

Analysing the Correlation between Closed Interrogative English Clauses and Speech Acts in Osita Ezenwanebe's *Adaugo*

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Abstract: *This paper investigates the function of a particular utterance, specifically a closed interrogative clause, in a particular social situation and a particular place in a sequence. The paper considers language from two approaches: first, from the structural approach, as an instrument for representation, broken into units such as sentences/clauses or words and second, from the action/theoretic approach, focussing on how the issuance of certain linguistic entities constitutes a means for interpersonal action. For instance, interrogative clauses basically ask questions but when a speaker uses an interrogative clause, closed interrogative specifically, his intended meaning might not be to ask questions. To this end, ten closed interrogative clauses are randomly selected from the text *Adaugo* for analysis which is based on structural description and Searle and Vanderveken (1985) types of indirect illocutionary acts such as: anticipatory illocution, hedged performative, and rhetorical question.*

Keywords: *Closed interrogative clauses, speech act, correlative analysis*

I. Introduction

In English grammar, there are four types of the main (independent) clause such as declaratives, interrogatives (open and closed), exclamatives and imperatives. Each of these clause types can be typically associated with a speech act. For instance, interrogative clauses basically ask questions but declarative clauses when said with a rising tone as in *The bottle of water is cold?* can also perform the same interrogative function. Hence, the correlation that interrogatives are used to form questions is not absolute. When a speaker uses an interrogative clause, closed interrogative for that matter, his intended meaning might not be to ask questions. Austin in his analysis of meaning describes it in a relation among linguistic conventions correlated with words/sentences, the situation where the speaker actually says something to the hearer, and associated intentions of the speaker. The idea that meaning exists among these relations is depicted successfully by the concept of acts. In other words, in uttering a sentence, the speaker with an associated intention performs a linguistic act to the hearer. This paper aims at describing the correlation between closed interrogatives and their typical speech acts as used by Osita Ezenwanebe in *Adaugo*.

The English Main Clause Types

An English main clause is a grammatical unit at the level between a phrase and a sentence. It is a group of words that contains a subject and a predicate. On the other hand, a dependent clause may have subject and verb but cannot stand on its own as a sentence. While main or independent clauses include declaratives, interrogatives, exclamatives and imperatives, subordinate or dependent clauses include adverb clauses, adjective clauses, and noun clauses.

Declarative clauses most commonly function as statements and the usual word order is “subject (s) + verb (v) + (Adv) (opt). Declaratives can be affirmative or negative. They make statements about how things are and how they are not (Cambridge Dictionaries Online). For instance, “He (s) came (v) this morning (adv)” = affirmative

“He (s) did not come (v) this morning (adv)” = negative

It should be noted that sometimes, declaratives are used as questions or requests.

However, the focus of this paper is on interrogative clauses and specifically, closed interrogative clauses. Interrogative clauses most commonly function as questions and the usual word order is (wh-word) + auxiliary/modal verb (aux/m) + subject + verb + X.

e.g. Where are you going? (wh + aux + subj + v)

Do they play around? (aux + subj + v + X)

Can I open the window? (modal + subj + v + X), where X is any other element in the clause (e.g. object, subject complement or adverbial).

There are two different constructions that can be used to form interrogative clauses in English. These are open and closed interrogatives. **Closed interrogatives** may only be answered by a limited range of responses, often simply yes or no, while open interrogatives, constructed using ‘wh-words’ allow for a much

greater range of answers. Closed interrogatives are formed by placing the auxiliary before the subject as in the following examples:

1. Is John playing football? Declarative: John is playing football.
 2. Did the chairman attend the meeting? Declarative: The chairman attended the meeting.
- Clauses that do not already contain an auxiliary take the dummy auxiliary 'do' in closed interrogatives. Closed interrogatives can be divided into two types: polar and alternative questions. Polar questions take yes/no answers while alternative questions require an answer from the set options presented in the question. Polar questions can be presented with either positive or negative polarity.

e.g. Is John playing football?
Isn't John playing football?

