

HABERMAS'S PRAGMATICS OF COMMUNICATION

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Throughout many years, philosophers around the world have been fascinated with the nature of language, and made extensive efforts to explain its purpose, function and effect in and on humans' lives. However the outcome of many of these efforts resulted in philosophers offering interpretations which greatly differed from each other in terms of explaining what language is, why we use it, and how we use it. These philosophers have engaged in debate, not in order to dismiss others' arguments in their entirety, but rather to help expand previous analyses and consequently learn more about the topic. Two of these philosophers were John Searle and Jürgen Habermas. While both of these individuals attempted to explain what language is, Habermas offered an analysis which explained the way humans interact through language by taking into account the social and norm implications, an aspect that was neglected in Searle's account. In order to truly understand the main points of Habermas's account, it is important to briefly review Searle's analysis of language and then proceed to contrast that with Habermas's account.

In his analysis of language, Searle analyzes language in terms of sentences and illocutionary force. More specifically, he analyzes illocutionary force by looking for conditions of success or failure of speech acts. "With an illocutionary act, the speaker makes an offer that can be accepted or rejected."¹ Searle explained that if the illocutionary forces of different speech acts are to be comprehensible and acceptable, their conventional presuppositions must be fulfilled. Based on this notion, Searle

¹ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. "On the Pragmatics of Communication." P 82. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

analyzed various sets of rules and conditions, such as preparatory rules and sincerity rules, which must be fulfilled in order for a certain speech act to be *satisfied*. If these conventional presuppositions are not fulfilled, the attempt by the speaker to carry out a specific illocutionary act makes no sense, resulting in the communicative act to fail.

Searle introduces a set of conditions of application for types of speech acts.

Habermas does not oppose Searle's analysis of illocutionary force and the method of checking the accordance of a speech act to see if its illocutionary act follows the conditions required for that speech act to be accepted. However, Habermas asserts, "the general contextual conditions for institutionally unbound speech acts are to be distinguished from the conditions for applying established norms of action."² Hence, Habermas offers a second set of conditions of application, which is that for established norms of actions. He asserts that these two sets of conditions must vary independently of one another if speech acts are to represent a "repertory from which the acting subject, with the help of a finite number of types, can put together any number of norm-conformative actions."³ In order to truly understand the components of Habermas's argument and the method which he is offering of looking at communicative acts, it is important to review some key differences between his argument and that of Searle.

One of the main differences to be pointed out between Habermas's argument and Searle's is the distinction between conditions of satisfaction and those of acceptance.

Searle provides us with conditions which we can use to accept or reject a communicative

² Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. "On the Pragmatics of Communication." P 83. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

³ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. "On the Pragmatics of Communication." P 83. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

speech act based on whether its illocutionary force meets the conditions it needs to follow in order for that act to have a real meaning or purpose. These conditions are called *conditions of satisfaction*, and mainly focus on the meaning aspect of speech acts. However, Habermas offers a whole new set of conditions, which he refers to as *conditions of acceptance* and focuses on what makes a certain speech act “acceptable.” Habermas recognizes that conditions of satisfaction are not sufficient to explain the nature of language, because they do not take into account the social atmosphere and implication of speech acts. “For a theory of communicative action, only these analytical theories of meaning are instructive that start from the structure of linguistic expressions rather than from speakers’ intentions”⁴ He acknowledges that such classifications as Searle’s provide us with a guideline for “enthological and sociolinguistic descriptive systems” as they are more manageable with the complexities of natural settings than those classifications that start from illocutionary intentions. However, Habermas continues by saying, “they pay for this advantage by relinquishing the intuitively evident character of classifications that lick up with semantic analyses and take account of the elementary function of language (such as the representation of states of affairs, the expression of experiences, and the establishment of interpersonal relations).”⁵ Here, Habermas mentions the conditions of acceptance, which are the foundations of his account of language. Before analyzing these conditions in more details, it is important to introduce Bühler’s schema of language functions, and then continue to review Habermas’s remarks on it and the relation between this schema and Habermas’s analysis.

