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Relations Between Fictive Interaction Elements and the Noun “Face”*

Ryota HOSOYA

1. Introduction

Fictive interaction compounds (FICs) are compounds with a fictive interaction element inside them (Pascual, 2014). English FICs consist of two parts: the first part, which I call the FI part, and the second part, which is a head noun that immediately follows it. It has been observed that a wide variety of expressions with different types of form and meaning can appear as the FI part of FICs (Hosoya, 2022; Pascual, 2014; also cf. Izumi, 2024 for Japanese FICs). However, it appears that different head nouns work better with some types of FI parts than others. For example, an “‘I can’t believe it!’ face” sounds more natural than a “‘The square root of two is irrational’ face,” although the latter may still be interpreted if we make an effort to create an appropriate context. This simple observation raises the question of which kinds of FI parts are favored by specific head nouns, a question that has yet to be answered. This article is a first step in answering this question by focusing on the illocutionary forces of the FI parts of FICs whose head noun is “face” (henceforth, face FICs) and revealing the noun’s preference for certain types of FI parts.

This paper aims to gain further insight into the relationship between the FI parts and head nouns of FICs through a close examination of face FICs. “Face” was selected as a head noun because face FICs are relatively frequent, allowing for the collection of a sufficient number of instances for investigation, and because there is potential to expand the research in the future by examining FICs with head nouns such as “look,” “expression,” or other synonymous nouns. Examples of face FICs were collected from a large web-based corpus named enTenTen15 (Jakubíček et al., 2013) and their FI parts were classified according to their speech act status using Searle’s (1976) taxonomy and Kallen and Kirk’s (2012) guidelines. The results revealed that the FI parts falling into the category of expressives are most favored,

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and that different types of FI parts align with “face” to varying degrees. The mechanism of interpretation was also considered.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 first offers a brief overview of the classification of illocutionary acts, with a particular focus on Searle’s (1976) work and its extension to naturally occurring utterances (Kallen & Kirk, 2012). It then explains the data collection methods and analysis procedures. Section 3 offers an analysis of the face FICs collected in this study, including a detailed analysis of face FICs containing different illocutionary forces and the overall distribution of face FICs. Concluding remarks are provided in Section 4.

2. Data and Methods

2.1. Classification Criteria

In his lectures, Austin (1962) famously gave us the illuminating insight that utterances can be analyzed in terms of three aspects: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. These are “the act of saying something” (Austin, 1962, p. 94), “an act *in* saying something” (p. 99, emphasis in the original), and “what we bring about or achieve by saying something,” respectively (p. 108). With regard to illocutionary acts, he advanced five different classes of utterances that were “classified according to their illocutionary force” (p. 150): verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives.

Although Austin’s categories formed “an excellent basis for discussion” (Searle, 1976, p. 7), Searle deemed it necessary to revise the taxonomy due to its weaknesses, and he proposed five categories of illocutionary acts that have since become widely recognized: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. According to Searle (1976), the purpose of representatives is “to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something’s being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition” (p. 10). Directives are attempts “by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (p. 11). In particular, questions are subsumed under this category because they are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to answer (p. 11). The point of commissives is “to commit the speaker (again in varying degrees) to some future course of action” (p. 11). The purpose of expressives is “to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (p. 12). Finally, the successful use of declarations “guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world” (p. 13).

Although Searle (1976) made significant theoretical contributions to the classification of illocutionary acts, attempting to classify naturally occurring utterances based on his

taxonomy would be enormously challenging. An examination of utterances in corpus data shows that many utterances defy neat classification and appear to fall into more than one category at once. One string of words can be classified into different categories when produced in different contexts. Since Searle (1976) did not focus on various kinds of utterances found in daily conversations and had no opportunity to deal with informal languages found on internet websites today, it is difficult for researchers to judge to which category a given utterance belongs based on his work alone.

A team of researchers who worked on the construction of the SPICE-Ireland corpus (Kirk et al., 2011) made a major breakthrough in the treatment of illocutionary acts of naturally occurring utterances. SPICE-Ireland is “a version of the Irish component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-Ireland) which has been annotated to display aspects of pragmatics, discourse, and prosody” (Kallen & Kirk, 2012, p. 1). What is remarkable about it is that each utterance found in the corpus is annotated with its speech act status, providing helpful guidelines for researchers to judge the illocutionary acts of various utterances. The system of annotation adopted in SPICE-Ireland is primarily based on Searle’s (1969, 1976) taxonomy. However, the system used in SPICE-Ireland has developed from it to provide for “an exhaustive and explicit categorisation” of a substantial amount of naturally occurring data in the corpus (Kallen & Kirk, 2012, p. 28). This annotation makes SPICE-Ireland a valuable resource for linguistic studies for pragmatic and other purposes.

