SPEECH ACTS. A CROSS-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Alina Alexandra Apreutesei

PhD Student, UMFST „G. E. Palade" of Târgu Mureş

Abstract: The speech act theory has long been an element of utmost importance to the field of pragmatics. Cross-cultural pragmatics designs a framework of analysis based on the principle of comparison between more than two linguacultures to observe and identify different patterns used in human communication. Both the similarities and the differences between these patterns convey inherent meaning which is linked to cultural influence, societal features and hierarchies. But in order to be able to perform such an analysis, a precise and interchangeable framework was needed so that it could be applied to an infinite number of linguacultures. The purpose of the present article is to outline the steps of this new methodology.

Keywords: cross-cultural pragmatics, speech acts, linguacultures, ritual frame expressions, discourse

1. Introduction. The relevance of cross-cultural pragmatics

The present comparative study which focuses on the public discourse provided by the medical authorities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in three European countries (U.K., Spain and Romania) will be conducted from a cross-cultural perspective and thus, the specific framework needs to be presented accordingly. Since it is a new field of study, it has been quite a challenge to delineate the principles and methods a researcher should follow when dealing with an analysis of cross-cultural pragmatics. Even if the decade of the 2000s has provided us with some critical studies in this respect which could be used as models and trustworthy references (e.g. Wierzbicka, Staedler, Gass & Neu, Kecskes, Blum-Kulka, Spencer-Oatey or House), there still was a need for a more detailed description of the theory and the methodology of this type of analysis.

The idea that the "*basic experiences of the world"* (Yule, 1996) might be differently perceived according to one´s cultural background and thus, differently expressed according to that person´s mother tongue represents a turning point in pragmatic research. Cross-cultural pragmatics started to be considered relevant by the world of linguistic science relatively recently, towards the beginning of the 1990s[1] and well into the years 2000 and it is considered that there are several reasons for which pragmatic research took a turn in this direction. These new perspectives were theorised mainly by linguists who entered the English-speaking world as immigrants from other languages and cultures and became interested in the dynamics that languages developed when confronted with one another. It is the perspective of an outsider of the Anglo (Kecskes, Wierzbicka) community that started to raise awareness of the fact that maybe most of the pragmatic concepts which referred to *human communication* were features typical to the English language since they were culturally based on the English communicating patterns.

[1] It was actually towards the end of the decade of the 1980s when the field of cross-cultural pragmatics became a reality in the study of language and it gained authority through the publication of *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project*, edited by Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Juliane House, and Gabriele Kasper and first published in 1989. However, it wasn't until the decade of the 2000s that new research started to be conducted in this area.

Considering primarily her status as a Polish-born researcher who lived and conducted linguistic research for more than 30 years in the Australian cultural and linguistic background, Anna Wierzbicka refers to the concept of a bilingual speaker. As she goes through her own experiences both as an Australian family member and as a researcher and professor at an Australian university, her perspective on discourse analysis shifts according to her real-life observations towards what we today call *cross-cultural pragmatics*. A singular personal experience can hardly set the basis for a new theoretical approach in the field of language studies and this is why Wierzbicka´s research extends over a long period and covers a series of other languages apart from the ones that she uses (which are Polish and English) such as Russian, German, Japanese, sometimes even French or Spanish. (Wierzbicka, 1997)

In her view, the bilingual should be referred to as a person who more than being able to withstand a conversation in a language different from their mother tongue, is someone who manages to adapt their mindset to a new language (implying here that the culture being delivered or embodied by that specific language is as important), while keeping an essential part of their world views unaltered, according to the perspectives delivered in their native culture and tongue.

> *"I was learning new ways of speaking, new patterns of communication, new modes of social interaction. I was learning the Anglo rules of turn-taking (...). But these weren´t just changes in the patterns of communication. There were also changes in my personality. I was becoming a different person, at least when I was speaking English."* (1997: 17)

One could infer here that what Wierzbicka is trying to say is that engaging in the communicative process in a second-acquired language produces profound shifts and changes inside the human mind. If we consider language as being the verbal or written expression of a people´s understanding of the surrounding world and consider thus, that a language carries apart from sheer meaning, a culturally and traditionally based view of the world, one might add that living in a foreign country and emerging into that new culture by speaking the new language daily as a primary means of interaction between humans, opens up a new conceptual perspective, while at the same time develops new interactional patterns at a communicative level.