⁴ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. “On the Pragmatics of Communication.” P 107. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁵ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. “On the Pragmatics of Communication.” P 158. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

“In 1934, Bühler introduced a schema of language functions that placed linguistic expressions in relations to the speaker, to the world, and to the hearer.”⁶ Through this diagram, Bühler demonstrated that language represents a medium that simultaneously serves three different and internally related functions. These three functions are expressive, objective and appellative. Communicative expressions are employed to express the intentions and/or subjective experiences of the speaker, to represent states of affairs, and to establish relations with the hearer. Bühler looked at the semantic aspects of these functions and what role they play in leading the speaker to form sentences. After discussing Bühler’s schema, Habermas reflects, “Bühler’s theory of language functions could be connected with the methods and insights of the analytic theory of meaning and be made the centerpiece of a theory of communicative action oriented toward reaching understanding if we could generalize the concept of validity beyond truth of propositions and identify validity conditions no longer only on the semantics level, for sentences, but on the pragmatics level, for utterances.”⁷ Habermas uses the classification which Bühler has used on a semantics level and applies it to language on a pragmatics level. In other words, Habermas uses this classification to establish a set of conditions, or validity claims, based on which the hearer could accept or reject an utterance based on what the speaker says in relation to herself, to the other person, and to the world. It is important to discuss Habermas’s notion of validity claims before learning how a hearer employs them to react a certain way to a speech act.

Validity claims explain what makes it acceptable for one to perform a

⁶ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. “On the Pragmatics of Communication.” P 277. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁷ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. “On the Pragmatics of Communication.” P 110. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

communicative act in a certain setting, about certain affairs, with a certain hearer. There are three types of validity claims that closely correspond to Bühler's classifications, which are the expressive, appellative and objective. According to Habermas, a hearer is able to not only reject a certain speech act on a semantic level, as Searle and Grice argue, but also on the pragmatics level, based on one of three validity claims, in the form of a yes or a no. "A hearer understands an imperative if he knows (a) the conditions under which an addressee can bring about the desired state (not smoking) and (b) the conditions under which S has good reasons to expect that H will feel constrained to yield to the will of S... In knowing these conditions, [the speaker] knows what makes the utterance acceptable."⁸ For instance, if the speaker tells the hearer, "Bring me the book that is on the table," the hearer can reject the statement based on the expressive validity, because she believes that the speaker is not being sincere about the true place of the book, based on the objective validity, because she believes that the speaker is wrong about the true location of the book, or based on the appellative validity, because she believes the speaker is in no position to make such a request of her.

In Habermas's analysis, we do not have truth conditions for sentences, but we can have reasons for or against a sentence. Habermas believes that the internal connection between meaning and validity is a good thing, and suggests that we move away from truth conditions and analyze language on the pragmatics level and by taking into account the social settings and implications which apply to every speech act. "The meaning of sentences, and understand of sentence meanings, cannot be separated from language's

⁸ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. "On the Pragmatics of Communication." P 134. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

inherent relations to the validity of statements.”⁹ People express their subjectivity when they express emotions. However this is just one aspect of the validity claims and cannot alone determine whether a hearer should accept or reject a statement. Hence in addition to Searle’s notion of illocutionary force and “conditions of satisfaction,” which equip the hearer with what she must do to satisfy the speaker’s illocutionary intent, Habermas shows the necessity of conditions of acceptance in explaining the nature of language. Habermas uses various terms to explain the role of validity claims in language. One of these terms is the “lifeworld,” one that is important to understand.

Habermas's own definition of lifeworld comes from Husserl. The notion of the lifeworld consists of “individual skills, the intuitive knowledge of *how* one deals with a situation; and from socially acquired practices, the intuitive knowledge of what one can rely upon in a situation, not less than, in a trivial sense, the underlying convictions.” This notion applies directly to the philosophy of language and Habermas’s validity claims. In the philosophical sense, the lifeworld is to be thought of as the massive background of Mutual Contextual Beliefs shared by all individuals in a certain linguistic community, and an intuitive knowledge that allows speech to flow unproblematically. The connection between the lifeworld and the validity claims arises when there is a breach in the lifeworld – when someone offers a speech act in a specific social setting that cannot be taken for granted. It is then in such a situation that the hearer could potentially reject a certain speech act based on the expressive, appellative, and objective validity claims. The lifeworld should be thought of as individual intuitions about appropriate language use and as socially acquired background information that one takes to every interaction. The

⁹ Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. “On the Pragmatics of Communication.” P 109. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

lifeworld is a combination of the subjective world, which consists of a collection of current moods, needs, etc., and the social world, which consists of norms. When participating in a communicative act, a hearer uses this intuitive knowledge to respond appropriately to specific speech acts. In short, the lifeworld tells individuals who they are, and how they should act. It is now important to review the required conditions in which, Habermas believes, a communicative act would be most likely to succeed. One of these conditions is the speaker's performance of illocutionary act without reservation.