The notation of SPICE-Ireland “works on a principle of exclusivity, whereby only one speech act is assigned to any given string of words,” and “cases which appear ambiguous are annotated on the most likely interpretation within the context of the conversation as a whole” (Kallen & Kirk, 2012, p. 28). This indicates that the SPICE-Ireland team regards contextual features as vital in determining to which category a naturally occurring utterance belongs. To determine the speech act status, each utterance has to be analyzed in terms of “a combination of structural, prosodic, and discoursal features,” and there is “no simple algorithm” for identifying it (Kallen & Kirk, 2012, p. 28).

In addition to Searle’s (1976) five categories of illocutionary acts, SPICE-Ireland uses four other labels: indeterminate conversationally-relevant utterances, keyed utterances, social expressions, and non-analyzable utterances (Kallen & Kirk, 2012). These labels cover a wide range of utterances in the corpus data. However, the number of utterances that fall within the purview of these categories is relatively small as far as this study is concerned, so they are not considered further.

2.2. Data Collection

EnTenTen15 was selected as a data source for collecting face FICs that occur naturally in daily life. It is a corpus consisting of more than 13 billion English words collected from a variety of written texts on websites across the globe on a particular day in 2015. Since the corpus contains a large amount of informal written texts, where FICs are often found, it is well suited for the purpose of collecting as many authentic examples of face FICs as possible.

The data collection method for the present study is as follows. Since the FI part of face FICs (or FICs in general) is often enclosed in quotation marks, I searched the corpus for all the strings of words that matched the pattern “‘X’ face” or “‘X’ faces” within a sentence, where X stands for two or more words.¹ This search yielded 3275 hits, which were reduced to 1729 hits by hiding redundant sub-hits. All 1729 hits were then manually examined for face FICs. Consequently 206 examples of face FICs were obtained.

I carefully examined all the 206 face FICs with particular focus on their context, interpreted their meanings, and decided on the most plausible illocutionary acts of their FI parts. Some FICs had an FI part so long that it was divided into several sections, resulting in a total of 235 speech act annotations. The annotation process was challenging because most of the websites from which the examples had been collected were unable to be reached at the time this study was conducted. However, by making full use of the limited contextual information available in the corpus, as well as the examples of annotation provided by Kallen and Kirk (2012), I estimated the FICs’ plausible meaning in context and determined their FI parts’ illocutionary status. Among 235 speech acts in the FI parts of face FICs, 222 speech acts were successfully interpreted and annotated in this way, whereas the other 13 speech acts were unintelligible despite my best efforts.

3. Analysis

This section provides a detailed analysis of face FICs with different types of FI parts. In the first four subsections, face FICs whose FI part belongs to the category of representatives, directives, commissives, and expressives are investigated. Section 3.5 presents an overview of the face FICs found in this study.

¹ A query for this is [word="\"]{2,}[word="\"][word="face|faces"] within <s/>

3.1. Representative Face FICs

Among 235 speech acts in the FI parts of face FICs in the data, 61 speech acts (26.0 per cent) were classified as representatives. This ratio is in stark contrast to that of SPICE-Ireland. According to Kallen and Kirk (2012), as many as 65.4 per cent of all the speech acts in SPICE-Ireland were classified as representatives, and this class was by far the largest category (p. 94). This difference is remarkable, even if we take into account the fact that SPICE-Ireland contains only Irish English, whereas enTenTen15 is not limited to a certain variety of English.

This difference in the ratio of representatives may be attributed to the affinity between representatives and the noun “face.” People’s facial expressions do not show noticeable changes when they describe something as true. There may be little need or motivation to make an effort to create a novel FIC that describes a face that has not deviated much from its normal state.

However, representatives are utilized to create face FICs that describe normal faces, especially when there are hidden thoughts and emotions. For example, the author of (1) writes about taking a day off from work on the anniversary of their brother’s death to avoid having to maintain a cheerful demeanor in the workplace.² The representative utterance “everything is ok” lets the readers imagine a type of face associated with this utterance, and consequently, the FIC describes a particular type of face people show when feigning equanimity. Example (2) is a similar case, where a calm face is said to be worn not by people but by an institution (NRC). The representative utterance “everything is safe” is exploited to let the images of (skillfully made) calm faces appear in the minds of readers. Although the NRC feigns its usual face, it seems to know the “quite different” reality. A non-human being also wears a face in example (3). The face of the cat would not have deviated much from its usual state, but underneath its normal face lies the hidden mixture of fear and courage.

