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## **Speech acts of gratitude and apology in semantic and pragmatic aspects**

### **Мовленнєві акти подяки і вибачення в семантичному і прагматичному аспектах**

**Summary.** *The article examines the speech acts of gratitude and apology from the perspective of discursive and pragmatic analysis. Such speech acts are identified as an integral part of interpersonal contact, which normally occurs daily in society and this is the relevance of the research topic. The features of politeness acquire significance in socio-cultural and intercultural aspects. It is established that the incorrect use of expressions of gratitude and apology can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between speakers of different languages and cultures. Therefore, addressing the semantics and pragmatics of the expressions «thank you» and «excuse me» has not only theoretical but also practical significance. The purpose of the work is to study the semantic nuances and patterns associated with the expression of forms of politeness in English-language discourse. The study combines theoretical analysis of existing sources with components of cognitive, pragmatic and linguistic analysis. The gratitude and apology are units carried out in accordance with principles and rules of communication. The communicative maxims underlie clear and effective speech acts. Gratitude (recognition for a service, gift, help) is used to establish social harmony and politeness in relationships; it performs functions: emotional, social, ceremonial, etc. Speech act apology expressing regret or admitting guilt for a situation or action that caused discomfort or harm to another person. The main functions of an apology are responsible and empathetic ones. The speech actions vary according to social norms, rituals, status, gender, etc. They can be expressed in different forms and styles. We see practical significance of the work results in pragmatics, communication and intercultural theory development.*

**Key words:** *speech acts, gratitude, apology, English-language discourse, semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics.*

**Анотація.** *У статті досліджуються мовленнєві акти подяки і вибачення з точки зору дискурсивного та прагмалінгвістичного аналізу. Обумовлені мовленнєві акти виявлені як невід'ємна частина міжособистісного контакту, що в нормі відбувається щоденно в соціумі і в цьому полягає*

актуальність теми дослідження. Підкреслено, що підґрунтям ефективного процесу комунікації в різних мовах і культурах слугує ввічливість, як ключова частина прагматики спілкування. Встановлено, що неправильне використання висловів подяки та вибачення може призвести до непорозумінь і конфліктів між носіями різних мов і культур. Тому звертання до семантики і прагматики виразів «дякую» та «вибачаюсь» має не лише теоретичне, але й практичне значення для покращення міжкультурної комунікації. Мета роботи полягає в дослідженні смислових нюансів та закономірностей, пов'язаних з вираженням форм ввічливості в англо-мовному дискурсі. У дослідженні теоретичний аналіз існуючих джерел поєднується із компонентами когнітивного, прагматичного та лінгвістичного аналізу. Викладено комунікаційні максими, які лежать в основі чіткого та ефективного спілкування. Подяка (вдячність, визнання за послугу, подарунок, допомогу) використовується для встановлення соціальної гармонії та ввічливості у стосунках; виконує функції: емоційну, соціальну, обрядову тощо. Мовленнєвий акт вибачення висловлює жаль або визнає провину за ситуацію чи дію, що спричинило дискомфорт або завдала шкоди іншій людині. Основними функціями вибачення є відповідальна та емпатична. Ці мовленнєві акти різні відповідно до соціальних норм, ритуалів, статусу, гендерної приналежності тощо. Можуть бути виражені в різних формах і стилях. Практичне значення вбачаємо у можливості використання результатів у прагмалінгвістики, теорії комунікації та міжкультурного спілкування.

**Ключові слова:** мовленнєві акти, подяка, вибачення, англомовний дискурс, семантика, прагматика, соціолінгвістика.

**Introduction.** In today's global world, appropriate and effective communication takes on special meaning. Manners, especially expressions such as «thank you» and «excuse me», play a key role in interpersonal and cross-cultural communication, helping to establish, maintain and restore social bonds.

Knowledge of the semantics of these expressions is important for the effective process of speaking. The linguistic basis for this is politeness as an integral part of the pragmatics. The sociocultural, especially intercultural, aspect becomes significant in achieving effective communication.

In the context of globalization, intercultural communication is getting increasingly widespread. In correct use of expressions of gratitude and apology can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between speakers of different cultures. Therefore, the study of the semantics and pragmatics of the expressions «thank you» and «sorry» in the English-language discourse has not only theoretical but also practical significance.

*The practical significance* of the research results lies in the fact that they can be used in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, creating textbooks and curricula on intercultural communication, developing automatic translation and speaking club's complexes.

*The purpose of the work* is to study the semantic nuances and patterns associated with the expression of gratitude and apology in English-language discourse.

*The object of this work* is the linguistic expressions of gratitude and apology in English-language discourse.