When Wierzbicka´s book *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics. The semantics of human interaction* was first published in 1991, her new views on human interaction and her unique proposals for discourse analysis were if not completely ignored, at least elegantly looked over by the scientific community because it was probably too soon or on a still unfertile ground to question the key pragmatic concepts which had been acclaimed and consistently theorised throughout the second half of the 20th century. The second edition was published in 2003 and in the *Introduction to the second edition* not only does she mention the fact that it took more than ten years for the new perspective to begin to be accepted by her research fellows, but also that the speed with which pragmatic research was evolving was something completely unexpected, but of a good omen. Consequently, she admits that the initial rejection of her approach was a trigger point, a key moment which made her even more determined to pursue her lifelong observations into scientific research and new data which might support her ideas. In 1997, in an article published in a Londonese scientific compendium, she starts from a personal testimony and easily walks into the scientific approach to make her point valid:

> "*the rules for "friendly" and sociable acceptable interaction in Polish and in English were different. Consequently, I could never believe in the "universal maxims of politeness", in the universal "logic of conversation", and the "cooperative principle" promulgated by scholars such as Grice (1975), Leech (1983) or Brown and Levinson (1978). I knew from personal experience, and from two decades of meditating on that experience, that the Polish "maxims of politeness" and the Polish rules of*

> *"conversational logic" were different from the Anglo ones. I also knew that the differences between the Anglo "rules", "maxims" and "principles" (presented in literature as "universal") and, for example, Polish ones, were not superficial, but reflected differences in deep-seated, subconscious attitudes – attitudes which were fused with the core of a person's personality. Thus, I came to feel that by learning the Anglo ways I could enrich myself immeasurably, but I could also "lose myself."* (Wierzbicka, 1997: 20-21)

This new pragmatic approach to the study of language, based on a cross-cultural view sees human communication as a culturally and socially grounded act. In a globalised world, where people travel faster and more easily than ever before the intersections between languages have also become more frequent. One cannot help but wonder how this phenomenon influences or alters human communication altogether. The cross-cultural perspective offers a wider net of ideas and analysis concerning the processes of language acquisition along with behavioural and linguistic patterns.

Anna Wierzbicka summarises the main ideas which led to the development of this new pragmatic perspective as follows:

> *"In different societies and different communities, people speak differently; these differences in ways of speaking are profound and systematic, they reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values; different ways of speaking, different communicative styles, can be explained and made sense of in terms of independently established different cultural values and cultural priorities."* (2003: 69)

When analysing discourse from a pragmatic perspective, one must not ignore these key differences because if put aside, the analysis will result purely theoretical. To see language in the terms of Noam Chomsky as a highly ambiguous system which follows only its own internal rules and patterns seems today both outdated and somehow unrealistic. Human communication is dynamic and unexpected, it can be based on a common desire for cooperation between both the speaker and the hearer while at the same time, it can intentionally (or unintentionally for that matter) seek confusion to mislead or even lie. In the latter case, one can even go a step further and analyse situations of lying through intentional omission or worse, conscious manipulation and the status of using a second acquired language could easily become the perfect excuse to shadow such intentions standing behind certain messages. It is not a mission of pragmatic research to determine the truthfulness of any given discourse. It is however a matter of cross-cultural pragmatics to raise awareness of the presence of such phenomena in language usage, as well as to identify possible culturally and socially based impediments which might aim to explain the outcome of a conversational interaction.

To summarize it better, the following definition delineates the area of study proposed by Anna Wierzbicka: "*Cross-cultural pragmatics compares different cultures, based on the investigation of certain aspects of language use, such as speech acts, behaviour patterns and language behaviour*." (as cited by Kecskes, 2017: 401). Once a language is perceived as a behavioural manifestation, it might be easier to become aware of its flexibility, power of adaptation to different situations and contexts as well as of its ability to create confusion and uncomfortable, if not unpleasant, interactions.

