocutionary effect (the effect of what has been said).

Central to the theory of Speech Acts is the illocutionary acts. Thus, the illocutionary acts are divided into five classes by Searle (1979):

(1) Assertives (representative): Commit speakers to say something being the case, e.g. stating, claiming, reporting, announcing, complaining, concluding, etc.

(2) Directives: these are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. It is usually used to give order thereby causing the hearer to take a particular action, e.g. request, command, ask, order, plead, beg, pray, entreat, advise, invite and permit.

(3) Commissives: Commit speakers to some future intentional actions, e.g. promising, offering, swearing, etc. to do something.

(4) Expressives: Count as the expression of some psychological state, e.g., thinking, apologizing, congratulating, welcome, etc.

(5) Declaratives: These statements are used to say something and make it so, such as pronouncing someone guilty, resigning, dismissing, accepting, declaring a war, etc. "(P12-18).

What's more, Searl (1979) made a difference between direct and indirect speech act, stating that if there is a direct relationship between the structure and the communicative function of the utterance, it is direct speech act. Otherwise, it is indirect speech act.

I adopt Searle's typology for the purpose of analysis.

2 Methodology

2.1 Corpora

In this research, 20 English utterances are selected from my two children (one son and one daughter) living with me in the Philippines. The two kids who are twins: Kaikai (son) and Xinxin (daughter). Both of them have the same growing backgrounds. When we arrived in the Philippines, they were 4 years and 8 months old. Until now, we have been staying for about 7 months there.

Both of them learn English in the kindergarten in the Philippines. When we stay together, I always require them to speak English to me as much as possible. Now, they can express themselves in English with my help. They, however, have different characteristics. Kaikai likes listening to some adventure stories and playing with some toys such as Ultraman, Spiderman, cars, building blocks, etc. While Xinxin prefers to some stories about Princess and likes drawing pictures by herself and playing house with her dolls and so on. Kaikai is braver and he can sleep in a separated bed beside mine at night while Xinxin is timid and she is unwilling to do.

2.2 Data gathering

Based on discourse analysis method, the 20 English utterances (10 from Kaikai and 10 from Xinxin) are selected on each Sunday morning from February to April, 2019 in different situations, which are taken records by notebook. Most of the utterances come from the following situations:

- (a) Different social places: home, amusement park, clubhouse and supermarket;
- (b) Different activities: playing games, story-telling, everyday greeting, going shopping.

2.3 Data analysis

In this research, the linguistic approach adopted is based on the linguistic framework of Speech Acts Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). In the course of analysis, in order to make the analysis clear and easy to understand, the two children's utterances are labeled K and X. The numbers of utterances are ten, therefore, we have K1 to K10, X1 to X10. Each of the sentence analyzed performs both direct illocutionary and indirect acts. We make efforts to calculate respectively the speech acts in Kaikai's utterances and Xinxin's utterances to make interpretation of the tables clear.

Speech Acts Analysis of Kaikai's Utterances (K)

K1

Situation1: In the supermarket, I plan to buy some milk. Kaikai looks at the toy Ultraman behind a box of milk. He wants to attract my attention and hopes me to buy the toy Ultraman for him. Then he says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *The Ultraman is together with the milk.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct-Assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect-Directive (requesting)

Perlocutionary effect: Expectation

K2

Situation2: We walk out from the amusement park where there is air-condition inside. It's very hot outside. Kaikai hopes me to ride a tricycle. Then he says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *It's so hot.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct-Assertive (assessing)
- ii. Indirect-Directive (requesting)

Perlocutionary effect: Unwillingness

K3

Situation 3: On the way to the SM supermarket, Kaikai doesn't want to walk. He hopes me to bear him on the back. Then he says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *I'm tired.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct-Expressive (unhappy about the walking)
- ii. Indirect-Directive (requesting)

Perlocutionary effect: Unwillingness

K4

Situation 4: Kaikai and Xinxin are playing happily race-car competition in the house where their grandma is doing some cleaning. Xinxin is a little unhappy. Then Kaikai moves the race-cars to the courtyard. And he says the following sentence to his sister.

Locution: *Here is good, sister.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Expressive (comforting)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (inviting)

Perlocutionary effect: Inspiring and encouragement.

K5

Situation 5: At home, Kaikai is making a hand worked toy. He needs a piece of colorful packing paper. He looks at some paper for packing birthday gifts at the corner of the house. Then he says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *Mummy, we have so much paper but nobody's birthday is coming.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (advising)

Perlocutionary effect: Expectation

K6

Situation 6: We are passing by a store selling ice-cream. Kaikai wants me to buy one for him. Then he says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *I will brush my teeth every day.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Commissive (promising)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (requesting)

Perlocutionary effect: Expectation and happiness
K7

Situation 7: Kaikai and Xinxin are doing a running competition in clubhouse. Kaikai gets to the ending first. And he says the following sentence to his sister.

