

Why Did They Get Divorced?-A Case Study of A Divorced Family

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the underlying causes of divorce through a detailed case study, employing spoken discourse analysis as its primary investigative tool. The study centers on a divorced couple, aiming to identify communication patterns and conflicts that may have precipitated the marital dissolution. The paper concludes with insights into how a deeper understanding and application of Speech Act could enhance marital communication and potentially mitigate conflicts. This study contributes to the broader understanding of linguistic factors influencing marital relationships and offers valuable implications for future studies aimed at improving communication within families.

KEYWORDS

Speech Act; Divorced couple; Marital Communication; Qualitative Research

1 Introduction

The dissolution of marriage, or divorce, is a multifaceted social phenomenon that has garnered significant attention from scholars across various disciplines. In the realm of linguistics, Speech Act Theory offers a unique lens through which to examine the communicative processes and interactions that may contribute to marital breakdown. This paper presents a case study of a divorced family, employing Speech Act Theory to analyze the linguistic exchanges and behaviors that potentially led to the termination of their marital relationship.

Speech Act Theory, initially proposed by J.L. Austin and further developed by John Searle, posits that language is not merely a tool for conveying information, but rather a means of performing actions. These actions, or speech acts, can be categorized into three main types: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary acts refer to the basic act of uttering words with a certain meaning, while illocutionary acts encompass the intended function or purpose of the utterance, such as making a promise or giving a command. Perlocutionary acts, on the other hand, pertain to the effects that the utterance has on the listener, such as persuading or offending someone.

In the context of a marital relationship, effective communication is often cited as a key factor in maintaining harmony and understanding between partners. However, when speech acts are not executed or interpreted correctly, misunderstandings and conflicts can arise. For instance, if one partner consistently makes requests or demands (illocutionary acts) without considering the other's feelings or capacity to comply, it may lead to feelings of resentment and frustration. Similarly, if a partner's utterances are perceived as insincere or manipulative, it can erode trust and emotional connection.

The case study presented in this paper delves into the specific linguistic interactions and speech acts employed by the members of the divorced family. By examining the transcripts of their conversations and analyzing the types of speech acts used, we aim to identify patterns and instances of miscommunication, conflict escalation, and emotional detachment. This analysis will shed light on how the breakdown in speech act effectiveness and understanding may have contributed to the eventual decision to divorce.

Furthermore, this study seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of the role of language and communication in marital relationships. By applying Speech Act Theory to a real-life case of divorce, we hope to provide insights into the complex interplay between linguistic actions and emotional dynamics within a marriage. This knowledge can potentially inform interventions and communication strategies aimed at preventing or mitigating marital conflicts, ultimately fostering healthier and more resilient relationships.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory, a pivotal framework in pragmatics, offers valuable insights into the linguistic mechanisms underlying divorce. Understanding how speech acts function within marital dissolution processes is crucial for grasping the complex dynamics that lead to divorce. This literature review synthesizes existing research on speech acts in divorce, focusing on the primary findings, theoretical frameworks, research methodologies, prevailing debates, and potential

directions for future inquiry.

2.2 Initiating Divorce Through Speech Acts

One of the key findings in the study of speech acts in divorce is the role of verbal communication in initiating the divorce process. In many cultures, divorce can be initiated verbally through specific speech acts. For instance, in some countries in the Middle East, the speech act of "talaq" is a performative act that can legally dissolve a marriage when pronounced by the husband (Siddiqi, 2016). This act exemplifies how speech can have tangible consequences in the context of marital relationships. Similarly, in some African cultures, women have been found to use strategic speech acts to assert their marital rights and express their intentions to divorce, challenging traditional gender norms and power dynamics (Harrison Adeniyi & Bello, 2016).

2.3 Communication Breakdown and Conflict Escalation

Speech acts also play a significant role in the escalation of conflicts within marriages. Ineffective communication, characterized by aggressive speech acts such as threats, blame, or criticism, can exacerbate marital discord. The inability to engage in constructive dialogue and resolve conflicts through positive speech acts, such as apologies or expressions of understanding, contributes to the deterioration of the marital relationship and increases the likelihood of divorce (Katz, 2003). For example, research has shown that couples who frequently use speech acts that violate Grice's Cooperative Principle, such as being ambiguous or irrelevant during conflict discussions, are more likely to experience relationship breakdown (Davis, 2015).