In order for two individuals to engage in a successful communicative act, they must share the goal of reaching mutual communicative understanding. "The term 'reaching understanding' means, at the minimum, that at least two subjects capable of speech and action understand a linguistic expression in an identical way."¹⁰ This understanding could be reached when the speaker and hearer not only share linguistic contextual knowledge through the lifeworld, but they are both aware of the three kinds of validity claims that make a certain speech act acceptable on all three levels of expressive, objective, and appellative, and that both individuals are employing their linguistic knowledge in its entirety to engage in a successful communicative act. Through explaining his notion of reaching mutual understanding, Habermas makes the point that mutual understanding is communicatively achieved rather than traditionally prescribed. This point also indicates the necessity of rationality of the actors in a speech act, or the knowledge of ways of talking to people. However it is important to learn about the elements of social action that could prevent actors from reaching mutual understanding.

¹⁰ Habermas, Jürgen. "On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction." P 142. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In his analysis of mutual understanding in communicative acts, Habermas makes a clear distinction between two different types of speech acts. “Types of interaction can be distinguished according to the various mechanisms ... I speak either of “communicative action” or of “strategic action,” depending on whether the actions of different actors are coordinated by way of ‘reaching understanding’ or ‘exercising influence.’” After making this distinction, Habermas continues by making the point that processes of reaching understanding cannot be undertaken with the dual interaction of reaching an agreement about something with a participant in interaction and simultaneously exerting some effect on her. Habermas emphasizes on the idea that a mutual understanding, or an agreement, “cannot be foisted by one party on the other” – whether instrumentally or strategically. He then proceeds to divide the category of strategic action into two subcategories of Latent strategic action and Manifest strategic action.

In the case of Manifest strategic action, one of the parties (or more) openly use(s) language in a way that indicates their clear intention to reach their self-interested perlocutionary goals, rather than reaching mutual understanding with the hearer. For instance if an individual would enter a bank, point a gun at the teller, and direct, “give me the money or I will shoot you,” the speaker does not want mutual understanding with the teller. In fact, he most probably knows that in a normal situation, the teller could reject the request based on the appellative validity claim, because no individual is in the position to ask a bank teller for money he doesn’t own. But by using a gun, he forces the teller to meet the conditions of satisfaction without requiring any of the conditions of acceptance. In fact one might be able to argue that by using a gun, the bank rubber

appeals to a different set of conditions of acceptance, because both the rubber and the teller know that a person with a gun *is* in the position to ask for the money he doesn't own.

In the case of the latent action, however, "at least one of the parties behaves with an orientation toward success, but leaves others to believe that all the presuppositions of communicative action are satisfied."¹¹ Latent strategic action divides up into yet two more subcategories: Conscious deception (manipulation) and Unconscious deception (systematically distorted communication.) Definition presented above describes the case of conscious deception or manipulation. Unconscious deception, or systematically distorted communication, presents a much more sophisticated case of strategic action, which shall be discussed in detail.

Systematically distorted communication is a brand of latent strategic action which occurs when the internal organization of speech is interrupted. The better definition of this kind of strategic action could be offered by stating that such action occurs when "the validity basis of speech is curtailed surreptitiously if at least one of the three universal validity claims to intelligibility (of the expression), sincerity (of the interaction expressed by the speaker), and normative rightness (of the expression relative to a normative background) is violated and communication nonetheless continues on the presumption of *communicative* (not strategic) action oriented toward reaching understanding."¹² In other words, at some point during the speech, one of the actors engage in strategic behavior in order to reach understanding, but fails to succeed, and this results in the other party to

¹¹ Habermas, Jürgen. "On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction." P 169. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

¹² Habermas, Jürgen. "On the Pragmatics of Communication." P 154-155. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

react in a similar way, which is to try to “fix” an communicative situation with no success. In such case, both parties are attempting unsuccessfully to use strategic action to reach mutual understanding. Habermas explains that in such a situation, “we are dealing with conflicts that can be neither openly carried out nor resolved consensually, but that smolder on with the effect of distorting communication.”¹³

A true understanding of systematically distorted communication is essential for two main reasons. The first is that it is a powerful tool of analyzing how systems of oppression and domination play out in language institutions. The second – and possibly more significant – reason for the importance of systematically distorted communication is that it demonstrates the full autonomy of language. This means that when language breaks down because of distorted communication, we can use language to speak about language and to repair language. But this feature also hints at an important weakness of language, which is such attempts usually give even more reasons for language to break down and therefore once a systematically distorted communication has started to take place, it is usually very unlikely for the actors involved to be able to get fully on the same page again.