*The subject of the study* is the semantic features of the expressions of gratitude and apology in English and their adequate understanding in various applications: in official business language, among relatives and friends, in an ethic environment.

**Methodology.** Theoretical analysis of existing Internet sources is combined with components of cognitive, pragmatic and linguistic discourse analysis.

**Results and Discussion.** The works of many researchers are devoted to definition of speech acts of gratitude and apology in English: Austin J. L., Cook H. M., Coulmas F., Culpeper J., Grice H. P., Jucker A., Miyake K., Searle J., Van O. D., Ziem A., etc. [1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 8; 9; 10; 11].

Thus, according to Searle [9], a speech act is a purposeful speech action carried out in accordance with the principles and rules of speech behavior accepted in a given society [9].

Since a speech act is a type of action, its analysis uses essentially the same categories that are necessary for characterizing and evaluating any action: subject, goal, method, instrument, means, result, conditions, success, etc. Depending on the circumstances or conditions in which a speech act is performed, it can either achieve its intended purpose and thus be successful, or it can fail to achieve it. To be successful, a speech act must at least be appropriate, otherwise it is accompanied by communicative failure.

The principles and rules, on which normal human communication is based, were formulated by the British philosopher Grice H. P. [5]. He outlined communication maxims that underlie clear and effective speech acts. He proposed such key maxims:

- give as much information as needed, but no more;
- give maximum quality: do not say anything that you consider wrong or for which you do not have sufficient justification;
- maximum relevance: your statements should correspond to the topic of the conversation;
- maximum method: avoid ambiguity and confusion in your statements [5, pp. 41–58].

It is worth to note, it is the speech act of addressing that establishes the necessary tone and style of illocution act, forms a certain attitude of the addressee to the message. Addressing can set a general favorable

background for communication or enhance the motivational potential of the statement.

The address can to one degree or another increase the status of the addressee when he behaves correctly, or, conversely, decrease it if the addressee considers the actions of the partner to be inadequate.

A formal address to the addressee can serve as one of the means of stimulation, encouraging them to make appropriate adjustments to their attitudes and change their behavior in the future. Therefore, the address affects the emotions, thoughts, actions of the addressee, that is, it has a certain illocution effect.

In our opinion, the address serves as an emotional means of speech influence, the main purpose of which is to «process» the emotional-volitional sphere of the addressee's consciousness. This corresponds to the theory of speech acts developed by Austin J. L. [1].

According to this theory, address is considered as an illocution act, capable of influencing not only the cognitive, but also the emotional-volitional sphere of the communicator. Other researchers, such as Searle, also emphasize the importance of the emotional component in speech acts [9].

Searle J. emphasized that address functions as a psychological tool in communication, acting as a means of both productive and unproductive speech acts. Such speech acts can evoke a variety of verbal and nonverbal reactions from the addressee, depending on the context and effectiveness of their execution, which reflects the social dynamics between the participants in the communication [9].

According to J. Leech, the communicative tactic of gratitude expresses recognition for a service, gift, assistance or other action. Gratitude is often used to establish or maintain social harmony and politeness in relationships [7].

To J. Leech's point of view, gratitude comes out the following functions:

1) *emotional function*. An expression of gratitude that emphasizes that the help was critically important. Gratitude has a deeply personal meaning.

*«I don't know how I would have managed without your help. It really means a lot to me!».*

*«I am sincerely grateful! You just saved me with this advice and I will never forget it».*

*«It was so unexpected and so kind of you. I can't express how grateful I am».*

Emotional expressions of gratitude usually include emotionally charged vocabulary that emphasizes the importance and strength of the

speaker's feelings («sincerely», «incredible», «I don't know how to thank you», «I will never forget», etc.

2) *social function* (maintaining or strengthening positive relationships between communication participants).

*«Thank you for always being there for me and supporting me. You are not only a colleague, but a true friend».*

*«I am very grateful for your help. You can always count on my support whenever you need it».*

*«Thank you for always finding time to help. Working with you is a real pleasure».*

In such examples, gratitude not only fulfills its primary function of expressing thanks, but also contributes to the maintenance or development of social ties between people.

3) *ritual* (observance of social norms and expectations related to politeness).

*«Thank you for your attention!» (after a public speech or presentation).*

*«I am sincerely grateful to you for inviting me to this event».*

*«Thank you for your cooperation!» (at the end of a work project or transaction).*

*«Thank you for joining us tonight» (the host says to the guests during a formal dinner).*

In such cases, gratitude is predictable, formal and does not always reflect true emotions, but it is an important part of observing social ritual and norms of politeness [7].