2.4 Negotiation and Reconciliation Efforts

Conversely, Speech Acts can also be employed in attempts to negotiate and reconcile within a marriage. Couples may use speech acts to express their concerns, propose compromises, or seek solutions to their problems. For instance, a spouse may initiate a conversation about their dissatisfaction with the marriage, hoping to prompt a discussion that could lead to positive changes and prevent divorce (Rappoport, 2005). However, the effectiveness of these speech acts in achieving reconciliation depends on various factors, including the willingness of both parties to engage in open and honest communication and the presence of supportive communication patterns.

3 Research Question

Speech Act Theory are categorized into three main types: locutionary acts (the act of saying something), illocutionary acts (the intention behind the act of saying something), and perlocutionary acts (the effect of the act of saying something on the listener). Based on the above literature review, whether Speech Act Theory can be used in the divorced cases should be tested. The following is the research question: How do the speech acts of the couple in this divorce case manifest and influence their marital relationship?

4 Theoretical Frameworks

4.1 Austin's Speech Act Theory

Austin's Speech Act Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how speech acts function in the context of divorce. According to Austin, speech acts are not merely utterances but actions that can have real-world consequences (Austin, 1962). In the case of divorce, the speech act of initiating divorce, such as the verbal declaration of "talaq," is a performative act that brings about a change in the marital status. This theory highlights the power of language in shaping the course of marital relationships and the potential for speech acts to initiate significant life changes, such as the dissolution of marriage.

4.2 Searle's Illocutionary Acts

Searle's extension of Speech Act Theory into illocutionary acts further elucidates the role of speech in divorce. Illocutionary acts focus on the intended effects of speech acts on the listener (Searle, 1969). In the context of divorce, the illocutionary force of a speech act, such as expressing dissatisfaction or proposing separation, can vary depending on the speaker's intentions and the listener's interpretation. For example, a spouse's speech act of expressing dissatisfaction may be intended to prompt change, but if interpreted as a sign of irreconcilable differences, it could lead to the decision to

divorce.

5 Research Methodologies

5.1 Qualitative Approaches

Qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and case studies, have been instrumental in exploring the nuances of speech acts in divorce. These methods allow researchers to delve into the personal narratives of individuals involved in the divorce process, providing insights into the specific speech acts used and their perceived effects (Alhussaini et al., 2017). For example, qualitative studies have examined how couples communicate their intentions to divorce and the emotional responses these speech acts elicit, revealing the complexity of linguistic interactions during marital breakdown.

This study mainly uses qualitative approach. A divorced couple was interviewed through their behaviour and speech. The object of the author's interview was a young couple, who felt broken because of the intervention of a third party. They had been married for a year. Through interviews, the author sorted out the interview records, translated them into written texts, and marked and sorted out the recording and video data. After that, the author code the sorted data, classify similar views, emotions, events, etc., and form a preliminary theme or concept. On the basis of coding, the author further analyze the relationship between various themes, and find out the core theme and secondary theme. Finally, the analysis results and Speech Act Theory are combined to explore the social roots and psychological mechanism behind the divorce phenomenon.

5.2 Quantitative Approaches

Quantitative approaches, including surveys and content analysis, have also been employed to study speech acts in divorce. Surveys can help identify common patterns in the types of speech acts used during marital conflicts and negotiations, as well as their perceived effectiveness in resolving issues or leading to divorce (Wang, 2018). Content analysis of communication transcripts or recorded interactions between couples can provide a systematic examination of the linguistic features of speech acts, such as the frequency and context of aggressive or conciliatory speech acts.

6 Case Study

6.1 Introduction

The interviewees are Mary(female) and Tony(male). They fell in love with each other and got married for one year. At the end of the year, another person called Barrett(male) was in love with Tony(male). In a marital relationship, when Mary expresses emotional demands to Tony, an unexpected third party intervenes, resulting in significant conflicts between the emotional ties between husband and wife. Later, through a series of revelations, Mary learned that Tony was actually a homosexual, which had a huge impact on him, and then prompted Mary to put forward the claim of terminating the marriage relationship based on this.

6.2 Interview of the Divorced Woman

6.2.1 Basic Information

Tony is a professor of art design at a university, while Mary works as a mechanical engineering technician. They experienced love at first sight when Tony encountered Mary in the library when they were senior at college, captivated by her physical attractiveness.