“For the ability to participate in interaction and to maintain the consensual basis of communicative action even through conflicts includes the competence in accordance with moral judgments, but, beyond this, also presupposes the validity basis of linguistic communication *in its full spectrum*. Interactive competence is measured not according to the ability to solve problems of knowledge and moral insight at the appropriate level, but according to the ability to maintain processes of reaching mutual understanding even in

¹³ Habermas, Jürgen. “On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction.” P 155. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

conflict situations rather than breaking off communication or merely seeming to maintain it.”¹⁴ Here Habermas closes his argument on systematically distorted communication by making an important point about the measure, which needs to be used to assess communicative actor’s competence in using the language. He doesn’t believe that competent language users should be able to repair a systematically distorted communication, but that they should be able to maintain their common goal of reaching mutual understanding despite the fact that language is derailed. This standard demonstrates a realist aspect of ideal Habermasian account of language. By looking at language in terms of validity claims, Habermas attended to the social aspect of language and demonstrated the way in which individuals accept and reject speech acts not just on the semantics level and because they wouldn’t understand the conditions of satisfaction, but also on the pragmatics level due to lack of conditions of acceptance.

David Mamet has directed a series of movies in which the characters interact in a way that makes it possible for those in the audience with Habermasian eyes to see the elements of Habermas’s analysis in the dialogues, such as validity claims and systematically distorted communication and their effects on the stories as a whole. One of these cinematographic works is *Oleanna*. It is important to review this play in order to better understand the role that Habermas’s linguistic elements play in shaping everyday communicative acts and social interactions.

One of Mamet’s movies in which the characters use a wealth of linguistic skills in their interactions with other characters is *Oleanna*. This movie is about an academically-frustrated student, Carol, who comes to her professor, John, asking for advice and help on

¹⁴ Habermas, Jürgen. “On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction.” P 135-136. *The MIT Press*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

how she could improve and understand the course materials. From that moment, the two engage in a series of communicative acts throughout which both the professor and the student seem to be breaking out of the institutional boundaries that once directed them in their speech acts. It is important to review this evolution of their communication in order to better observe the ways in which interpersonal relationships change through language.

One of the most important changes in the communication between Carol and John which one should observe is the role that systems of oppression and domination play in this play. Initially, Carol comes to John for help. She initially expresses the fact that she is helpless and asks John to help her. After she insists on getting immediate help, he agrees to stay and speak with her. What is important to observe in their communicative interaction is that initially, John is himself in the position of authority. As she asks questions, John repeatedly tells her to “sit down” and interrupts her. Toward the beginning, John is the one who seems to be put together and in control, while Carol sits in a chair, listens and takes notes, and appears inarticulate and emotional when she speaks. For instance, one segment of the conversation between John and Carol goes as follows:

Carol: I walk around all day with this one thought in my head, that I’m stupid.
John: You’re not stupid.
Carol: What am I then?
John: I think you’re angry

This exchange demonstrate how Carol seems to submit herself to how John’s definition of her. This alone demonstrates the imbalance of communicative power between these two communicative actors. In the beginning of their one-on-one interaction, it seems as if both individuals are there to discuss Carol, whom John seems to imply is angry and

emotional. John appears as the rational and fair individual who is assessing Carol's frustrating situation rationally, while she is the one who is being weak, communicatively submissive, emotional and appealing to feelings. However as the play evolves and Carol gets to know John better, she starts to question the information John's views. In the midst of this development, there is an important scene which signifies the shift of power which is taking place.

Carol: How can you say that...

John: That's it, speak up. Right Right Right and starts talking."

Carol: But how can you...

John: Yes? That's it. Let's examine good, good...

Carol: I believe that I'm speaking!