- (1) I never get through the day without many bouts of crying, so most years I take a vacation day from work so that I don't have to put on the **“everything is ok” face**.
- (2) While the NRC is putting on an **“everything is safe” face** for the public, the communication inside showed something quite different.

² All examples in Section 4 are from enTenTen15 and are presented as in the original even when they contain spelling and grammatical errors. The only modification is my emphasis of FICs in bold.

- (3) The cat was frankly curious at the singing, wearing his **“my better instincts tell me to run for the closet but I’m trying to be brave” face**.

3.2. Directive Face FICs

Among 235 speech acts in the FI parts of face FICs in the data, 46 speech acts (19.6 per cent) were classified as directives. Kallen and Kirk’s (2012) report shows that 19.1 per cent of all the speech acts in SPICE-Ireland were classified as directives (p. 94). The directives in this study show a slightly higher percentage, but both are similar.

It seems that people create face FICs with directives because they can exploit particular images and vibes associated with the directives to describe certain facial expressions that are harder, if not impossible, to verbalize by other means. In example (4), the author utilizes a fictive directive utterance (i.e., “help me”) to create an expression that describes a type of face worn by someone pleading for help (i.e., “help me” face). Here, the directive “help me” triggers shared images that people have of someone asking for help in the minds of readers. In example (5), the directive “Don’t even think about talking to me” is used to describe a type of stern face. Supplementary linguistic expressions, such as “stony,” “distant stare,” and “furrowed brow,” contribute to the construction of the image depicted by the FIC. The question (hence directive) “Did that just happen” in example (6) and the suggestion “Let’s just pretend this never happened” in example (7) are utilized in a similar way.

- (4) I moved to Toronto and liked it, despite the fact that the city sometimes smells like horse manure and no one ever offers to carry your shit in Ikea. Even when you’ve got your **“help me” face** on and break a lamp in the parking lot. You’re on your own, kid.
- (5) I am a hardened traveler. I have perfected my stony **“Don’t even think about talking to me” face** (distant stare, furrowed brow), and if you do dare to think about it, you’ll be met with a curt and final “Fine, thanks” and a quick dive for my headphones or cellphone.
- (6) I would have dismissed it completely had a friend not been there to witness it. I turned to her with my, **“Did that just happen” face** and she responded with her, “Yes, it did” face.
- (7) She’s pushing her call button a lot The male flight attendant is giving me the **“let’s just pretend this never happened” face**.

3.3. Commissive Face FICs

Among 235 speech acts in the FI parts of face FICs in the data, 11 speech acts (4.7 per cent) were found to fall into the category of commissives. Kallen and Kirk’s (2012) survey shows

that 1.2 per cent of all the speech acts in SPICE-Ireland were commissives (p. 94). Hence, there was a slightly higher proportion of commissives found in this study.

Like representatives and directives, commissives are exploited by authors to give readers access to the kinds of images associated with them. Example (8) is an excerpt from recollections of child-rearing. The fictive commissive utterance “I’m gonna get you” is utilized to construct the image of a gentle but mischievous face worn by the father. Example (9) is taken from the report of a wrestling match. The threatening remark “I’m gonna F’n kill you” is exploited to depict a belligerent attitude and a particular type of face accompanying it.

- (8) Daddy makes a step in his direction with an **“I’m gonna get you” face**, the boy screams and starts running in the other direction, daddy chases for a while letting him barely slip away a few times, boy giggles uncontrollably, then daddy scoops up the boy with lots of love and laughter.
- (9) The crowd goes “OHHHHHHHHH!” as Bubba slowly utrn s back to Roode with his **“I’m gonna F’n kill you” face**, but Roode with a kick to the gut and a series of heavy elbows and right hands.

3.4. Expressive Face FICs

Among 235 speech acts in the FI parts of face FICs in the data, 103 speech acts (43.8 per cent) were classified as expressives, making this by far the largest category. This result contrasts with that of SPICE-Ireland, which yielded only 2.3 per cent of expressives (Kallen & Kirk, 2012, p. 94). This difference is noteworthy even when considering that SPICE-Ireland represents Irish English, while enTenTen15 encompasses multiple varieties of English without any specific regional restriction.

Similar to the other types but in a more diverse way, expressives can be utilized to depict faces that people associate with them. The expressives in the FI part of face FICs can evoke various nuanced facial expressions in the minds of people: faces of positive attitudes (10), faces of negative attitudes (11), faces with volition (12), apologetic faces (13), faces accompanying exclamations (14), sympathetic faces (15), happy faces (16), and many other faces.³

³ For different types of expressives in naturally occurring utterances, see Ronan (2015).