Locution: *You are number 2.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Declarative (declaring)
- ii. Indirect- Expressive (happy with the result)

Perlocutionary effect: Excitement and happiness
K8

Situation 8: It's time to sleep. I ask Kaikai to go to bed several times but fail. I am a little angry. Then he says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *My good mother.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Expressive (appraising)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (begging)

Perlocutionary effect: Worry.
K9

Situation 9: It's raining outside. Kaikai wants to play rainwater with Xinxin. And he says the following sentence to his sister.

Locution: *It stops raining.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (inviting)

Perlocutionary effect: Hopefulness and excitement
K10

Situation 10: At home, Kaikai is throwing his block toy at the wall. Then it's broken. He doesn't know how to repair. He wants me to help him. Hence, he says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *Sorry, it's broken.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Expressive (apologizing)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (inviting)

Perlocutionary effect: Worry

Speech Acts Analysis of Xinxin's Utterances (X)
X1

Situation 1: In the amusement park, we are playing a game, namely "I say, you do". If I say "jump", they do the action of "jump". There are some words in our games, such as "jump" "run" "walk" "dance" etc. Xinxin likes dancing very much. Hence, every time she wishes me to say "dance". She repeats several times before I speak out.

Locution: *Dance, dance, dance.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Directive (requesting)
- ii. Indirect- Commissive (promising)

Perlocutionary effect: Expectation and excitement
X2

Situation 2: In the morning, I am putting the pink lipstick on my lips. Xinxin likes it very much. She requested to put a little on her lips several times before, however, I refused her every time and told her that she was too young to wear lipstick. This time, she also wants to let me put for her. She looks at my lipstick and says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *Mummy, you are beautiful.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Expressive (praising)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (requesting)

Perlocutionary effect: Expectation and happiness.
X3

Situation 3: Kaikai and Xinxin are doing a role play, acting as salesperson and customer.

Kaikai is selling some dolls while Xinxin needs to take some money to buy. She wants me to give her some money. Then she walks towards to me and speaks the following sentence.

Locution: *Where is my money?*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Assertive (asking)
- ii. Indirect- Directive (requesting)

Perlocutionary effect: Expectation and excitement.
X4

Situation 4: Xinxin wears a new dress that I bought for her yesterday. She is very happy. And she says the following sentence to her Mickey Mouse doll.

Locution: *You have no dress.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect- Expressive (pleasing)

Perlocutionary effect: Satisfaction and excitement.
X5

Situation 5: Kaikai is eating ice-cream. However, Xinxin catches a little cough these days. So she has no ice-cream. She is eager to eat but is not allowed by me. She says the following sentence to comfort herself.

Locution: *Mummy, ice-cream is not yummy!*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect-Expressive (envying)

Perlocutionary effect: Comforting herself.

X6

Situation 6: I am going to the university library for a whole day. Xinxin asks me how long I can come back. I tell her I have to come back in evening. She says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *Hug me.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Directive (requesting)
- ii. Indirect-Expressive (missing)

Perlocutionary effect: Attachment.

X7

Situation 7: At the amusement park, Xinxin incautiously knocks down Kaikai’s toy house. Kaikai is angry and says that he doesn’t love her any more. Xinxin is sad and runs towards to me. And she says the following sentence.

Locution: *Mummy, do you love me?*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Directive (asking)
- ii. Indirect-Expressive (comforting)

Perlocutionary effect: Worries.

X8

Situation 8: Kaikai and Xinxin are doing a balloon competition. Kaikai gets the top one while Xinxin fails several times. She looks anxiously at her balloon and says the following sentence.

Locution: *Come on, please.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Directive (ordering)
- ii. Indirect-Expressive (sorrow)

Perlocutionary effect: Inspiration and anxiousness.

X9

Situation 9: Xinxin is playing Kaikai’s toy car. Kaikai asks her not to stop but Xinxin continues

playing. Kaikai is a little angry and pushes her away. Xinxin cries and runs to me. She says the following sentence to me.

Locution: He beats me.

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Assertive (stating)
- ii. Indirect-Expressive (sadness)

Perlocutionary effect: Complaint.

X10

Situation 10: There are some kids in the Philippines wearing earrings. Xinxin likes earrings very much and wants to wear, too. However, I tell her that students are not allowed to wear earrings in China. In the morning, when she sees that I am putting my earrings, she says the following sentence to me.

Locution: *Mummy, I want to be a Mummy soon.*

Illocutionary force:

- i. Direct- Declarative (declaring)
- ii. Indirect-Expressive (joy)

Perlocutionary effect: Hopefulness.

3 Results and discussion

A rigorous analysis of 20 utterances of the twins with the framework of Speech Acts Theory results in many themes which are presented in this section under three cardinal categories, namely *Features, Comparison and Characteristics*.

3.1 The features of the twins’ speech acts

To explore the features of the twins’ speech acts, the researcher is guided by Speech Acts Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). The following tables show the frequency of speech acts performance of the twins.

Table 1. Data K (Kaikai’s Utterances)

Speech Acts (Direct and Indirect)	Frequency	Percentage
Assertive	4	40%
Directive	9	90%
Commissive	1	10%
Expressive	5	50%
Declarative	1	10%
Total number of speech acts = 20		

As shown in Table 1, it is discovered that Kaikai employs illocutionary acts that are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The most frequently performed speech act by Kaikai is directive which is 90%. Commissive (10%) and Declarative

(10%) have the lowest frequency. It reveals that Kaikai employs more directives to express his requesting, inviting and advising. He also make use of expressives which garners 50% to present his emotion such as likes, satisfactions, and appraising.