This scene represents the point in the play when Carol learns how to use language to claim her right to speak, challenge what John is telling her, and refuse to be someone who is told to sit down and listen. As the play continues, the shift of domination and oppression becomes more apparent. As the phone keeps ringing and interrupting their conversation, Carol and John are led to maintain a side conversation about the tenure that John is nominated for, and the house that he is planning on purchasing to go with the tenure. This conversation, however, starts to become the primary part of their communication as the result of the report that Carol has submitted to the tenure committee in which she criticizes John's teaching techniques as well as behavior. It is important to observe that while in the beginning of the play, John is in a dominating position and they are speaking about Carol's problems and discussing and criticizing *her*, she gradually takes over the position of domination, the criticism gradually shifts toward John, and eventually John's personality and character becomes the main subject of discussion and criticism. In the last scene, John is the one who is inarticulate and is sitting

and listening while Carol criticizes him for being irrational and emotional. This assertion is best demonstrated in the following two exchanges:

Carol: You believe in nothing; you believe in nothing at all. You mock and exploit the system that pays your rent. You're wrong. I'm not wrong. You're wrong...
Carol: Do you hate me now?
John: Yes.
Carol: Any atmosphere of free discussion is impossible (due to hate)
John: Yes.

And...

John: Don't you have feelings?
Carol: That's my point, you see? Don't you have feelings? I don't take your side, John: you question if I'm human.

These two exchanges demonstrate how the conversation has shifted toward being about John, and in a parallel way, Carol becomes the dominant force in the communication.

Another important aspect of the role of communicative acts in *Oleanna* is the way in which John attempts to communicate mixed opinions about the institutional structure of society to achieve his personal ends. More specifically, in the beginning of the play, John seems well integrated into and even loyal to the idea that a society consists of institutions which clearly define the duties of individuals. This claim is apparent in some of the exchanges in the beginning of *Oleanna*.

John: What is it you would have me do? We are two people, both of whom have subscribed to certain arbitrary; certain institutional forms.
Carol: You have to help me.

Even though it is hard to observe in the beginning what Carol truly feels about these institutional forms, John seems to have accepted them and act according to what, in this case, the academic institution require him to do. However, as the play progresses, John seems to want to break away from institutional boundaries for reasons that appear to be rather vague. When Carol tells him that she doesn't understand what any of John's book means, John a does not reply by explaining the answers to her questions.

John: It's just a course; it's just a book.

In the beginning of the play, John seems to know well the defined roles of students and teachers, and seems to follow them as best he can. But as Carol spends more time in his office, he starts to speak about wanting to break away from institutional requirements. Initially, John seemingly shows loyalty to institutional forms as he attempts to be on-time for the meeting he has with the realtors, which is again another institutional element which defines certain obligations for individuals who want to purchase real states. But as the play progresses, he seems to be avoiding that meeting. When Carol wonders about him not leaving, he responds in a way that shows his diminishing care for institutional forms.

Carol: Why did you stay here with me?

John: Stay here?

Carol: Yes, when you should have gone.

John: Because I like you.

John: Like me?

Carol: Why?

John: Why? Well, because perhaps, we're similar.

Carol: You said everyone has problems.

John: Everyone has problems.

Carol: Do they?

John: Certainly.

Carol: You do?

John: Yes.

Carol: What are they?

John: Well... well. You are absolutely right. If we're going to take off the artificial stricture of teacher and student, why should my problems be any more of a mystery than your own.

In this part, John clearly shows his willingness to abandon his institutional obligations for his social and personal relationships. Even though he states that he did not go to the meeting because he likes Oleanna, one could argue that he has other motives. For instance, it might be that he is avoiding the meeting because he has problems with his wife, who would also be at the meeting, or that he is just attempting to get close with her to gain her trust as a teaching technique. However what is important to notice is not so

much the reasons for why he seems to abandon these institutional obligations, but that he consciously treats institutional boundaries in different ways and accordance with his own goals at large. If he wants to leave the student without helping her, he leaves his office without answering the student's questions and blames arbitrary institutional forms for the way he is acting. If he wants to get close to the student in a way that the institutional codes for student-teacher relationship do not allow him, then he expresses the desire to remove the "stricture of teacher and student" and have a kind of a relationship with a student that is in conflict with norms.

