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Illocutionary Acts of Sent and Unsent Messages via Personal Messages and Group Chats

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ABSTRACT

New features of communication technology are gaining much attention in computer-mediated communication in relation to speech acts and conversational implicatures which aim to transcend the conventional and nonconventional meaning of words, phrases, or sentences when an interlocutor conveys messages in varied contexts. By examining 30 exchanges and conducting survey interviews, this study concerns the illocutionary acts of sent and unsent messages both in personal messages and group chats via an online messaging application. The findings show that there are 7 identified meanings of unsent messages; moreover, although there are similarities, the meaning varies depending on the context. The study also shows that students use representatives more frequently than the other illocutionary acts in sent messages both in personal and group chats. It is also noteworthy to point out that students rarely use greeting speech acts in their messages.

Keywords: speech act, illocutionary, conversational implicature, unsent messages

INTRODUCTION

Language is indeed an indispensable tool among humans. Sweet (2008) defined language as "the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts". Humans produce language either in written discourse or in spoken discourse. It is used from day-to-day communication to express and convey meanings specifically in conversations among peers, in the academe, and even in politics. In today's context, the ins and outs of messages in varied gadgets and technologies are evident with the use of messaging apps and the internet amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. It is presumed that the most important function of communication technologies is to empower connection maintenance with those from whom they are distanced physically, especially in today's context; it has been evidently observed through the interpersonal messaging capabilities that these technologies support. On a regular basis, individuals could use the phone to talk to friends and family, email colleagues about work and social activities, and use instant messaging to message people on their buddy lists; thus, the social uses of technology play an explicit role in maintaining relationships and presenting oneself to others (Baym 1995; Lea & Spears 1995; McKenna, Green & Gleason 2002; Walther 1992).

In line with this, as communication extends domain in various social media platforms, studies concerning the use of language to meet communicative goals is also given significance, especially, in today's context where information is just a tap away. Communication technologies can also provide more implicit ways of maintaining social contact (Erickson & Kellogg 2003). Grice (in Sioson 2011) stated that one of the famous proponents in the field of pragmatics has made a difference between what was said and what is implicated in his conversational implicatures. In the field of discourse, primarily

a field in linguistics, it aims to define the conventions and rules encompassing language use in extended stretches of text (McCarthy & Carter 1997). Discourse is considered as a term in linguistics to refer to the spontaneous stretch of a language that is larger than a sentence which entails the communication of intention to another intention through which convenient meaning emerges. One approach to analyze discourse studies that has been widely used in particularly the field of pragmatics, is the speech act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1976; Sinclaire & Coulthard 1992).

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the speakers' use of specific words and expressions from a variety of English or the intended meaning of utterances that speakers speak depending on the context they are in (Kachru 1998). There are certain aims beyond the words or phrases when a speaker says something; Austin (1976) further added that speech acts are acts that refer to the action performed by produced utterances: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Yule (1996) stated that there are four areas which pragmatics is concerned with, namely: the study of speaker meaning, the study of contextual meaning, the study how to get more communicated than it is said, and the study of the expression of relative distance. In broader sense, with pragmatics we are able to grasp the message of the utterance by being aware that there is more than what is being communicated through words, phrases, and sentences. In line with this, Richard & Schmidt (2002) argued that pragmatics is concerned with the use of language in communication related to sentences and the context and situations in which they are used. Hidayat (2016) further adds that there are some factors that should be considered in scope of pragmatics which builds the very essence of pragmatics, namely: implicatures, speech acts, presupposition, context, adjacency pairs, as well as deixis and distance. To highlight implicatures, Grice (in Sioson, 2011), has made a difference between what was said and what is implicated in his conversational implicatures. He treated the utterance itself as artificial to some degree while considering implicature as something that is recommended or implied in an utterance and further distinguished two kinds of implicature. The first one is conventional implicature which occurs from the meaning of some word or phrase used in the semantic level and the second is the non-conventional implicature which roots on "outside the specification of the conventional meaning of the words used" as affected by the context (Grice in Sioson 2011, 46).