Alternative questions contain elements linked by 'or' and the answer is expected to be identified with one of the elements.

e.g. Is John playing football or badminton on the field? (Coordinated clauses-implies doing one of these).
The correlation between the interrogative clause and the speech act is not absolute. While performances between clause types and the corresponding speech acts do not relate one to one, there is however, a characteristic correlation between clause types and speech acts:

Clause types	Characteristic Speech Act
1. Declarative	making a Statement
2. Closed Interrogative	asking a closed question
3. Open Interrogative	asking an open question
4. Exclamative	making an exclamative statement
5. Imperative	issuing a directive

Speech Act Theory and Communication

Speech acts are regarded as acts of communication and to communicate is to express a certain attitude. The type of speech act that is performed corresponds to the type of attitude being expressed. For instance, a statement uttered may express a belief or a fact, a request may express a desire or a prayer, and an imperative may express a command. As an act of communication, a speech act succeeds if the hearer identifies, in accordance with the speaker's intention, the attitude being expressed.

Speech acts are not isolated moves in communication, they appear in more global units of communication defined as conversations or discourses. According to Vanderveken (1994), "speakers perform illocutionary acts within entire conversations where they are most often in verbal interaction with other speakers who reply to them and perform in turn their own speech acts with the same collective intention to pursue with success a certain type of discourse." He further explicates that the use of language is a social form of linguistic behaviour consisting ordered sequences of utterances made by several speakers who tend to achieve common discursive goals such as discussing a question, deciding together how to react to a certain situation, negotiating, consulting, exchanging greetings or talking for its own sake. He refers to all these ordered sequences of speech acts as conversations.

Austin, as illustrated by Searle (1968) tries to describe the total speech act in the total speech situation by specifying performativity, formerly introduced as an intuitive idea of «performing an act». He introduces the concept of illocutionary acts, and carefully distinguishes them from locutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. Searle (1979) elaborates on the direct and indirect illocutionary acts. There is a difference of principle between the two: in the direct act, a sentence that contains the illocutionary force indicators for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, in addition, another type of illocutionary act, hence, an indirect act.

Gazdar (1981) highlights two problems in the Speech Act Theory that was developed by pragmaticians much earlier. He describes the first problem as relating to the semantic content of utterances; that is, utterances, whatever their clause type (viz. declarative, interrogative, imperative or exclamative) consistently expressing propositions. The second problem according to him concerns the illocutionary potential of utterances such that each clause type is associated with a different illocutionary force (assertion, question, directive and exclamation).

Yule (1996) points out that actions performed via utterances are generally referred to as speech acts and are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, or request in English.

According to Austin's theory (1962), an utterance has three kinds of meaning:

1. Locutionary meaning: the literal meaning of what is said

e.g. It's hot in here

2. Illocutionary meaning: the social function of what is said

'It's hot in here' could be:

- an indirect request for someone to open the window
- an indirect refusal to close the window because the hearer is cold
- a complaint implying that someone should know better than to keep the windows closed (expressed emphatically)

3. Perlocutionary meaning: the effect of what is said

'It's hot in here' could result in someone opening the windows.

Indirect illocution is an illocutionary act in which the speaker expresses another illocutionary force other than that literally expressed in the utterance by relying on shared background knowledge (speech situation), principles of conversation such as the cooperative principle, convention, and the ability of the addressee to make inferences (Searle and Vanderveken 1985). This implies that both the speaker and the hearer must share the same cultural and social background knowledge for the speech act communication to be a success. In light of this assertion, Austin formulated a method to describe a sentence in terms of the speech situation where it is uttered: by means of associated linguistic conventions, the speaker, with an associated intention, actually performs an act to the hearer, which induces a certain response from the hearer.

This paper focuses on describing selected closed interrogatives from the text to determine their indirect acts in relation to literal function (locutionary meaning), social function (illocutionary meaning) and the effect of what is said (perlocutionary meaning). For example, an utterance such as "Is my home on fire?" (closed interrogative clause) is a literal question produced by the speaker to the receiver to ensure, on one hand, if fire has really engulfed the house (locutionary meaning) and on the other hand, the speaker could be referring to knotty issues erupting at home (Illocutionary meaning), and the action of the hearer (perlocutionary meaning). However, there are three types of indirect illocutionary acts: anticipatory illocution, hedged performative and rhetorical question. Thus, these three types of indirect illocutionary acts as presented by Searle and Vanderveken (1985) will represent the framework of our analysis.