However, what is important to notice about the pattern in which John treats institutional forms is that once he realizes that the close relationship he has established with Carol is resulting in him getting deprived from his larger goal of getting the tenure, he attempts to change his treatment of institutions yet once more. Toward the middle of the movie, this is what John has to say about the tenure committee and the process of giving tenures to professors:

John: I wouldn't have people in the committee who are judging me wax my car

Through this statement, John undermines the legitimacy of the tenure process by mocking those individuals who are in the higher level of the institutional bureaucracy. However, although John's words denounce the institutional boundaries, he is in fact very dependant on these institutional forms. John wants to purchase a house, and in order to make that purchase, he needs the financial security that he would obtain if he is granted tenure. Through out the movie, John seems to criticize arbitrary institutional elements without realizing that his views might jeopardize his tenure. But once he realizes that the tenure committee has received Carol's complaint, he speaks about the committee very differently.

John: Now the tenure committee will meet. This is the process, and a good process, under which the school has functioned for quite a long time.

As this statement demonstrates, John's views about the institutions seem to alternate between one of total distrust about (and seemingly, independence from) the system and one of acceptance and loyalty toward it. But the important point is that he decides how to speak about institutional boundaries based on what perlocutionary effect he is trying to create in Carol.

It is also essential to observe that the characters in *Oleanna* continuously attempt to reach what Habermas calls "mutual understanding." This idea is even apparent toward the end of the play when the relationship between Carol and John is fairly damaged and John is about to lose his job. More specifically, the conversation occurs when Carol has told John about the report and is about to leave the room without listening what John has to say.

Carol: ...Good day.

John: Wait a second will you? Just one moment... nice day today.

Carol: What?

John: You said good day. I think that it is a nice day today.

Carol: Is it?

John: Yes, I think that it is.

Carol: And why is that important?

John: Because, it's the essence of all human communication. I say something conventional, you respond, and the information we exchange is not about the weather, but that we agree to converse. In effect, we affirm that we are human.

Carol initially seems to want to leave the conversation without hearing John. But John says "nice day today," which surprises Carol and prevents her from going. The reason that she is surprised is because she realizes that the communicative action which just took place before this scene between her and John were one of aggression and argument when both parties seemed to want to advance their own points without hearing out the other person. The statement of such nature as "nice day today" is conventionally exchanged in a relatively positive interpersonal atmosphere. However, when John makes the statement

in a different atmosphere, it somewhat surprises Carol. But what is important about John's statement is the point he is trying to make, which is, he wishes to communicate with her. He explains that what he said about the weather doesn't matter, but that she and I have agreed to speak about something to reach a common understanding in a conversation. *Oleanna* is a great example of how actors could participate in a communicative act with someone else whom they do not have good relations with, and still strive to reach mutual communicative understanding.

At the time Habermas offered his analysis of language and introduced such terms as validity claims, the lifeworld, and systematically distorted communication, his theory was considered the closest to a complete analysis of language. However, Mikhail Bakhtin offered a new aspect of language, which had been fully neglected by other linguists before Bakhtin. This aspect is the idea of utterance act and speech genre.

Bakhtin criticized Habermas the way Habermas criticized Searle: he did not disagree so much disagree with the previous philosopher as he attempted to point out what was missing from previous accounts of language. Bakhtin argues that we express our feelings as well as knowledge about the objective world in a context-appropriate way. He then moved on to define a speech genre as a context-appropriate way of carrying out a speech act. Bakhtin's idea of genre is beyond semantics and pragmatics. According to Bakhtin, Habermas doesn't have a clear sense of utterance act and fails to connect language to specific human spheres of activities. He argues that individuals do not use language solely on the semantics level and conditions of satisfaction. Neither do they only employ conditions of acceptance, as offered by Habermas, in forming their communicative act. But that before getting engaged in communication, individuals take

into account the social atmosphere in which communication is to take place. For instance a certain individual speaks in a different genre if she is speaking at a formal meeting than if she is speaking amongst her closest friends. Hence, Bakhtin argued, the social context of the conversation is one of the most important elements in leading the individuals to speak a certain way in different social atmospheres.

Throughout the years, individuals from different fields such as philosophy and sociology have offered numerous accounts of language. While Habermas spoke of linguistic freedom and power, Bakhtin argued that communicative power does not give social power as there is no absolute communicative power as such power could only be genre-based. As we read the works of such individuals as Habermas's, we realize that there is a similar relationship between the linguists who offer accounts of language to that between individuals in a communicative act; in both cases the parties, although might disagree, work together in a cooperative effort toward reaching mutual understanding. It is through this common desire for mutual understanding that we are able to learn more about language and the sophistication of us humans in using language in a way that makes difficult for us to catch up with ourselves in explaining what we already do.