The speech act of apology is used to express regret or admit guilt for a situation or action that caused discomfort or harm to another person. There are the following functions of apology:

1) *restorative function* (eliminating or mitigating the negative consequences of an action or situation, restoring broken relationships);

2) *empathetic function* (expressing sympathy or understanding the emotions of the other side).

*«I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you».*

*«I apologize for the inconvenience».*

The speech acts of gratitude and apology also vary depending on the cultural context. In some cultures, there may be more or less emphasis on the use of these acts. It depends on cultural norms of politeness.

J. Leech views politeness from a pragmatic perspective as a set of rules that govern speech behavior during communication. His theory of politeness is based on several maxims that help maintain harmony in illocution acts, avoid conflicts, support friendly relation between interlocutors [7].

The main maxims for the theory of Leech are as follows:

1) maximum wit (make the other part pay the least and get the most). This means that the interlocutor should try to make his speech useful and enjoyable for the listener;

2) maximize generosity (minimize your own benefit and maximize the cost to others). This maxim emphasizes the importance of being willing to sacrifice your own interests to meet the needs of others;

3) maximum approval (minimize criticism and maximize praise). Recognizing the positive qualities and achievements of others strengthens social bonds;

4) increase humility (minimize self-praise and maximize self-criticism). This creates an atmosphere of humility and openness, which has a positive impact on communication;

5) maximizing pleasantness (minimizing disagreements with others and maximizing agreement). Maintaining a common point of view helps create harmony while speaking;

6) maximize empathy (minimize disgust towards others and minimize sympathy). This requires understanding and empathy, helps achieve social balance and contributes to maintaining positive interpersonal relationships;

7) maximum amount (give as much information as possible, but no more). Try to tell the truth; don't say what you think is wrong or without a good reason;

8) maximum relevance (try to make your message relevant to the topic of the conversation). Try to avoid ambiguity and unpleasant content, be clear and concise [7].

Politeness is an important communicative category that influences the success or failure of any illocution act, as it coordinates social interaction and ensures harmony between interlocutors. In discourse, politeness is not just a rule of etiquette, but a complex phenomenon that is closely related to the contexts, goals, interests, relationships of the participants.

Jucker A. explores politeness in the context of speech and its impact on identity, focusing on how social and cultural factors shape communicative strategies [6]. Key aspects of his work include the following:

1. *the relationship between politeness and identity*. Jucker A. analyzes how personal and social identities (ethnic, professional, gender) influence the use of politeness strategies in communication;

2. *contextualization of politeness*. It considers how the context (social, cultural, professional) impacts the choice of speech acts related to the perception of the identity of the interlocutors;

3. *empirical research*. Jucker A. conducts quantitative and qualitative research to understand how politeness manifests itself in real-world interactions and also impacts the perceptions of conversation partners;

4. *cross-cultural aspects*. The researcher also analyzes how different cultures may have diverse norms of politeness [6].

Jucker's research is important for understanding the complexity of speech practices and how they interact with social structures and identity in the modern world.

The semantic aspect of the speech acts of gratitude and apology is explored in the context of pragmatics and speech act, taking into account the meaning behind the utterance, as well as the intentions and expected impact on the interlocutor.

Politeness theory of Miyake K., Ziem A. has become the basis for further research in the fields of speech acts, cross-cultural communication, social pragmatics. It demonstrates how people use language to balance their needs with those of their interlocutors and to maintain harmonious social relationships [8; 11].

These scholars have investigated the concept of a «face», politeness strategies, speech acts, threats to «face» and cultural universals. According to their concept, there are two types of «face».

– *Positive «face»* (the desire to be accepted, recognized and understood by others).

*«Your idea really changed the course of our project. You did a great job».*

*«Hi! I'm so glad to see you! How are you».*

*«I'm here for you. If you want to talk, I'm always willing to listen».*

– *Negative «face»* (the desire for freedom of movement and inviolable personal space).

*«I noticed that there are flaws in our strategy. I'm sorry, but we need to discuss this».*

*«I'm sorry, but could you explain your proposal in more detail? I didn't quite understand».*

*«Sorry, I can't help this time. I have a lot of work to do».*

Miyake K. develops the concept of speech acts, determining their impact on social interaction. There are different types of speech acts, including expressive ones, which embrace thanks and apologies. Miyake K. emphasizes that these acts are not intended to change the world, but rather reflect the speaker's attitude to certain situations [8].

Among them we can underline:

1. *Assertives*. These are speech act that express a statement or description of a certain situation or state of affairs. Its purpose is for the speaker to demonstrate his opinion of authenticity. For example: *«It is raining today».*

2. *Directives*: speech acts aimed at influencing the behavior of the listener. Its purpose is to get the listener to perform a certain action.

