

Speech acts performed by echo questions in English conversational discourse

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Abstract. The article examines illocutionary characteristics of echo questions in English conversational discourse, identifying the types of speech acts performed and specifying their felicity conditions. Drawing on data from British and American films and prose, the research revealed that echo questions may be realized as direct speech acts (quesitives) as well as combine several illocutions functioning as indirect directives, expressives, metacommunicatives, constatives, and commissives.

Keywords: *echo question, speech act, quesitive, directive, expressive, metacommunicative, constative, commissive, conversational discourse.*

Introduction. Echo questions, common in conversational discourse [0, p. 99], have been defined on the basis of their functional characteristics (to ask a question, express emotions, check one's understanding of the interlocutor's message, or make further inquiries) as well as structural and semantic relation with the preceding utterance [0]. Their differentiation into certain types of speech acts [0] is made possible by establishing their communicative intention ("orientation of a sentence towards achieving a certain linguistic communicative aim" [0, p. 433]), which makes the present study **topical**.

This paper **aims** to identify the types of speech acts performed by echo questions as well as specify their felicity conditions.

Material and methods. Echo questions, selected by continuous sampling from prose works of British and American authors of the 20th and 21st centuries as well as English feature films have been studied by means of descriptive and pragmatic methods.

Literature review. Types and characteristics of speech acts have been explored by J. Austin [0], J. Searle [0], K. Bach and R. Harnish [0], G. Leech [0, p. 207-226], D. Wunderlich [0], and G.G. Pocheptsov [0, p. 435-444]. Generalizing the results of speech act classifications, I.S. Shevchenko has offered a typology of speech acts relevant for a diachronic study of the English interrogative sentence based on J. Searle's and G.G. Pocheptsov's ideas, thus distinguishing *quesitives* ("inquiring about new important information to bridge the information gap"), *directives* (*injunctives* – inducements-orders and *requestives* – inducements-requests), *expressives* (expressing evaluation and emotions), *metacommunicatives* (speech acts which precede establishing speech contact, speech acts prolonging contact, and speech acts terminating speech contact), *constatives* (which ensure "communicating new important information"), and *commissives* (*menasives* – warnings, threats; *promisives* – promises, offers) [0, p. 50].

Results and discussion. The illocutionary force of a *quesitive* is realized when echo questions are used to request elaboration (clarification / repetition) on the elements of the interlocutor's utterance, check an inference / assumption, and ask for confirmation or commitment [0, p. 181-182].

Assuming that a question (quesitive) requires that the speaker should not know its answer [0, p. 362-363], we may formulate *felicity conditions* of echo questions func-

tioning as quesitives in the following manner (based on felicity conditions of a directive speech act [0, p. 80]):

perlocutionary condition – the speaker (B) is going to obtain the answer;

preparatory conditions – the addressee (A) is in a position to give the answer, the speaker (B) has the right to ask and is not certain about obtaining the answer in the normal course of events; *requesting elaboration*: B does not know the (details of) the answer; *requesting clarification*: B does not know the answer (due to a misunderstanding); *requesting repetition*: B does not know the answer (due to various problems pertaining to perception of A's utterance); *checking an inference / assumption*: the truth thereof should necessarily be confirmed by A; *asking for confirmation*: B is uncertain / doubtful about A's utterance; *asking for commitment*: B wants A to behave in a certain way / perform a certain action in the future; B's asking for commitment is necessary for A to perform the action in question [0];

propositional content condition – a future action of the addressee (providing the required answer);

sincerity condition – the speaker (B) really wants the addressee (A) to provide the answer;

essential conditions – the speaker's attempts to obtain the answer from the addressee;

individualized conditions specify the element of A's utterance which requires elaboration / clarification / repetition / confirmation.

The interrelation of formal and functional features of an utterance is characterized by a certain flexibility, which allows a quesitive to acquire additional illocutions of other speech acts [0, p. 444-446]. A *directive* may take the form of an *injunctive*, which pertains to the interlocutor's actions / behaviour / attitude (examples in (1)) or the unfolding of the common communicative activity (the necessity of discussing a certain subject at a certain time, the truthfulness of the interlocutor's message and his / her sincerity, inducement to provide information) (examples in (2)). It is noteworthy that modal meanings of necessity, obligation, and possibility may be actualized in both (1) and (2):

(1) *Why don't you come and see?* [0]; *Why don't you leave her alone?* [0]; *Is it necessary to trouble Her Ladyship any further, sir?* [0]; *Must you interfere? Does it really matter if he marries the girl?* [0, p. 1046]; *But does one have to be so proud?* [0]; *Do you have to take them all?* [0]; *May I see this letter?* [0];

(2) *Can't this wait?* [0]; *Do we have to talk about this?* [0]; *Can't you stop talking about murder?* [0]; *Can you lie to me just once?* [0]; *Can you tell me where I might find him this evening, Monsieur?* [0]; *Would you mind explaining, Doctor?* [0].