Theoretical Framework

According to Searle and Vanderveken (1985), Crystal (1980), an illocutionary act is an instance of a culturally defined speech act type, characterised by particular illocutionary force e.g. demanding, promising, advising, warning etc. The illocutionary force of an utterance is the speaker's intention in producing that utterance. There are three forms of the illocutionary act:

1. Anticipatory illocution: It is an illocutionary act that has the direct illocutionary force of a question about the conditions necessary for the appropriateness of some other illocutionary act. The anticipatory illocution thus has the indirect illocutionary force of the latter (Leech 1983). E.g. "could you close the window?" has the direct force of a question about whether or not you have the capacity to close the window. However, the utterance has the indirect force of an order/demand to get the window closed.
2. A hedged performative: It is an indirect illocution whose illocutionary force is expressed directly by a performative verb but is given an additional illocutionary force by some device, such as modalization or subordination e.g. "may I know your name?" has the indirect force of "I want to ask you for your name".
3. A rhetorical question: It is an illocutionary force of a question and is not generally used with the expectation of an answer but with some different, indirect force such as a command, a tentative statement and an evaluation (Larson, 1984).

Conceptualisation of the Text

The text, *Adaugo*, is written by Osita Ezenwanebe in 2011 to address the issue of gender relation in the contemporary Nigerian society. It is a sociological play that harps on the complementary roles a wife plays in the family in sharp contrast to the traditional stereotypic "servant/maid obedient wife" role the society approves.

This play mirrors the current roles of a wife in the present excruciating economic conditions in Nigeria by showcasing *Adaugo*, a clerical officer in a health ministry and *Chuma*, a businessman who without any prior notice become victims of the economic crunch. This situation throws *Adaugo* out of the "kitchen cabinet" into the vicious world of business to fend for the family of four children: *Chukwuemeka*, *Nonso*, *Ugo* and *Ebele*. But, expectedly, all her efforts are perceived as a surreptitious attempt to undermine her husband's authority, especially by *Eddy*, *Chuma's* friend whose ulterior motive is to sleep with *Adaugo*. Her success ultimately sparks jealousy in *Chuma* who is blinded by his pride and gets to know the true worth of his selfless wife almost too late.

Osita, the author successfully reflects the gradual process of redefinition of male responsibility of being the provider, protector and spokesman of the family and female role of childbearing and home keeping. She deliberately chooses simple day to day sentences to depict a normal family setting and situation. She uses short

sentences and indigenous words to illustrate the Igbo culture through the names given to her characters. Most importantly, there is a preponderance use of both closed and open interrogative clauses throughout the text

II. Methodology

For the purpose of the analysis intended in this paper, ten (10) closed interrogative clauses are randomly selected from different characters thus:

- (1) Is my home not on fire?... (Adaugo addressing Helen her friend. p 20)
- (2) Did I tell you I'm staying at home? (Chuma addressing his wife, Adaugo. p 24)
- (3) Hello, is it Interline Shipping Company? (Chuma answering a call on his cell phone. p 25)
- (4) Is there no one in this house? (Adaugo addressing no one in particular. p 29)
- (5) Is that supposed to be an answer to my question? (Chuma addressing his wife, Adaugo. p 30)
- (6) Did you ever think about your friend? (Adaugo addressing Chuma's friend, Eddy. p 38)
- (7) Don't you trust your wife? (Eddy addressing Chuma. p 41)
- (8) (Do) You want to turn me into a beggar? (Nonso as Chuma addressing Emeka as Adaugo. p 43)
- (9) Did armed robbers attack him? (Helen addressing her friend, Adaugo. p 64)
- (10) Do you call them men? (Eddy addressing Chuma. p 68)

Analysis of the text is carried out in two tiers, the structural analysis where selected texts are broken into their units to describe their constituent elements and the indirect illocutionary acts analysis. The baseline for analysing the selected closed interrogative clauses are the three types of indirect illocutionary acts as presented by Searle and Vanderveken (1985). In other words, interrogative clauses are described accordingly to indicate whether they are anticipatory illocutions, hedged performatives or rhetorical questions.

Analysis

Text 1

Is my home not on fire?