2. Speech acts

2.1 Historical overview

The discussion on pragmatics cannot be made outside the main keywords and concepts that define the study of this discipline. To begin with, John Langshaw Austin's book *How to Do Things with Words,* first published in 1955 as a collection of twelve lectures that he gave at Harvard University, represents a milestone in the evolution of pragmatics as a self-sustained linguistic discipline. One of the study's main achievements is the introduction of a new concept defined as speech acts. According to Austin, *"to say something is to do something, or in saying*

something we do something, and even by saying something we do something" (Austin, 1962: 100). This is a theory which stated from the very beginning that it deals with a quite obvious type of linguistic phenomenon, but whose in-depth study and analysis are yet to be performed. It is a theory that bridges grammarians and philosophers into creating a more complex perspective on human language, starting with philosophical questions and undergoing a logical type of analysis, while re-structuring the units and scope of the methodology.

Although Austin is acknowledged for having created and developed the theory of the speech acts, philosophers and linguists before him have paved the ground and conducted studies that opened the direction for his new approach. To name only a couple, Karl Bühler (1879 – 1963) was the one who first described the dynamic between *the sender, the message, and the receiver* in his *organon model* of communication which would later help Roman Jakobson (1980) in his defining of the functions of language. Second, the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951) described human communication as a language game in which the speaker and the receiver of the message alternate roles and play certain rules which can convey a specifically desired meaning to the spoken utterances.

Speech act theory views utterances as acts and posits the speech act as the unit of linguistic communication. The speech acts were classified by their author into three main types: locutionary (the act of saying something, without further interpreting the underlying intentions), illocutionary (speakers' intention upon saying the utterance), and perlocutionary acts (the effect that the speech act has on the participants). It is a task of speech act theory to explain in which senses and under which conditions uttering something means doing something, thus providing a theory for describing and understanding the various kinds of linguistic action (apologizing, promising, ordering, answering, requesting, complaining, warning, inviting, refusing, or congratulating).

> *"To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and eo ipso to perform an illocutionary act, as I propose to call it. To determine what illocutionary act is so performed we must determine in what way we are using the locution:*
>
> - *asking or answering a question,*
> - *giving some information or an assurance or a warning,*
> - *announcing a verdict or an intention,*
> - *pronouncing sentence,*
> - *making an appointment or an appeal or a criticism,*
> - *making an identification or giving a description, and the numerous like."* (Austin, 1962: 104).

Austin's theory was later continued by the studies of his disciple, the American philosopher, John Searle who also promoted the idea that human language and human behaviour are interconnected manifestations that if separated, lead to a fragmentary understanding. If language is a "*rule-governed intentional behaviour*" (Searle, 2011: 16), then all communicative acts occur with a purpose and are delivered according to a set of rules which facilitate communication:

> "*speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on; (…) these acts are in general made possible by and are performed in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguistic elements."* (Searle, 2011: 16)

Searle made a significant contribution to Austin's theory and built upon a perspective of analysis which stayed and became quite appealing to linguists. A matter of major concern was the classification of the speech acts into determined typologies. If Austin theorized *an open-ended list* (Levinson, 2017:205) of types of speech acts which are prone to vary according to different cultural backgrounds, Searle identifies five classes of speech acts and insists on their universal character: *"representatives (assertion-like), directives (questioning, requesting,*

etc.), commissives (promising, threatening, offering), expressives (thanking, apologizing, etc.) and declarations (blessing, christening, etc., which rely on special institutional backgrounds).” (Levinson, 2017:205).