Examples of directives include requests, commands, advice. The important thing is that directives aim to change the behavior of another.

*«Sit here, please».*

*«Please, close the window».*

3. *Commits*: Speech acts by which the speaker has committed to perform a certain action in the future. This category includes promises, obligations. Commits focus on actions that the speaker plans to perform.

*«I will help you tomorrow».*

4. *Expressives*: These speech acts express the speaker's emotions or attitude towards a situation. They include thanks, apologies, congratulations, condolences, etc. Expressives are not intended to change the world, but reflect the speaker's inner state.

*«Thank you for your help».*

*«Sorry for the delay».*

5. *Statements*. These are speech acts that themselves change the state of affairs. Speech acts in this category have an immediate result. An example of a statement is the announcement of a verdict.

*«Take him to the prison, will you?» [8].*

The cross-cultural nature of the speech acts of gratitude and apology is explored in terms of how these speech acts are used and interpreted across cultures, taking into account social norms, rituals, cultural context. Such behavior is an important element of politeness and social interaction, but its forms and expectations can vary significantly across cultures.

In different cultures, gratitude and apology can be expressed in diverse forms and styles. For example, in English-speaking cultures, apologies are usually expressed with phrases such as «I am sorry» or «Excuse me». In Japanese culture apologies may be classified according to situation and social role of the speaker: «sumimasen» or «gomen nasai».

What is considered appropriate or necessary to express gratitude and apology can vary greatly between cultures. In the UK, an apology can be formal. People apologize for minor offenses, while in other cultures, apology may mean a serious offence or a violation that carries a lot of weight.

In British culture, apologies are sometimes called «standard apologies». This is a type of apology that does not actually express an actual apology or admission of guilt, but is a formal part of communication. They are used to maintain politeness or avoid conflict. «I'm sorry you feel that way».

In the USA, «types of apologies» can attract more criticism because they are often perceived as insincere or as a way to avoid responsibility. American culture values honesty and openness, so apologies that do not express genuine remorse can be seen as hypocritical.



For example, in the media or during public speeches, you can often hear criticism of celebrities or politicians for using these phrases, which seem like formal but insincere apologies. Therefore, Van Olmen analyzes gratitude as a form of positive politeness aimed at strengthening social ties by acknowledging the help or kindness of another person. He views apology as an act of negative politeness aimed at reducing social pressure after a violation or insult. Both speech acts perform important social functions, such as maintaining harmony, resolving misunderstandings and strengthening relationships [10].

**Conclusion.** As a result of the study of the semantics and pragmatics of the speech acts of gratitude and apology in English-language discourse, the goal was achieved, which allows us to draw the following conclusions.

The speech acts of gratitude and apology belong to the expressive class of illocution acts, the main communicative purpose of which is to express the psychological state of the speaker, his attitude to a certain situation or interlocutor. These acts play an important role in maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships and implementing the principle of politeness in communication.

The semantic structure of speech acts of gratitude is characterized by the presence of such components as recognition of the received benefit, positive assessment of addressee's actions and expression of gratitude. At the same time, depending on the context and intensity of emotions, speakers use various lexical and grammatical means to enhance the expressiveness of the statement.

Pragmatic analysis of acts of apology has revealed that their successful implementation depends on the sincerity of the speaker, his recognition of his guilt and desire to restore the broken social harmony. Important factors are also the status characteristics of the communicants, the degree of formality of the situation and the severity of the offense.

The study showed that in the English language is an extensive system of means of expressing gratitude and apology, which vary from neutral standard formulas («thank you / sorry») to emotionally colored and intensified constructions – («I am eternally grateful, I sincerely apologize»). The choice of specific language means is determined by the pragmatic factors of the communication situation.

The analysis of the discursive implementation of the studied speech acts revealed their frequent interaction with other types of statements, in particular compliments, excuses, promises to correct the situation, etc. This indicates the complex nature of politeness strategies in real communication.

The sociolinguistic aspect of the study demonstrated the dependence of the form of expression of gratitude and apology on such parameters

as the social distance between the communicants, their relative status, gender and cultural context of interaction. Particularly noticeable are the differences in the use of intensifiers and additional speech acts.

The practical significance of the obtained results lies in the possibility of their use in courses on pragmatics, communication theory and intercultural illocution acts. Understanding the semantic and pragmatic features of acts of gratitude and apology contributes to the development of communicative competence and the improvement of intercultural understanding.

Promising directions for further research may include a comparative analysis of the implementation of these speech acts in different languages and cultures, the study of their functioning in new forms of electronic communication, as well as the study of the interaction of verbal and nonverbal components in expressing gratitude and apology.

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