Table 2. Data X (Xinxin's Utterances)

Speech Acts (Direct and Indirect)	Frequency	Percentage
Assertive	4	40%
Directive	6	60%
Commissive	1	10%
Expressive	8	80%
Declarative	1	10%
Total number of speech acts = 20		

From Table 2, we can see that Xinxin also uses illocutionary acts that are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The bulk of dominant speech act performed by Xinxin is expressive, garnering a total frequency of 8 occurrences in the corpora, which helps to express her missing, joy and sorrow. Far second, garnering a total frequency of 6 occurrences in the corpora is directive which helps to

express her inviting, requesting and ordering.

3.2 A comparative analysis of the twins' speech acts

In order to identify the commonalities and differences in relation to the application of speech acts in the utterances of two children, the researcher does a comparative study on the corpora.

Table 3. Comparative percentage of the twins' speech act performance

Speech Acts (Direct and Indirect)	Percentage	
	Kaikai	Xinxin
Assertive	40%	40%
Directive	90%	60%
Commissive	10%	10%
Expressive	50%	80%
Declarative	10%	10%

As shown in Table 3, similarities are identified concerning the performance of assertive, commissive and declarative speech acts for both of the twins, respectively garnering a total frequency of 40, 10, and 10 occurrences in the corpora. The other speech acts, however, are found out varied in the percentage of their performance. Directive and expressive are the most and second performed both in two kids' utterances. In Kaikai's utterances, directive occupies 90% while Xinxin's directive just occupies 60% which is less than Kaikai's. Meanwhile, in Kaikai's utterances, expressive occupies 50% while Xinxin's expressive occupies 80% which is more than Kaikai's.

The above results reveal that as children they know how to express their ideas in an indirect way. What's more, they have the same way to express their stating, promising and declaring. Most of the speech acts performed relate to their expressions of psychological state: what they experience, what they feel, what they need, etc.

Meanwhile, when talking with me, Kaikai prefers more directives to express his requesting. While Xinxin

prefers more expressives to present her likes, sadness and happiness.

3.3 The characteristics of the twins projected by the speech act features

To explore the characteristics of the twins from the perspective of speech act features, the researcher gives a further analysis of the data.

Kaikai uses mainly sentences that are directive with 90% of the total sentences, which are to show his requesting, inviting, advising and begging. This is followed by expressive acts with 50%. The results reveal that as a five-year-old boy, he is interested in the surrounding environment. When staying with mother, he likes to ask for some help especially to meet his need or get mother's permission, which shows he can follow the social communication rules among people. He also can express his true feeling to his mother, which shows he can open his mind and trusts his mother.

For example, in K6, Kaikai wants to eat ice-cream by saying "*I will brush my teeth every day*". Because I have told him that eating too much ice-cream is bad for

his teeth, he tries to use this sentence to persuade me to buy one for him. He shows his requesting in indirect way.

Xinxin employs most sentences that are expressive with 80% of the total sentences, which is followed by directive acts with 60%. It reveals that Xinxin prefers to express her mental emotions with mother: getting comforting, acquiring joy, and showing sadness. She relies more on her mother spiritually. As a child, she also show her requesting with directive acts.

For example, in X6, Xinxin shows her attachment by saying “Hug me” before I leave for school. She feels that she will miss mother during the whole day.

Through the analysis of data, we can see that both of the kids use illocutionary acts that are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. This finding is almost consistent with the study conducted by Widiatmoko(2017), who had given an analysis of presidential inaugural addresses with Searle’s taxonomy of speech acts, stating that assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative are observed in the selected addresses.

We find that Kaikai and Xinxin have the same frequency in assertive, commissive and declarative speech acts, and different frequency in directive and expressive which are the most frequently performed respectively. For both of them, requesting is the most frequently used in directive speech acts. “Requesting” is an important pragmatic strategy for kids to communicate in L2, which is influenced by L1. Just as Sadighi, Chahardahcherik, Delfariyan, Feyzbar (2018) did a study on the influence of L2 English acquisition of the request speech act on Persian preschool, stating that the use of English request strategy features in the first language influenced significantly students’ choice in L2.

It is also find that, to some extent, the speech acts can reflect speakers’ characteristics. The result seems to be the same as the study conducted by Hashim (2015), who did a study on speech acts in political speeches, concluding that the personality of the speaker was portrayed by the speech acts in a work.

4 Conclusion

With the linguistic framework of Speech Acts Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the researcher gives an analysis of English utterances produced by two Chinese children living in the Philippines, making an attempt to make contributions to a better understanding

of children’ speech acts.

Based on the data analysis above, the research has the following conclusions:

Firstly, the two kids use illocutionary acts that are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative.

Secondly, the two kids have some common in employing assertive, commissive and declarative speech acts, however, they are different in directive and expressive speech acts.

Thirdly, to some degree, we can see their different characteristics from their speech acts performance.

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