6.2.2 Early Marriage

6.2.2.1 Acquaintance and Courtship

The circumstances of their initial meeting are vividly clear. It was a sunny afternoon when Tony was engrossed in reading a book on educational psychology in a corner of the library. Mary noticed the book in Tony's hands and approached him to discuss its contents. Although they specialized in different fields, Tony discovered that they shared a mutual interest in education. Their conversation flowed naturally, and they quickly recognized their shared passion and insights regarding educational matters.

During their courtship, one of the most memorable experiences was their participation in an educational seminar. At

this seminar, they not only had the opportunity to engage with industry experts but also to share their perspectives on educational reform. This experience deepened their understanding and respect for one another, further solidifying their shared professional aspirations.

The greatest challenge they faced during their courtship was time management. Due to their commitments to academics and part-time jobs, finding sufficient time to be together proved difficult. To address this issue, they devised a detailed schedule to ensure they had at least two dates each week. This approach not only preserved the novelty of their relationship but also taught them how to balance personal time with shared experiences amidst their busy lives.

6.2.2.2 Decision to Marry

Tony's decision to marry was influenced by multiple factors. Firstly, they exhibited a high degree of alignment in their values and life goals, which laid a solid foundation for their marriage. Secondly, they had successfully navigated numerous challenges during their courtship, instilling confidence in their ability to confront future difficulties together. Finally, both expressed a desire to establish a family and share the joys and sorrows of life together.

6.2.3 Life After Marriage

6.2.3.1 Shared Life

Their daily life post-marriage was highly structured. Each morning, they exercised together before heading off to work. In the evenings, they would cook together and share anecdotes from their day. They also maintained certain special rituals, such as watching movies together every Saturday night and planning at least one weekend getaway each month. These rituals infused their lives with enjoyment and freshness.

One of the happiest moments in their marriage occurred when they completed their first home renovation project together. They repainted the living room and added new furniture, supporting each other throughout the process. Witnessing their home transform into a more beautiful space filled them with pride and satisfaction.

6.2.3.2 Communication and Interaction

Post-marriage, their primary mode of communication was through daily conversations. Each night, they dedicated time to discuss their experiences and feelings from the day, with Mary often needing Tony's reassurance to fall asleep. They also learned to employ positive communication techniques, such as active listening and expressing gratitude.

However, they encountered instances of communication breakdown. For example, when discussing the prospect of having children, they held differing viewpoints. To resolve this issue, they decided to attend fertility workshops together and read relevant literature.

They shared numerous interests, such as hiking and photography. Frequently, they planned weekend hikes to explore natural beauty and captured memorable moments with their camera. These shared interests not only enriched their lives but also strengthened their emotional connection. Through joint participation in activities, they had the opportunity to face challenges together and celebrate successes.

6.2.4 Conflicts and Disputes

In November 2024, Mary inadvertently overheard a phone conversation between Tony and a male individual named Barrett. Barrett expressed his affection for Tony in an ambiguous tone, suggesting they start as close friends and gradually develop their feelings. Upon hearing this, Mary began to question Tony's sexual orientation and requested to see the chat history between Tony and Barrett. In the chat records, Mary discovered that Barrett had repeatedly proposed a romantic relationship with Tony, affectionately referring to him as "baby." In a fit of anger, Mary decisively demanded a divorce from Tony.

6.2.5 Decision to Divorce

The primary reasons for their divorce were the infrequent meetings and the involvement of Barrett. Despite their efforts to overcome numerous challenges within their marriage, they found that their opportunities to meet were diminishing over time, and Tony had concealed his sexual orientation. It was only after Barrett's involvement and expression of affection for Tony that Mary realized Tony had been deceiving Barrett regarding his feelings.

Prior to the divorce, Tony did attempt to salvage the marriage. He maintained that his relationship with Mary was purely platonic and not romantic; however, Barrett remained unconvinced and was unwilling to accept any third party in their relationship.

6.2.6 Life After Divorce

Post-divorce, Mary experienced a shift in her life circumstances. She felt both liberated and somewhat lonely. On one hand, she no longer had to confront the pressures and conflicts of marriage, allowing her to focus more on her personal growth and career development. On the other hand, she needed to adapt to life without a partner and to rebuild her social circle and support system.

6.2.7 Summary and Reflection

Reflecting on her marriage, Mary considers it a process filled with challenges and growth. They experienced a range of emotions and events at each stage—acquaintance, courtship, marriage, and divorce. Although they ultimately chose to divorce, this experience has made Mary more mature and resilient. She learned how to communicate within relationships, how to address conflicts, and how to seek solutions in times of difficulty.