The clause is made of **Aux + NP + not element + PP**

This utterance was made by Adaugo in response to Helen, her friend's utterance. It is anticipatory illocutionary act because she did not expect the fire fighters to quench the fire in her home; rather, it has the direct illocutionary force of a question with some other illocutionary acts inherent in it. Hence, Adaugo asked the question not because fire engulfed her house, but because her matrimonial home was in chaos. Her husband was making her life miserable as a result of his own misfortune. The question has the illocutionary force of "Hasn't my marriage totally collapsed?" It is a hedged performative act.

Text 2

Did I tell you I'm staying at home?

The clause is made of **Aux + Prn + V + Prn + Prn + Aux + V + PP**

The utterance was made by Chuma to Adaugo, his wife. It is a hedged performative act because Chuma was being sarcastic, he asked the question to express his bitterness and to sting or inflict pain on his wife. He never went out of the house throughout the day. The utterance, with the use of the performative verb "did I tell" insinuated another illocutionary act "you don't know anything about me". In other words, Chuma was indirectly telling his wife Adaugo that she should mind her own business and leave him alone.

Text 3

(Hello), is it Interline Shipping Company?

The clause constituents are **(N) + Aux + Prn + NP**

This closed interrogative clause is uttered by Chuma to a caller on his phone. At this time, every call he receives is assumed to be from the shipping line handling his business. Hence, it is an anticipatory illocutionary act. He is not interested in knowing if the caller is from Interline Shipping Company or not, rather, he actually wants to know if his ship has been recovered. Hence, one can say that this utterance has the indirect force of "Is my ship recovered?"

Text 4

Is there no one in this house?

Clause constituents are: **Aux + Prn + Adj + Noun + Prep + Adj + Noun**

It is an utterance from Adaugo to no one in particular. It is a rhetorical question since it is an illocutionary force of a question which is not used with the expectation of an answer but with some different, indirect force such as a command. Adaugo expects either her husband who is now forced to stay at home or the children to welcome her home from work. As far as she is concerned, this is the least they could do to show

their appreciation to her for being the bread winner now. Hence, the underlying commanding force, in the utterance.

Text 5

Is that supposed to be an answer to my question?

Clause constituents are: **Aux + Prn + VP + Art + Noun + Prep + Adj + Noun**

Chuma is addressing his wife, Adaugo here. This utterance reveals his state of mind concerning Adaugo being the one going to work. He has never been happy with this and he deliberately creates unnecessary tension in the home, instead of a warm and friendly gesture to welcome his wife, he barrages her with questions. Ironically, Adaugo replies him with another question which according to the Igbo culture is an aberration, especially between a wife and her husband. In other words, this statement is indirectly saying “how dare you fail to answer my question?” It has an indirect force of command and demand; hence, it is an anticipatory illocutionary act.

Text 6

Did you ever think about your friend?

Clause constituent elements are: **Aux + Prn + Adv + V + Prep + Adj + Noun**

Adaugo addresses Eddy her husband’s friend in a situation she finds shocking. Ordinarily, the answer to this question would have been just either yes or no, but there is an underlying meaning to it. Eddy is making advances at Adaugo, capitalizing on the current financial crisis of Chuma, his best friend. He feels that since Chuma does not have the money any more, he could lure his wife into having an affair with him. Eddy forgets about loyalty and integrity being the cornerstone of friendship and throws caution into the wind. This means that all the while, he has had his eyes on Adaugo unknown to Chuma and Adaugo herself. This statement is a rhetorical question because Eddy obviously never thought of his friend. It is an illocutionary force of a question that is giving an evaluation of Eddy’s shocking behaviour.

Text 7

Don’t you trust your wife?

Clause constituent elements are: **Aux + Prn + V + Adj + Noun**

Eddy is addressing Chuma, his friend here. Eddy is being sarcastic and is trying to poison Chuma’s mind against his wife to pave way for his hideous plans. Unfortunately, Chuma falls into his plans headlong and concludes that Adaugo has been cheating on him. Chuma starts a fight with his wife and ultimately sends her packing. This statement is intended to spark suspicion in Chuma and not to elicit a yes or no answer from him. The underlying indirect force here is “I don’t want you to trust your wife” or “your wife is not trustworthy”. It is a hedged performative.

Text 8

(Do) You want to turn me into a beggar?