In recent years, researchers have begun to extend the investigation of pragmatic competence to new domains such as email, online forums, blogs, and messaging apps. Cohen (2008) further noted that in email, pragmatic failure is often observed. Felice & Deana (2012) argued that good knowledge of email text is an essential skill for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) to succeed in a global workplace because email use lies at the heart of modern business communication. In their study, the main focus is a corpus and computational study of speech act data—and of the ways in which speech act data can best be represented and analyzed—one of whose outcomes is a speech act-tagged corpus of learner emails that can be of use in research on second language acquisition (L2) speech act usage found. Furthermore, in the study of Nastri et al. (2006), it was investigated the extent to which the communicative goals are reflected in the language structure of away messages, by examining the speech acts performed through the production of 483 away messages crafted by 44 participants. It is in the sense that instant messaging (IM) is currently one of the most popular computer-mediated communication technologies. For instance, instant messaging appears to be the communication technology of choice for teenagers nowadays, who use instant messaging to make plans with friends, talk about homework, share jokes, check in with parents, and post away messages or notices about what they are doing when they are away from their computers. it was also found that instant messaging allows users to create and display away messages or customized text messages signifying users' presence or absence in front of a computer (Baron, Squires, Tench & Thompson 2005).

Online text-based conversations require users to master a number of coordination strategies in order to achieve understanding, such as managing turn-taking (Hancock & Dunham, 2001). Baron et al. (2005) observed that teenagers reported signing on to IM not necessarily to talk, but rather to look at the away messages of their online buddies. He argued that users tend to post away messages with two communicative goals in mind, i.e.: to entertain and to inform. Nastri et al. (2006) further added that messages used for entertainment were often examples of self-expression and included the use of humor, quotations, and links to different websites. Hanna & Richards (2019) also highlighted the effective communication in task-oriented situations which requires high-level interactions. In their study, they focused on human-agent communication in a collaborative virtual environment (VE) where both the agent and human should collaborate together to complete a shared goal. They evaluated the agent's verbal communication while collaborating with humans and the speech act theory was used to anatomize the structure of agent's speech acts, the agent's intention behind the speech acts, and the effects on the human's mental state. Lastly, Wulandari (2012) studied the Facebook statuses posted by students in a university. Here, the researcher utilized speech acts for analyzing the data and found five common types of speech acts that shape Facebook statuses.

Hence, the importance of understanding pragmatic failure is not only in email communication, but also the other domains of communication, especially in today's context where face-to-face communication is very limited. It is then hoped that the findings of this study could facilitate the understandings of pragmatics and speech acts in instant messaging and would contribute to an effective communication processe.

This study was made possible through discourse analysis and the speech act theory, specifically with the use of Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts and Grice's (1968) notion of conversational implicatures. through discourse analysis. It specifically aimed to identify and describe the pragmatics of sent and unsent messages. It used five core principles in analyzing a text according to Antaki (2008), such as: (1) the talk or text is to be naturally found (in the sense of not invented, as it might be in psycholinguistics, pragmatics or linguistic philosophy); (2) some analysts admit interview data into this natural category (while others do not); (3) the words are to be understood in their co-text at least, and their more distant context if doing so can be defended; (4) the analyst is to be sensitive to the words' non-literal meaning or force; (5) the analyst is to reveal the social actions and consequences achieved by the words' use as enjoyed by those responsible for the words and suffered by their addressees or the world at large.

Although the unsending feature of messaging applications is relatively new, considering the studies conducted using the speech act theory as regard to computer-mediated communication, this study focused on the illocutionary acts of sent and unsent messages in personal messages and in group chats. It ought to answer the following research questions:

- 1. What are the illocutionary acts of sent messages both in personal messages and in group chats?
- 2. What are the pragmatic meanings of unsending messages both in personal messages and in group chats?
- 3. Are there similarities and differences in illocutionary acts and pragmatic meanings of sent and unsent messages both in personal messages and group chats?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used descriptive research design, specifically discourse analysis in the light of the schools in pragmatics as a tool to interpret and to describe utterances. The utterances were particularly of conversations that emerged locally affecting language meaning and use as well as those exchanges which contain implicatures.

This study was conducted at a vocational and industrial high school of a senior high school department in Philippines through virtual environment where the communication was mediated by computers. This senior high school is an ideal research environment because it comprises students enrolled in humanities and social sciences strand as well as students who use messenger application in communicating online and transacting school related matters.

The study requested the participation of the senior high school students with the approval and support of the school administration. It utilized the entire population of students who specialized in humanities from grade 12. However, based on the research instruments, only a half of the population participated in the study (n=51).

In identifying the pragmatic meanings of unsending messages, the study employed survey interviews via Google Forms in soliciting the students' pragmatic meaning of unsending messages. The results of the survey interviews were collated and crafted into a checklist-type questionnaire via Google Forms, where students can choose and identify the meanings of unsent messages. Piloting was also done to ensure the reliability of the tool. Moreover, in identifying the illocutionary acts of sent messages, a randomly-selected corpus of 30 exchanges was utilized (15 in personal messages and 15 in group chats).

