

## ABSTRACT

### A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE OFFER AS A SPEECH BEHAVIOR IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

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This study had a two-fold purpose: to develop a comprehensive definition of the offer as a speech act, and to determine the social parameters which accompany its use. A specific attempt was made to identify those features in the offer which distinguish it from several other speech acts with which it shares some commonality. The essential difference was found to lie in the level of situational context rather than at that of utterance or linguistic attributes. A new and more finely detailed definition of the offer, containing six accompanying corollaries, was reached. This both substantiated and elaborated upon the original working definition.

The research direction followed was the one suggested by Hymes in his rules-of-speaking approach for studying speech acts, with particular emphasis upon the methodology and the interpretation of this approach as applied in the work of Ervin-Tripp and Wolfson. From these sources came a strong focus upon the analysis of the data, with the categories emerging from that data itself.

Several different types of offers and offer-sequences involving a variety of topics were examined. In all offers, an item

or a service was either directly extended or else alluded to as available for presentation to the receiver. Contrary to expectations, responses in the offer-sequences studied reflected a similar occurrence of acceptances and refusals. A temporary shift of momentary control from offerer to receiver during the span of the offer-sequence was noted.

Duality in the nature of the offer was suggested as a prominent feature, particularly in that two participants (an offerer and a receiver) must always be involved. Further aspects of this duality were identified and interpreted. The study also addressed variation in the degree of magnitude among offers, the presence of voluntary selection (the decision of whether or not to make an offer, and which offer to make), and the issues of spontaneity, obligation, commitment, and politeness as they pertain to offers.

The study implies support for some of the gender and social-distance claims made for other speech acts, while new claims are made regarding the effect of relative age upon offering. The abundance and the ready availability of food in middle-class American society is noted for its effect upon the type and frequency of a large number of offers. It is further implied that TESOL pedagogy, by imparting a greater awareness of cross-cultural differences in offering, can help cultivate greater communicative competence in this area of speech behavior.

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