As we approach the contemporary decades, one cannot help but notice that the study of language from a pragmatic perspective means intertwining areas of greater diversity such as sociology, computer technology, behaviourism, psychology, philosophy and even educational sciences. Due to the notable advances in technology, human communication has become more dynamic than ever in a social context in which the traditional boundaries and limitations brought forward by the limits of time and space have almost entirely disappeared. It is in this particular environment that linguists have started to realise that the attempt to define a set of universal speech acts which could apply to the process of communication is not only limitative, but it can surely be a mistake. If we maintain Searle’s hypothesis according to which language is a form of human behaviour that only becomes coherent and functional when following a set of predetermined rules, then the link between human communication and cultural/ societal backgrounds becomes the new matrix of language analysis. Levinson (2017:202) acknowledges the fact that “*we need to decode or attribute speech acts as lightning speed because it is the illocutionary force, not the meaning, that we primarily respond to*.” Thus, real communication is generated at an instinctual level, starting with the intention either of initiating a new exchange or of answering to a received stimuli. Defining the typology of speech acts throughout a finite classification is probably an attempt similar to the procrustean bed – as long as humans use language as a means of communication, the language will be created and it will re-create itself according to each communicative situation it is being used in; thus, a theory of language in use would aim mainly to describe the phenomena rather than establish structures and categories to be fitted.

> “*Is there a finite set of speech act types, and if so how big is it? The answers are that we really don’t know. Is the set universal in character? Not in the sense that all speech acts are pan-cultural (…), but it is an open question as to whether there is a pan-cultural core with such plausibly general functions as telling, questioning, requesting, greeting, agreeing, or initiating repair.”* (Levinson, 2017:205)

This brief overview of the speech act theory was aimed to underline the relevance and importance of the basic unit of any pragmatic analysis of language. Seen as an abstract concept, the speech act in itself does nothing more than to reinforce the philosophical idea according to which, saying something will always mean doing something; behind every utterance there is an underlying intention on the speaker’s behalf that represents the key starting point which will delineate their verbal behaviour. The way people act can be at times hard to explain, but there is a consensus according to which behaviour is influenced by culture, education, ethnicity and many other layers which shape human existence. And so is language.

2.2. The cross-cultural pattern of analysis

Cross-cultural pragmatics looks into the problem of universals and aims to prove that human communication is culturally grounded: “*speech acts are realized from culture to culture in different ways and these differences may result in communication difficulties that range from humorous to the serious.”* (Gass, 1996: 1). The choice we make every time we produce utterances lies embedded into the customs and the cultural mentality we have either been brought up in or have been living in. Phenomena such as bilingualism or second language acquisition have made linguists reconsider the study of language from a new perspective. When children are taught to express themselves in their mother tongue, they follow behavioural patterns they first witness and then, imitate. First language acquisition delineates verbal expression according to factors which characterize the child’s environment from multiple perspectives: family background, education level (considering here the possibility of the child being brought up as a bilingual), social and economic status, linguistic features of the

community or the region he is raised in, ethnicity, and ultimately the culture and the country (López Montero, 2017).

The reference-point study which sets the framework for a cross-cultural analysis of speech acts remains the *Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project* published in 1989 by Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Juliane House, and Gabriele Kasper. This is a study which is still massively cited in today's research related to pragmatics or other fields such as language teaching and learning. The *Cross-cultural Speech Act Realisation Project* focuses mainly on the coding and analysis of two speech acts: request and apology. Its major contribution to the cross-cultural research refers to the fact that it successfully managed to delineate a framework of analysis which could be later applied to all types of different studies that looked into a wider range of comparisons between languages and cultures.

Thus, towards the end of 2021, Juliane House (one of the authors of the *Cross-cultural Speech Act Realisation Project*) and Daniel Kádár published their own updated work on cross-cultural pragmatics in which they specifically describe the framework they respected in the case studies and the analysis provided herein. The chapter where the analytical framework is carefully explained focuses on three key categories of significant importance in cross-cultural pragmatics: expressions, speech acts and discourse.