Initial interviews were conducted via Google Forms. Based on the results of the interviews, a checklist-type questionnaire was then constructed via Google Forms as well. In this case, piloting was also done to validate the tool. A letter was also sent to the administration for the permission for the conduct of this study. Approval of floating the questionnaire was secured. After obtaining the permission, the test was administered to the respondents.

In analyzing the data of sent messages, the corpus was transcribed and further examined using Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts, namely: *representatives, directives, commissive, expressives,* and *declaratives.* Grice's (1968) notion of conversational implicatures was also used as the framework in identifying what was implicated in unsent messages via group chats and personal messages. The identification of speech acts was examined by the researcher and an intercoder to ensure the reliability of findings. Meanwhile, in identifying the pragmatic meanings of unsending messages both in private messages and group chats, counts and percentages were used to quantitatively qualify the data which were further analyzed qualitatively through descriptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conversational Implicatures of Unsent Messages via Personal Messages and Group Chats The analysis of unsent messages both in personal messages and in group chats revealed 7 meanings. The identified meanings of unsent messages are illustrated in this section.

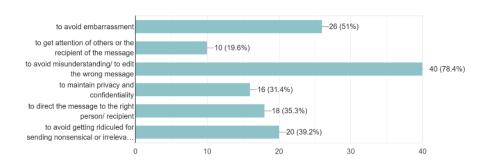


Figure 1: Pragmatic meaning of unsent messages in personal messages

Figure 1 reports the identified meanings of unsent messages in personal messages. These meanings correspond to the students' shared meanings of unsent messages which are: to avoid embarrassment, to get attention of others or the recipient of the message, to avoid misunderstanding/to edit the wrong message, to maintain privacy and confidentiality, to direct the message to the right person/recipient, and to avoid getting ridiculed for sending nonsensical or irrelevant messages and jokes.



Translation.

(unsent a message)

(unsent a message)

Hello sir, who can we get the I'd from To your advisor Lemily

Ok sir.



Translation.

Good afternoon sir

(unsent a message)

Sir do you have a list of our subject teacher

Hello, I have already sent to go before Kristalyn please ask if your classmates are okay, thank you Allright sir

., ,

Yes sir

Figure 2: Unsent messages to get the attention (left) and unsent message to edit wrong message (right)

Figure 2 revealed that most of the students unsent messages to avoid misunderstanding/ to edit the wrong message (78.4%) (as seen in the right side), half of the sample (n=51) also identified the meaning to avoid embarrassment (51%), and least of the respondents indicated the meaning to

get attention of others or recipient of the message (19.6%) (as seen in the left side).

The implications that are in line with communicative competence is evidently seen on the findings that students unsent messages to avoid misunderstanding/confusion as well as communication breakdown, communicative competence is vital to the quality of life of individuals with great communication needs and it provides the means to attain personal, educational, and social goals (Calculator 2009; Lund & Light 2007).

Furthermore, to develop communicative competence, the integration of cultural and cross-cultural instruction in language teaching (Celce-Murcia in Lenchuck& Ahmed, 2013) as well as focusing on the micro levels of pragmatics, like conversational implicatures (Bardovi-Harlig in Lenchuk & Ahmed 2013,) should also be considered in the teaching and learning process.

In contrast with maintaining the flow of communication, students' unsent messages to get the attention of others or the recipient of the message; this phenomenon might lead to communication breakdown. However, it is also a strategy of the sender to be noticed in a speech situation. Bayat (2012) posited that a variety of the strategies utilized is linked with specific conditions of the communication and qualities of the parties involved in a communication. It is an intervention to build, rebuild and sustain linguistic situations. However, individuals with great communication needs will inevitably encounter situations where they face significant limitations that will negatively impact their communicative competence which will require their strategic competence (Light & McNaughton 2014).

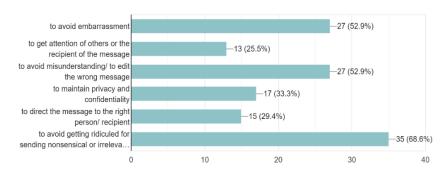


Figure 3: Pragmatic meanings of unsent messages in group chats

Figure 3 reports the identified meanings of unsent messages in group chats. The figures revealed that most of the students' unsent messages in group chats to avoid getting ridiculed for sending nonsensical or irrelevant messages and jokes (68.6%). An over a half of the sample (n=51) also identified the meaning to avoid embarrassment (52.9%) and to avoid misunderstanding/to edit the wrong message (52.9%), whereas an over a quarter of the sample identified the meaning to maintain privacy and confidentiality (33.3%) in unsending messages. Finally, least of the respondents indicated the meaning to get attention of others or recipient of the message (25.5%).