Clause constituent elements are: **(Aux) + Prn + V + Prep + Prn + Prep + Det + Noun**

Nonso mimics Chuma while Emeka acts as Adaugo in this situation. Both are the children of Chuma and Adaugo. Chuma does not want to be responsible for the children’s school fees any more since he lost his goods in the missing ship. He turns every expense to his wife including the children’s school fees. In this situation, Adaugo already has part of the money to pay the children’s school fees and is pleading with her husband to get the remaining from his friends. Hence, the reply, “(Do) you want to turn me into a beggar?” The interrogative clause, “(Do) you want to turn me into a beggar?” is a way of saying “I am not ready to pay, even if it requires asking my friends for money”. The utterance is hedged performative.

Text 9

Did armed robbers attack him?

Clause constituent elements are: **Aux + NP + V + Prn**

In this situation, Helen addresses her friend, Adaugo who has been sent out in the night by her husband after a quarrel. Since Adaugo would not explain why she came so late crying, Helen straight away assumes that Chuma must have been attacked by armed robbers. Helen anticipates that her friend would not look so dishevelled if there was no grave incident as serious as Chuma being attacked by armed robbers. Hence, the utterance is anticipatory illocution.

Text 10

Do you call them men?

Clause constituent elements are: **Aux + Prn + V + Prn + Noun**

Eddy in his characteristic crafty behaviour addresses the unsuspecting Chuma. This statement is uttered to instigate Chuma against his wife so that Eddy could take over Adaugo when Chuma finally drives her away. In this regard, “Do you call them men” actually has the indirect force of “Men who beat their wives are truly men”. This is a hedged performative act.

III. Analyses’ Result

From the two levels of analysis carried out, the first level of structural description of selected utterances reveals that closed interrogative English clauses are representations of language that can be broken down into their specific units or structural components. The structural descriptions of all utterances confirm that they are all closed interrogative clauses because all begin with an auxiliary verb. However on the second level of analysis, results confirm that these utterances are not just interrogatives but illocutionary acts. From the ten closed interrogative clauses, five (5) perform the hedged performative act; three (3) perform the anticipatory illocutionary act, while two (2) are rhetorical questions.

Graphical illustration of the Correlational Analysis of Closed Interrogatives as Speech Acts

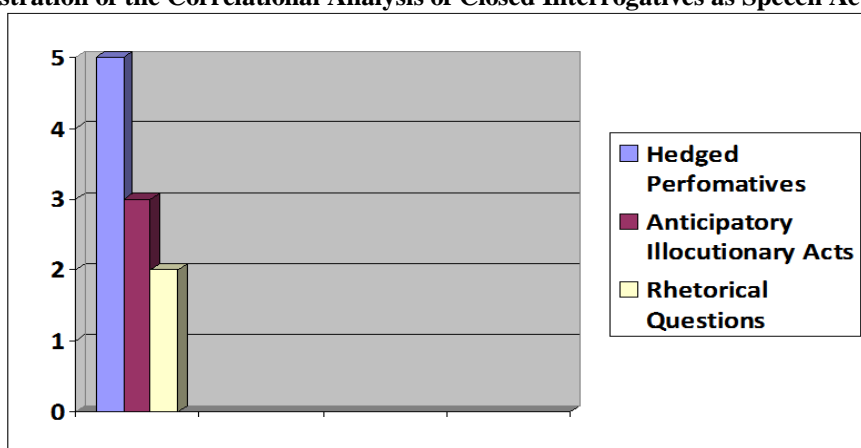


Figure 1: Closed Interrogative Clauses as Speech Acts

IV. Discussion

Analyses of closed interrogatives according to the three illocutionary types reveal that preconditions on illocutionary acts defined for one language cannot be expected to be universal. Intercultural miscommunication arises from the assumption that the language strategies appropriate to the delivery of the intended meaning in one language can be used with equal efficacy in another language. In different societies, and in different communities, people speak differently – not only because they speak different languages, but also because their ways of using language are different. These differences reflect different cultural values, which may often lead to a communication failure between individuals and between social groups.

Hence, it is impossible to attain a particular level of linguistic competence without understanding the nature of indirect speech acts. It is also important to understand that there are typical indirect speech acts peculiar to particular languages. By studying different cultural traditions manifesting themselves in different ways of speaking, we can improve our ability to communicate with others more effectively.

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