To begin with, one relevant example of this sort refers to a case study in which the two linguists analysed "*war crime apologies realized by representatives of the German and Japanese states following the Second World War*." (House and Kádár, 2022: 152). Their analysis focused on one specific speech act (the apologies) and performed both a quantitative and qualitative study where they looked into different ways in which apologies were formulated, such as "*expressing guilt and shame"* or providing "*explanation and account*" (House and Kádár, 2022: 152). Some interesting conclusions have been reached which proved that the stereotypical or general beliefs about a culture (for example that Germans master the appropriate way to present apologies or that the Japanese act according to their innate "shame culture") can be misleading and remain without a solid justifiable base. For example, although apologies are usually provided while referring to an explanation aimed at presenting the motives which lay behind the respective act, in this particular case explanations were generally avoided since those particular crimes could not be neither explained nor justified. Moreover, the researchers observed that "*the German apologies frequently involved Head Act Strategies of "expressing guilt and shame" much more than their Japanese counterparts, which flies in the face of the claim that Japanese is a so-called "shame culture*" (House and Kádár, 2022: 152). This example illustrates clearly the relevance and the importance of the cross-cultural approach both for a better understanding of cross-cultural interaction in a deeply connected and cosmopolitan world and also for the very necessary acknowledgement that cultures are far more complex and diverse than their labelled stereotypes. The connection between the way people choose to express themselves, the context they find themselves in and their own personal cultural and linguistic background proves itself to be so important that it can no longer be ignored in an analysis of language.

Moreover, House and Kádár (2022) present another case study in which they looked into IKEA catalogues published in different languages. More precisely, they analysed the use of second-person T and V pronouns and how speakers of those different languages reacted to those usages. "*This research was based on the issue that IKEA traditionally prefers using the T pronoun to promote the Swedish convention of egalitarianism*." (House and Kádár, 2022: 153). Again, their cross-cultural framework of analysis succeeds in proving that when dealing with people and languages from all parts of the world, one single universal rule simply does not work as it was initially intended.

Based on their research, the two linguists formulated a set of principles which they consider necessary in all studies that aim to engage in a cross-cultural approach to human

language. Before anything else, they constantly use the cross-cultural pragmatic term of *linguaculture* because it seems the most appropriate way to refer to the ways in which a culture presents itself through language. "*We prefer this term over "culture" because it emphasizes the inherently close relationship between language and culture*." (House and Kádár, 2022: 156). Then, they enumerate and explain in detail the following cross-cultural pragmatic principles:

1. *Bottom-up research*
2. *Multimethod approach to researching language use*
3. *Relying on interrelated but distinct units of analysis and finite typologies of these units*
4. *Variation and/or more than one language*
5. *Relying on corpora and the Principle of Comparability*
6. *Using linguistically-based terminology* (House and Kádár, 2022: pp. 152-156).

One of the recurrent ideas that is being emphasized in this study refers to the danger of the generalizations and the pre-conceived perceptions. To do *bottom-up* research is, in their perspective, to approach a language in an almost innocent way; that is, without allowing a generic type of previous knowledge about a certain culture to shadow or dictate certain directions throughout the analysis. The *multi-method approach* starts with the traditional contrastive analysis achieved through comparison and parallel looking into things, but the researcher is advised to always test and make sure that the validity of certain preliminary data remains unquestionable and is backed up by further proof. In this sense, they talk about *ancillary research* which "*consists of interviews, DCTs, questionnaires and other data eliciting methods."* (House and Kádár, 2022: 153).

> "*Simply put, in quantitative research, the cross-cultural pragmatician examines and compares data by looking into the frequency of occurrence of a given pragmatic phenomenon. In qualitative research, the cross-cultural pragmatician engages in a detailed comparative examination of instances of language use in order to gain a deeper understanding of the pragmatic phenomenon under investigation*." (House and Kádár, 2022: 154).

Further on, they insist on the importance of choosing one specific unit of analysis, not in the sense of disregarding others that could be equally relevant, but because one particular unit acts as a "*gateway to the linguaculturally embedded data*" (House and Kádár, 2022: 154). Since in cross-cultural pragmatics, we deal with data compiled from different linguacultures, it is extremely important to find that relevant niche and to analyse it with systematic and finite typologies, thus making sure that the data is indeed comparable in terms of quantity, quality, type and forms of usage. If we simply juggle with concepts and words which seem alike, the results will not only be irrelevant and fake but also easily questionable. Cross-cultural pragmatics usually deals with more than one language, although analysis between different dialects, gender or age might also be relevant. A contrastive analysis of different linguacultures becomes even more challenging when dealing with "*typologically distant languages"* (House and Kádár, 2022: 154). It will also be the case of our study, where we consider that Romanian and Spanish are more alike due to their Latin roots whereas English follows a different pattern of Germanic origin. In this sense, we consider that the method provided here could be of real help:

> "*the cross-cultural pragmatician can engage in complex contrastive work, e.g. by comparing how a particular pragmatic phenomenon is realized in typologically close and distant linguacultures – a procedure we call "double contrasting" in our book. For example, we contrasted patterns of speech act realization in the closing phase*

of historical family letters written in English, German, and Chinese, by first contrasting our linguaculturally close English and German data and then comparing the outcomes with what we found in our Chinese data." (House and Kádár, 2022: 155).

As far as the corpora are concerned, their size is not the most important aspect to be considered, but when dealing with different languages one must make sure that they are more or less of the same length. The Principle of Comparability refers both to the corpora and to the core unit of analysis: "*Whenever we use corpora compiled by others, we need to consider whether the generic, temporal, and other features of the corpora are actually comparable. As to the phenomena to be contrastively examined, we need to consider how representative and conventionalized they are in their respective linguacultures."* (House and Kádár, 2022: 155). And ultimately, as with any other scientific field, cross-cultural pragmatics needs its specific terminology even if, in this type of analysis one mainly deals with the basic pragmatic terminology and principles. But what seems to be a dangerous direction to follow is the use of social, cultural or even psychological concepts to conduct what remains, after all, a linguistic analysis. This fallacy remains tempting because all of these concepts are strongly interconnected and they do explain and justify certain phenomena only when seen in connection to one another; however, a cross-cultural pragmatic analysis must be a study of language seen in the most complex linguistic frame known to date.