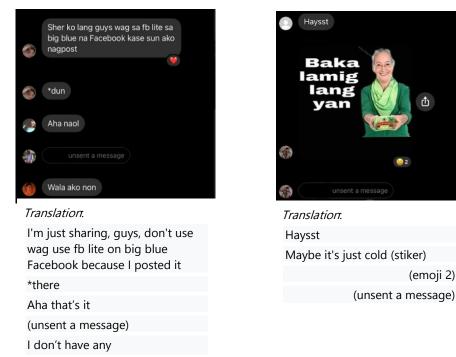


Figure 4: Unsent message to avoid misunderstanding (left) and unsent message to avoid getting ridiculed (right)

A majority of the students indicated that they unsent messages in group chats to avoid getting ridiculed for sending nonsensical or irrelevant messages and jokes as well as to avoid being embarrassed and misunderstood (See right picture). Implications, such as when receiving criticisms and experiencing embarrassment, may lead students to low self-esteem in communicating; thus, fewer chance of connecting and building relationships among others. This finding is in-line with impression management which suggest that people may monitor the image that they provide of themselves to the audiences they address (Baumeister 1982; Leary & Kowalski 1990) and when personally anonymous, people feel free to challenge external self-views, and attempt to communicate to others how they wish to be regarded (Barreto et al. 2003; Spears & Leah 1995).

Language, most often than not, is used to present personalities online as well as to identify oneself in a particular group or society and it can also help in maintaining relationships (Hickey 2001; Tom Tong et al., 2019; Qiu et al., 2012). It suggests that the way we use language in a specific context gives a clue of what we are and of who we are. Thus, to be able to maintain desirable identity in a particular group, students unsend messages which results to the non-conventional implicature that stems beyond the specification of the conventional meaning of the words used, affected by the context.

It is also noteworthy to point out that the findings on unsent messages via group chat and personal messages overlaps and diverge in a variety of ways; the findings report that a majority of students unsent messages in personal messages to avoid misunderstanding and confusion (See Figure 1). Similarly, a half of the sample also unsent messages in group chats to avoid misunderstanding (See Figure 3).

In contrast with the findings of unsent messages in personal messages, almost all of the students indicated that they unsent messages to avoid getting

ridiculed as well as to avoid embarrassment in group chat. There is a difference in meaning or intention in terms of unsending messages in both context (personal and group chats). Grice (in Sioson, 2011) further posited that meanings and implicatures may stem beyond what is expected and what is meant that is based on context. Thus, unsending messages yields non-conventional meanings depending on the context.

Finally, it is also pointed out that unsending messages is one of the strategies used with specific conditions of the communication and qualities of the parties involved in a communication to repair, rebuild, and to maintain conversations both in personal messages and group chats.

Illocutionary Acts of Sent Messages via Personal Messages and Group Chats Figure 5 presents the illocutionary acts found in sent messages via personal messages; the figures reveal that all classification of illocutionary acts (Searle, 1976) were present in the corpus except for declarations. A majority of the students used representatives frequently in their exchanges. These representatives found in the exchanges are informing (f=15), agreeing (f=8), greeting (4), stating (3), and insisting (3). Expressives such as thanking (10), apologizing (5), and complaining (2) were also identified as well as directives, such as asking (9), commanding (2), and requesting (1). A trace of commissives were also seen in the corpus, such as promising (f=1). The findings revealed that students use illocutionary acts primarily to provide and to gather information as well as to state a fact or opinion, to express psychological state, and to get someone do something.

Similar to the findings of Baron et al (2005) and Nastri et al. (2006), teenagers used communication technologies to inform and to entertain (self-expression which includes the use of humor, memes, and links to various websites). On the other hand, this finding is in contrast with Bahing, Emzir & Rafli's (2018) study of illocutionary force in the classroom where directives dominated the class interactions and were secondly followed by representatives.

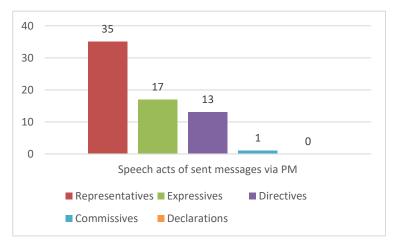


Figure 5: Speech acts of sent messages via personal message (PM)

Although representatives numbered the data, speech acts like greeting (4 occurrences out of 35 identified representatives) were seldom used by the students. The absence of greeting acts was also noted in group chats (See Figure 5).