A *requestive* is realized in the form of a recommendation / advice (examples (3)–(5)) or request (6). In comparison with *injunctives*, these utterances are less categorical due to the use of modal verbs, the pragmatic marker *please* [0, p. 189], discourse markers and hedges: *well* [0, p. 59] expressing the meaning of disagreement / doubt [0, p. 851-852] and *oh* [0, p. 321; 0, p. 267]) as well as transposition of the grammatical category of person of the pronoun [0, p. 79-85]: the use of the first person plural instead of the second.

(3) *Then may I recommend that you return there and be on hand in case I should want you?* [0, p. 819];

(4) Princess Shaista: *Perhaps I'll find my husband here, in England.*

Miss Bulstrode: *Yes, well, we mustn't run before we can walk, must we?* [0];

(5) *You will be careful, won't you?* [0];

(6) Bobby: *Come inside.*

Moirra: *Oh, no, please, before we go inside, isn't there somewhere we could go – a cafe that's safe?* [0].

In communicative situation (7), evaluation (an *expressive*) is combined with an implicit directive ("a situation-bound directive with contextual illocutionary indicators" [0, p. 75]), while in (8) *requesting confirmation* (a *quesitive*) is intertwined with the expression of surprise:

(7) Morse: *Have a look at my glass first.*

Lewis: *It's a bit early for a second, isn't it, sir?* [0].

(8) Bobby Jones and Reverend Jones are having breakfast. Bobby: *Well, I'm damned.*

Reverend Jones: *Really, Bobby!*

Bobby: *Oh, sorry, Dad, I forgot you were there. But somebody's offered me a thousand a year.*

Reverend Jones: *What did you say? A thousand? A thousand pounds?*

Bobby: *Hold and wonder* [0].

When echo questions are used as *metacommunicatives*, their function is maintaining speech contact by expressing empathy and interest. Demonstrating attention to the interlocutor's message may be accompanied by urging him / her to continue speaking and provide more information [0, p. 400].

A *constative* has the illocutionary force of a statement [0, p. 437], whereas indirect constatives, according to I.S. Shevchenko, realize at least two illocutionary forces: informing and inquiring [0, p. 117]:

(9) Miss Bunner: *I saw him with an oil can in the garden.*

Miss Marple leaning forward: *Really?*

Miss Bunner: *And the other door to the drawing room has been oiled. And I heard him having an argument with Julia the other day.*

Miss Marple: *But that's human nature, isn't it? Arguments between brothers and sisters* [0].

Miss Marple's echo questions present a combination of two illocutions: *Really?* requests elaboration and demonstrates interest in the facts communicated by Miss Bunner and her version of events, while Miss Marple's second

echo question simultaneously expresses her own view on the subject under discussion.

Rhetorical questions also belong to indirect constatives [0, p. 76-77]. Unlike *quesitives*, they do not inquire about new information [0, p. 77] because the answer is known to both communicators (can be provided by either of them) and is part of the common ground. The aim of a rhetorical question is drawing the interlocutor's attention to a particular element of the common ground, which constitutes the answer to a rhetorical question, rather than increasing the amount of the communicators' common knowledge [0, p. 131]. In the following situation, a negative answer to Father Brown's rhetorical questions is obvious to his interlocutors and indicates the seriousness of the condition which he is trying to simulate.

(10) Dr. Henshaw: *Kleptomania?*

Father Brown: *Frequently. Mr Hammond's apple tree is a particular casualty.*

Dr. Henshaw: *Gambling?*

Father Brown: *I like an occasional flutter.*

Nurse Farrow: *Occasional?*

Father Brown: *Every day.*

Dr. Henshaw: *Compulsive eating?*

Father Brown: *Oh, who can resist second helpings? Or third? Or fourth?* [0].

Obviousness of the answers [0, p. 436] to rhetorical questions on the basis of common knowledge and beliefs [0, p. 164] allows using echo questions in the function of *implicit disagreement* ("a reactive speech act expressing a speaker's opinion which is different from his / her interlocutor's stance, has the form of an informative or evaluative utterance and is characterized by different emotional colourings (e.g., disapproval, criticism)" [0, p. 3]). For instance, in situation (11), Miss Blacklock's echo questions express doubt about the version of the attempted murder suggested by the police inspector, pointing out its absurdity, and represent a *disagreement-constative*, which is realized by means of positive evaluation of the neighbours, who are incapable of committing such a crime.