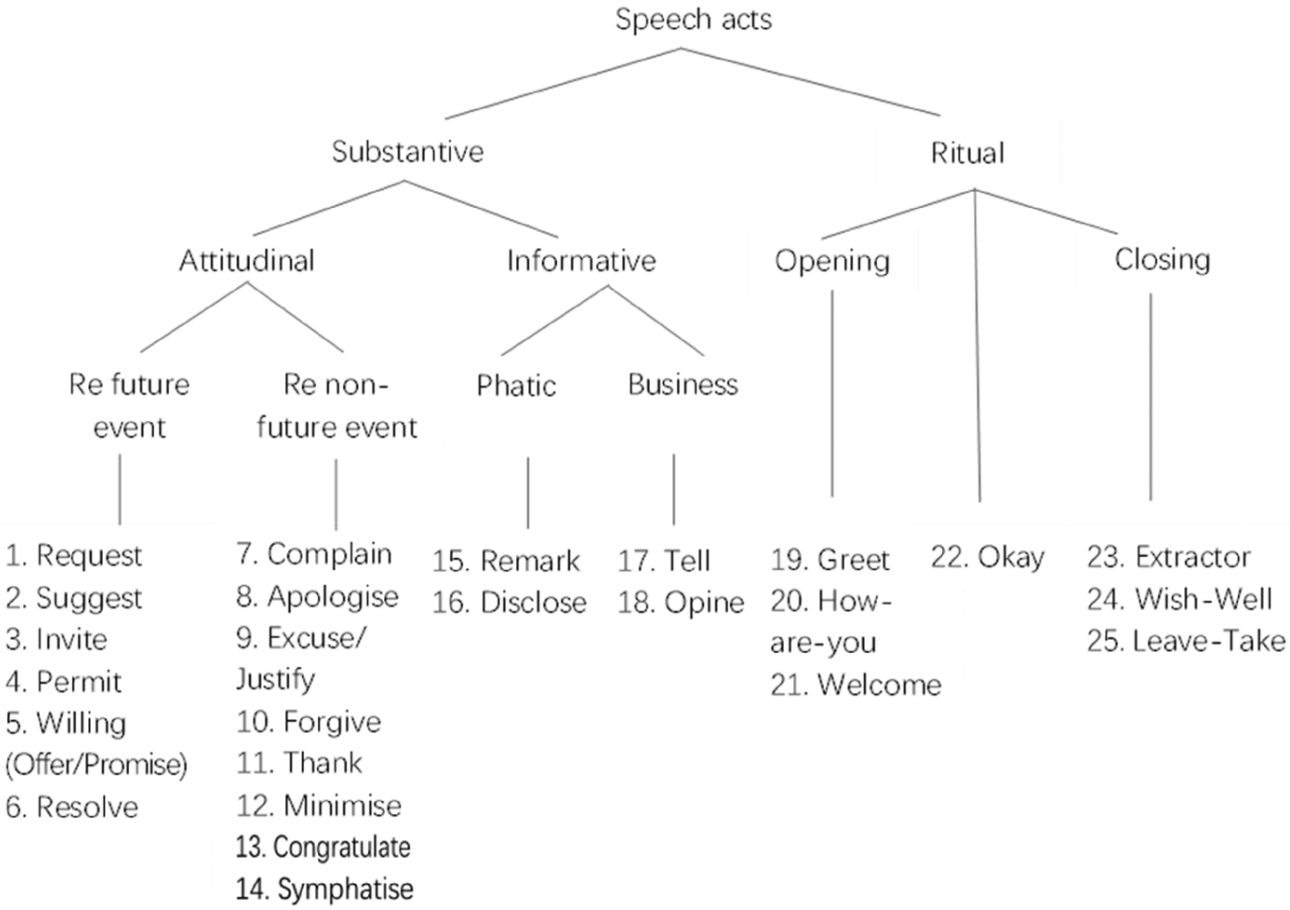
3. Types of speech acts

Since the focus of the present study relies entirely on the speech acts, it becomes relevant to look into their categorisation. Apart from requests and apologies, which were clearly described in the 1989 CCSARP project, House and Kádár's study (2021) engages in a more detailed and complex overview of speech acts.

Two main categories (Substantive and Ritual), each divided into their own two sub-categories (Attitudinal and Informative for Substantive; Opening and Closing for Ritual) are comprised in this specific classification which represents an update brought to the theoretical frame developed in 1989.

The main differentiation which separates the first two clusters is made by considering whether or not the analysed speech act represents an inherent part of the conventional structure of the interaction. The inherent parts (such as greetings or wish-well) belong to the cluster Ritual and are considered typical to any human interaction, no matter the linguaculture it belongs to. However, despite them being an inherent part of any conversation, cross-cultural analysis brought forward significant lingua-cultural differences in the coding scheme of said speech acts.

The cluster Substantive, with its two main sub-categories: Attitudinal and Informative, is not considered an inherent part of the interaction, thus the presence or the absence of a particular speech act fluctuates almost chaotically depending on the speaker's intentions, state of mind, the relation to the listener, as well as any other aspects which contribute to the context of a communicative endeavour. Their speech act typology can be observed in the figure below which was adopted from Edmondson and House, 1981: 98



Two observations must be made here related to the way in which the denomination of the speech acts is being built in this analytical framework. On the one hand, verbal forms are used to name the speech acts: e.g., *Invite, Forgive* instead of *Invitation, Forgiveness*. On the other hand, the names of all speech acts categories are capitalised.

The dynamics of the occurrence of speech acts in a corpus of texts constitutes one of the primary objectives of pragmatic analysis. The comparison between corpora written in different languages makes the objective of cross-cultural pragmatics.

Among the speech acts identified along the corpora of the present study, the following categories were encountered with enough frequency to become relevant. Belonging to the cluster Substantive, the sub-category Attitudinal, there are Request, Apologise and Thank; other two important categories belong also to the cluster Substantive, but the sub-category is Informative: Tell and Opine. From the cluster Ritual, the sub-category of Opening, the speech act Greet becomes relevant in terms of frequency and meaning, while from the sub-category of Closing, Extracting, Wish-Well and Leave-Take are identified.