Example:

STUDENT 1: Sir bakit po ako naremove sa GC? (Sir, why was I remove from GC?) STUDENT 2: Sir one week po ba yung quiz? (Sir, is the quiz for one week?)

Based on the given extracts, directives were used to open conversations. Students convey their intentions right-away through a question and opening a conversation through greetings is rare where it could have been automatic, especially as regard to the social distance (student-teacher). In the study of Kurdghelashivili (2015), teachers attempt to establish a friendly relationship with the students, they also maintain some kind of distance that in some respect is necessary from the perspective of maintaining discipline and classroom management. In the study, the survey show that the students know some pragmatic rules, such as how to request politely. However, from the observation findings, they practice none of these acts. This gives a ground to assume that students may also fail to use the proper linguistic units in real life situations.

Ryobova (2015) also further added that speech etiquette is a crucial component of culture, behavior, and human communication. Social relationships and norm behavior are constant in speech etiquette formulae. Nowadays, it has been a common observation that students have been wandering away with greetings as a part of politeness in speech, especially where communication is mediated by computers and other electronic platforms. Thus, politeness and speech etiquettes are still relevant in teaching approaches and methods.

Although politeness and speech etiquettes can be seen in different levels, such as lexical level marked with special expressions or phrases, special forms of address, that is grammar level marked with polite form of language (e.g.: plural form of pronouns, use of interrogative sentences instead of imperative ones) and stylistic level in the use of figures of speech and literary devices (e.g.: euphemism instead of obscene terminologies), its implications to the teaching and learning suggest crafting an integrated approach that address pragmatic competence which includes speech acts and politeness strategies.

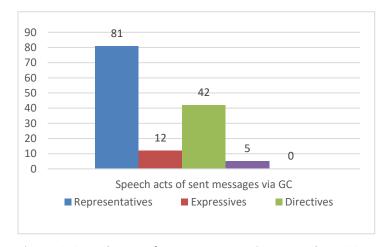


Figure 6: Speech acts of sent messages via group chat (GC)

Figure 6 reports illocutionary acts found in sent messages via group chat. the figures reveal the absence of declarations not only in group chats but also in personal messages (See Figure 6.). A majority of the students used representatives (f=81) frequently in their exchanges, including informing (f=33), stating (13), agreeing (10), asserting, claiming, insisting, disagreeing, describing, and explaining. Directives like asking (19), requesting (12), suggesting (5),

commanding, and clarifying were also noted in the findings as well as the expressives, such as: thanking, apologizing, wishing, and complaining. Commissives like refusing, planning, and offering were found in the study as well.

Similar to the findings in personal messages (See Figure 6), representatives dominated the exchanges, both in personal and group messages. Some differences were also noted such as directives which take the second position of illocutionary acts classified under representatives in group chats while expressives ranks third. Implications, such as managing turn-taking, maintain the interaction of students by providing and gathering information as well as to state a fact or opinion.

It can be also implicated that the findings might have been influenced by other factors such as the topic of the exchanges where students are free to pitch ideas and information. Although Bahing et al. (2018) posited that an interactive class is dominated by the illocutionary speech acts of directives, which drive the students to use language to perform actions, the exchanges were also interactive since students were able to take turns.

This finding also expressed that teacher-students and student-students could carry out interactions through exchange of providing information as well as stating a fact or opinion with minimal questions or directives that is used for opening conversations and expressives to close conversations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and results of the study, the following conclusions can be drawn. Students unsent messages both in personal messages and group chats. The pragmatic meanings of these unsent messages depend on the contexts where the occurrences of unsent messages can be observed. Unsending messages could also be a strategy to repair, build, and maintain discourse which gives emphasis on the strategic competence of the interlocutors in conversations. A majority of the students use representatives frequently in class interactions outside actual class discussions in virtual environment. However, it can also be attributed to the topics and the existing situation where students give and provide information to pitch and to develop the topic of an exchange, primarily with the purpose of informing and entertaining the audience. Meanwhile, greeting speech act was seldom used by students in personal messages and was non-existent in group chats.

For future directions of the study, since unsending messages is a new feature of various social media platforms, it is suggested to investigate other possible meanings of unsending messages; it is also proposed to examine the politeness of unsending messages both in personal messages and in group chat to identify whether unsending messages entails politeness or rudeness/being impolite. It can also be further added by studying the politeness strategies of students in computer-mediated communication. Finally, it is also recommended that the study's corpus be expanded to a great extent to be able to verify the findings on illocutionary acts of sent and unsent messages, especially for longer stretch of exchanges.

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