6.3 Analysis of the Case

6.3.1 Illocutionary Acts

6.3.1.1 Commitment to Shared Life

Tony and Mary's daily routine of exercising together, cooking, and sharing anecdotes, as well as their special rituals like watching movies every Saturday night and planning monthly getaways, represent a commitment to a shared life. These acts express their intention to build and maintain a strong marital relationship.

6.3.1.2 Communication and Support

Their primary mode of communication through daily conversations, where they discussed their experiences and feelings, is an illocutionary act of maintaining open and honest communication. Mary's need for Tony's reassurance to fall asleep further emphasizes the emotional support they provided each other.

The use of active listening and expressing gratitude are illocutionary acts aimed at enhancing their emotional connection and resolving conflicts.

6.3.1.3 Addressing Challenges

Attending fertility workshops and reading relevant literature to address differing viewpoints on having children is an illocutionary act of commitment to resolving issues and moving forward together.

6.3.1.4 Declaration of Divorce

Mary's decision to demand a divorce is an illocutionary act of declaring the end of their marriage. This act is based on the revelation of Tony's hidden sexual orientation and the involvement of Barrett, which significantly impacted their relationship.

6.3.2 Perlocutionary Acts

6.3.2.1 Building Trust and Connection

Their shared interests in hiking and photography, and the joint participation in activities, had the perlocutionary effect of strengthening their emotional connection and enriching their lives. These activities provided opportunities to face challenges together and celebrate successes, thereby enhancing their bond.

6.3.2.2 Communication Breakdown

The communication breakdown regarding the prospect of having children led to differing viewpoints and the need to seek external help. This perlocutionary effect highlights the challenges in aligning their future plans and the importance of addressing these differences.

6.3.2.3 Trust Erosion

Mary overhearing the phone conversation between Tony and Barrett had a profound perlocutionary effect. It introduced doubt and suspicion about Tony's sexual orientation, leading to a breakdown in trust.

The discovery of the chat history, where Barrett repeatedly proposed a romantic relationship with Tony, further eroded Mary's trust. This perlocutionary effect led to a decisive demand for divorce.

6.3.2.4 Effect of Divorce

The perlocutionary effect of this declaration is the formal end of their marital relationship, marking a significant change in their personal and social lives.

Mary's post-divorce experience of feeling liberated yet lonely is a perlocutionary effect of the divorce. This effect highlights the mixed emotions and the need for personal growth and adaptation to a new lifestyle.

7 Conclusion and Limitation

7.1 Limitation

7.1.1 Barrettle Size and Generalizability

The study focuses on a single case study, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include a larger and more diverse Barrettle to validate the results.

7.1.2 Subjectivity in Interpretation

The analysis of speech acts is inherently subjective, relying on the interpretation of the researcher. Future studies could benefit from multiple coders to enhance the reliability of the analysis.

7.1.3 Lack of Longitudinal Data

The study provides a snapshot of the couple's communication patterns at a specific point in time. Longitudinal studies could offer a more comprehensive understanding of how speech acts evolve over the course of a marriage.

7.1.4 Cultural and Societal Influences

The study does not fully account for cultural and societal influences on marital communication. Future research should consider these factors to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of speech acts in different cultural contexts.

7.2 Conclusion

Speech Act Theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the complex interplay between language and marital outcomes. By examining the specific speech acts used by individuals in a marital context, researchers can identify patterns of communication that may contribute to marital breakdown or facilitate reconciliation. This study highlights the importance of effective communication in maintaining healthy marital relationships and offers insights that can inform interventions and communication strategies aimed at improving marital communication and preventing divorce. Future research should continue to explore the application of Speech Act Theory in diverse marital contexts to further our understanding of the role of language in marital dynamics.

This study demonstrates the applicability of Speech Act Theory to the analysis of divorce cases, highlighting the critical role of language and communication in marital relationships. By identifying specific speech acts and their effects, researchers can gain valuable insights into the dynamics of marital breakdown and develop strategies to enhance marital communication and stability. Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the broader understanding of the linguistic factors influencing marital outcomes and offers practical implications for future research and interventions.

Funding

Completing their first home renovation project together was an illocutionary act of commitment to their shared home and future. The act of repainting the living room and adding new furniture symbolizes their joint effort and mutual support.

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