Request is a speech act in which the speaker addresses the listener to convince the latter to perform or to act in the interest of the former. The Requests observed in the study's corpora refer to verbal goods and services ("Do not leave your homes!"), whereas in many interactions they might include non-verbal goods as well ("Go home now!"). An important pattern in the realisation of this speech act is made of the following sequence: *Request-to-do-X* and *Request-not-to-do-X*. For example, the speaker may ask the listener to lift a series of restrictions and the latter may refuse to accept it and stick to the initial regulations.

Apologise is a speech act with a redeeming purpose. This usually occurs as a consequence of a previous offence felt by the addressee at different intensities. *"Apologies are highly supportive of the addressee and self-demeaning – they therefore are often realised by the use of set formulae" (House and Kádár, 2021: 109).* More often than not, Apologise infers an acknowledgement of the offence or mistake in an attempt to minimise its outcome. However, Apologise is frequently seen as a mitigating device aimed at reducing the illocutionary force of a stronger speech act such as a non-debatable Request or a Tell-Opine sequence with a powerful or even shocking impact on the addressee.

Thank shares some general similarities with Apologise in the sense that it also supports the addressee and it is mainly realised through expressions with a strong ritual feature. Its mitigating character is also important to mention since at times Thank can be used to acknowledge the positive outcome of a rather unpleasant or even difficult-to-grasp situation. Thank also acknowledges the merits of the addressee and their participation in the overall context, which might also ease up a difficult conversation.

Tell is probably the speech act with the most informative character since its main objective is to make information known. However, since the distinction between facts and opinions can be a rather subjective one, it might become truly challenging at times to differentiate Tell from Opine. *"The assumption behind a Tell is that the content of the speech act – the 'fact' communicated – is of interest and relevance to the addressee, and Tells are therefore often made as a response to the addressee's explicit or implicit, real or assumed, desire to know the fact." (House and Kádár, 2021: 111).* As such, Tell can appear at times as a response to Request or vice-versa, a Tell can lead to a Request from the addressee to the first speaker.

Opine is a speech act whose meaning and illocutionary force mingle with the ones of Tell. The two speech acts tend to share the same interactional structures to the point at which their differentiation might become quite challenging for the researcher. There are, however, aspects which can have more generic features: *"Opines (...) are common coins in the process of interactional negotiation. Opines are voiced in the hope of reaching agreement, that is an Opine is successfully realised when the addressee holds the same opinion. When initially agreement is not present – the interactants express different Opines – negotiation commences." (House and Kádár, 2021: 112)*. As far as the speech acts' sequencing goes, Opine can also serve as an answer to a Request or Apologise, especially in the absence of clear-cut Tells and also with a mitigating intention on the speaker's behalf.

Greet is a speech act that falls under the Ritual category and it marks the initiation of the interaction. Greet falls under the rules of social and cultural politeness, its absence or intentional skipping marks a certain degree of rudeness or, depending on the social hierarchy and status, a forced acknowledgement of the superiority of the listener. *"An initiating greeting is generally responded to in a mimetic way" (House and Kádár, 2021: 112)* or at best, with synonymous ritual frame expressions aimed at acknowledging the beginning of the conversation.

Extracting is the speech act that first announces the imminent closing of the interaction. Thus, the speaker makes sure they explain or justify themselves by providing reasons for leaving the conversation. It might also imply an excuse for having to end the interaction and it *"tends to appear when an encounter has not yet led to a natural point of closure" (House and Kádár, 2021: 113)* and so the speaker 'extracts' themselves from the conversation.

Wish-Well usually occurs in the ending phase of a conversation and it is used to convey the positive attitude of the speaker in relation to future events and also to the addressee. The presence of this speech act might indicate the fact that the interaction ends in amiable terms, that the speaker looks forward to a new conversation and cares about their addressee. Depending on the linguaculture that is being studied, this speech act is also linked to types of

politeness and social hierarchy. Its absence conveys an abrupt ending which is usually also a meaning bearer. Since it belongs to the cluster Ritual, its realisation is generally made through ritual frame standard expressions which are reciprocated.

Leave-Take is the speech act that ends the conversation, it is ritual-bound and involves reciprocation. It relies on the speaker's intention to bridge the present interaction to a future encounter and it marks closure.

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