- (10) Luke just stood there wearing that annoying **“I adore you” face** that Gabi couldn't wait to get away from.
- (11) Bret looked at the crowd giving them a **“you make me sick” face** that led to them booing him out of the building.
- (12) I got my camera out and ready in the small open area that security was managing to maintain, put on my best **“I just want to walk around and have a look” face** and set off into the crowd.
- (13) Click that link for the best Biden **“I’m sowwwwy” face** ever.
- (14) They’d point, laugh, and make those **“Oh my God” faces** as we’d stroll by.
- (15) Amy played right along, looking straight at the camera with her best **“I feel your pain” face**.
- (16) My **“I can finally listen to Pandora” face!**

3.5. Overview of Face FICs in the Data

Four classes of face FICs have been discussed above. Face FICs with declarative FI parts were not found in the data. This is hardly surprising given that only 0.1 per cent of utterances are classed as declaratives in SPICE-Ireland (Kallen & Kirk, 2012, p. 94). One speech act (“good morning”) was classified as “social expression” (Kallen & Kirk, 2012), and 13 speech acts were not classified because it was impossible to judge their status due to the limitation of contextual information. The frequencies of different types of speech acts found in the FI parts of face FICs together with those of different types of utterances in SPICE-Ireland are summarized in Table 1.⁴⁵

Table 1. Distribution of Speech Act Types in Face FICs and SPICE-Ireland

	Rep	Dir	Com	Exp	Dec	Others	Totals
Speech acts in Face FICs	61 (26.0%)	46 (19.6%)	11 (4.7%)	103 (43.8%)	0 (0%)	14 (6.0%)	235 (100%)
Speech acts in SPICE-Ireland	35749 (65.4%)	10445 (19.1%)	684 (1.2%)	1242 (2.3%)	57 (0.1%)	6385 (11.7%)	54612 (100%)

⁴ The sum of the percentages of each category (100.1%) is slightly larger than 100 percent because they were rounded to one decimal place.

⁵ The figures in the lower half of Table 1 are based on Kallen and Kirk (2012, p. 94). There may be a minor error in the frequencies, as the total sum of the figures should be 54562.

As noted above, the proportion of representative FICs in the data of this study was smaller than that of representatives in SPICE-Ireland. One reason behind this difference may be that representatives, whose purpose is “to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something’s being the case” (Searle, 1976, p. 10), do not dovetail well with a variety of faces showing deviation from the normal state, which seem to be more noteworthy. In contrast, the proportion of expressive FICs in this study was significantly larger than that of expressives in SPICE-Ireland. This could be because expressives are associated with a wide variety of faces displaying a notable departure from the normal state. The proportions of directives and commissives are similar to or a little larger than those in SPICE-Ireland. The differences in distribution can be attributed to the harmony between different classes of fictive utterances and the noun “face.”

4. Conclusion

This paper analyzed face FICs to gain insights into the relations between the FI part and the head noun of FICs. The total of 206 face FICs were collected from enTenTen15, a large web-based corpus of a variety of written English. Through a close examination of the face FICs in context, they were classified according to the illocutionary acts of the FI part. The method of classification was based on the guidelines by Kallen and Kirk (2012), which built upon Searle’s (1969, 1976) taxonomy to deal with naturally occurring utterances, and which was adopted in the construction of the SPICE-Ireland corpus (Kirk et al., 2011). The results showed that the proportion of representatives in the face FICs was smaller than that of representatives in SPICE-Ireland. A possible explanation for the difference may be that representatives, which mainly state that something is true, do not align well with a range of faces displaying deviations from the normal state, which appear to be more worthy of verbalization than normal faces. Conversely, the proportion of expressives in face FICs was significantly higher than that of expressives in SPICE-Ireland. This difference may be attributed to the fact that expressives are associated with a wide variety of faces displaying a notable departure from the normal state. The proportions of directives and commissives in the face FICs were similar to or slightly higher than those found in SPICE-Ireland. These differences in distribution are noteworthy even when considering the different English types in SPICE-Ireland and enTenTen15. This can be attributed to the harmony between different categories of fictive utterances and the head noun “face.” The FI part of face FICs triggers the images of faces associated with the fictive utterance, be it a feigned normal face with diverse thoughts and feelings disguised, as in representative FICs, or a variety of transformed faces

linked to respective emotions, as in expressive FICs. In this way, fictive utterances with different speech act statuses are exploited to create FICs that describe nuanced meanings that are difficult to express by other linguistic means.

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