(11) Inspector Craddock: *When Scherz came in this door and did his party piece, anybody could've slipped out through the other door, stood behind him and fired the shots at you, Miss Blacklock.*

Miss Blacklock: *Oh! Are you suggesting that one of my neighbours, one of my nice, commonplace neighbours, slipped through that door and tried to murder me? Oh! Who is your main suspect, Inspector? The vicar's wife?* [0].

An implicit *disagreement-directive* combines criticism of the interlocutor's viewpoint, namely speaking ill of the deceased during the funeral, and inducement to stop discussing the subject:

(12) Dr Crawford: *Well, your son was hardly the most respectful of people.* John Tatton: *How dare you? You seen this? Hm?* Dr Crawford: *What is it?* [0].

An indirect *commissive* functions as a *promisive* / *asking for instructions* in the case of behavioural cooperation and coordination of a common activity (*Is there anything I can do?* [0]; *Any instructions, sir?* [0, p. 120]), whereas in conflict situations it may act as a *menasive* combined with disagreement (an *expressive*):

(13) *"Keep on talking," said Holmes. "It's fine." "Oh! it's fine, is it?" growled the savage. "It won't be so damn*

fine if I have to trim you up a bit. I've handled your kind before now, and they didn't look fine when I was through with them. Look at that, Masser Holmes!" He swung a huge knotted lump of a fist under my friend's nose [0, p. 1059].

A felicitous performance of an indirect *commissive* / asking for instructions presupposes fulfilling a number of conditions:

perlocutionary condition – the speaker (B) is going to perform an action and requires A's permission / agreement;

preparatory conditions – the speaker (B) is able and willing to perform the action; the speaker (B) cannot perform the action without obtaining permission; the speaker (B) is uncertain about the necessity / appropriateness of performing the action; performance of the future action does not contradict A's interests according to the context of communication;

propositional content condition – a future action by the speaker (B);

sincerity condition – the speaker (B) wants the addressee (A) to agree that the speaker should perform a future action / specify what exactly must be done;

essential conditions – the speaker's attempts to gain the addressee's consent to performance of the action;

individualized conditions specify the characteristics of the action which the speaker wants to perform.

According to G.G. Pocheptsov, a sentence may function as a promissive if the action / event in question depends on the speaker [0, p. 438]. An indirect *commissive-refusal* [0, p. 5] is characterized by the speaker's unwillingness to perform a certain action (including a verbal one), interlocutors' conflicting goals, the speaker's doubt about the addressee's right to demand performance of a certain (communicative) action by issuing commands / offering suggestions or asking for certain information.

(14) Iggy: *Listen, Dan, anything else, I play it your way, right? Just one condition.*

Dan: *Who says you make conditions?*

Iggy: *Just one* [0].

In situation (14), a conversation between two bank robbers, Dan's echo question denies Iggy the right to influence their common future actions. In the following situation, echo questions pertain to verbal behaviour:

(15) Patti Randall: *Shh!*

Ingrid Randall: *What do you mean "shh"? What's going on here?*

Zeke Kelso: *Now quiet please. to another agent using a transmitter: Report to me when you reach the area.*

Ingrid Randall: *How dare you tell me to be quiet?* to Patti: *What's this man doing in my room?* [0].

Having returned from work, Ingrid enters her bedroom, sees a stranger (an FBI agent Zeke Kelso with a transmitter, giving instructions to his colleague) and attempts to find out what is happening. Her echo questions (addressed to her sister Patti and Zeke Kelso) may be viewed as a refusal to keep silent, which in the first case is caused by a misunderstanding and in the second also expresses indignation at Zeke Kelso's seemingly impudent behaviour: entering Ingrid's bedroom without her permission, staying there, and refusing to answer any questions as to the aim of his visit.

Conclusions. In conversational discourse, echo questions may be realized as direct speech acts (quesitives) as well as combine several illocutions functioning as indirect directives, expressives, metacommunicatives, constatives, and commissives. Quesitives embrace requesting elaboration / clarification / repetition, checking an inference / assumption, and asking for confirmation / commitment. A directive may take the form of an injunctive (order), requestive (recommendation / advice / request), or disagreement-directive. A metacommunicative maintains speech contact by expressing empathy and interest, while a constative combines informing and inquiring. A commissive may function as a promissive / asking for instructions, menasive, and refusal.

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