COMMAND OR PETITION? A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE PARENTS' UTTERANCES IN JOHN 9:21cd[1]

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ABSTRACT

Although speech act theory has a great potential for a better understanding of biblical texts, as demonstrated by some excellent published monographs and articles, it has been only occasionally utilised since the introduction of this theory to New Testament scholarship. In this somewhat disappointing situation, the purpose of this article is to continue to show the validity of this approach and to develop it further in the reading of biblical texts. The utterances of the blind man's parents in John 9:21cd are selected as an example for this purpose.

1 INTRODUCTION

Speech act theory has a great potential for a better understanding of biblical texts, as demonstrated by some excellent works in New Testament studies such as Evans (1963), Du Plessis (1985, 1987, 1988), Wendland (1985, 1992), Botha (1990a, 1991a), Thompson (1992), Neufeld (1994), Saayman (1994, 1995), Cook (1995), Tovey (1997) and so on.[3] In fact, volume 41 of *Semeia* (1988) explored the potential contribution of this theory to biblical criticism. However, this theory has been only occasionally utilised since its introduction to New Testament scholarship. In this somewhat disappointing situation, the purpose of this study is to continue to show the validity of this approach and to develop it further in the reading of biblical texts. The utterances of the blind man's parents in John 9:21cd are selected as an example for this purpose (for a speech act analysis on John 9 entirely, see Ito 2000).

Before proceeding with the task, perhaps one question has to be answered. The question is: what are the main reasons for the lack of practical ap-

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3 I wish to point out that in this paper the absence of reference to works written in Afrikaans is not due to my negligence but due to the language problem. Valuable studies, e g, Snyman (1983), Jacobs (1985), etc could thus not be used.

plications of this theory to New Testament studies in spite of its great potential? Although there may be several answers to the question (see Botha 1991b; Ito 2000:71-73), this study presents two possible reasons. Firstly, as Burridge (1993:263) points out, this approach does not guarantee to yield particularly new benefits. It rather confirms the insights which have been noted before only from a different angle. While it is true that this happens most of the time, it is also true that this approach sometimes shows its distinctiveness and does it in a more intriguing way. It is my contention that this is a valuable approach which can yield good results if one faithfully follows the procedures of this method from the beginning. Secondly, as Patte (1988:88) says, "speech act theory does not offer any clear method which could be directly applied to the study of the texts." Therefore, it is crucial to establish one's own methodological framework before actually applying this theory. Responding to this, it is hoped that my methodological framework will give a good example of the possibilities, following the footsteps of scholars who have successfully utilised this approach before.

2. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Since the focus of this section is to set up my own methodological framework formulated from diverse aspects of speech act theory, this section will not attempt to provide a detailed presentation of the concepts, history and development of this theory (for these aspects see Austin [1962] 1976, 1985; Searle [1969] 1980, 1976, [1979] 1981, 1985; Grice 1975, 1978; Pratt 1977; Bach & Harnish 1979; Van Dijk 1980; Leech 1983; Levinson 1983; Stubbs 1983; Kock 1985; Combrink 1988; White 1988; Botha 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Du Plessis 1991; Houston 1993; Yule 1993; Neufeld 1994; Cook 1995; Tovey 1997 and Ito 2000). Only the relevant concepts (with very brief explanations) which are suitable to the analysis of the given text are presented. My own framework can be divided into two main categories: a) speech act theory and its related approaches, b) other literary approaches.

2.1 Speech act theory and its related approaches

In analysing an utterance, Austin ([1962] 1976:109) introduces three constituent elements: a) *locutionary act* - the act of saying something, b) *illocutionary act* - the act in saying something, c) *perlocutionary act* - the act performed by saying something. Speech act analysis mainly deals with the last two acts. An illocutionary act is an utterance which is performed with illocutionary force such as asserting, arguing, advising, promising, and so forth. A perlocutionary act should be basically limited "to the *intentional*

production of effects on (or in) the hearer. Our reason is that only reference to intended effects is necessary to explain the overall rationale of a given speech act" [Bach & Harnish's italics] (Bach & Harnish 1979:17). In order to account for a successful performance of a speech act, Searle ([1969] 1980:57-61) sets out an explicit set of conditions, known as *felicity conditions*, introducing four such categories; propositional content condition, preparatory conditions, sincerity condition, and essential condition.

Searle further construes an illocutionary act in the following symbolism - *F(p)*. And "the variable "*F*" takes illocutionary force indicating devices as values and '*p*' takes expressions for propositions" (Searle [1969] 1980:31). This symbol shows "the formula for the so-called *full-blown* illocutionary act" [Saayman's italics] (Saayman 1994:3). Thus the meaning of an utterance will vary according to the illocutionary force operative in various contexts even though the propositional content remains the same.

As for the classification of illocutionary acts, there is no consensus among speech act theorists due to the lack of a unified categorising standard. Since one's classification of a given speech act, however, is indicative of how s/he understands the meaning and use of an utterance, it is important to categorise it according to some or other taxonomy. This study will follow *Bach and Harnish's taxonomy* (1979:39-55) because their taxonomy is, to my mind, the most comprehensive and the least confusing one.

Bach and Harnish (1979) redefine, what we generally call, the shared knowledge between speaker and hearer as *mutual contextual beliefs* (MCBs). They help us to understand and interpret an utterance, and give a clue to the inference the hearer makes. Examples of MCBs are social, cultural, religious knowledge, knowledge of the specific speech situation or of relations between two parties, and so on. Bach and Harnish (:4-5) call such "information 'beliefs' rather than 'knowledge' because they need not be true in order to figure in the speaker's intention and the hearer's inference."

According to Leech (1983:15-17), a speaker has both the illocutionary force and certain social goals in making an utterance. Leech clarifies these social goals in terms of two types of rhetoric: a) *Interpersonal Rhetoric* b) *Textual Rhetoric*. Under each category, he introduces various pragmatic principles and maxims in which he also includes *Grice's Cooperative Principle* (CP) and its *four maxims* (see the diagram of Interpersonal and Textual Rhetorics in the appendix). Whenever one or more of these principles and maxims is flouted, an *implicature* will be needed to arrive at the extra meaning of an utterance. Botha (1991a:48) explains:

> Implicatures are unstated propositions which a reader is able to deduce from what is actually stated by means of convention,

presuppositions and the like. It helps to give explanations of why users of language are able to read 'between the lines' as they so often have to do.

2.2 Other literary approaches

In the text analysis, I will employ some notions from narrative criticism and reader-response criticism.

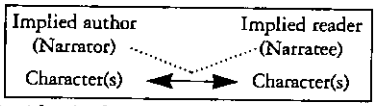
Our text is perceived as part of a narrative which consists of *story* and *discourse*. Chatman (1978:23) defines these terms as follows: "Story is the content of the narrative expression, while discourse is the form of that expression." According to this definition, the story of John's Gospel depicts the life of Jesus, the Son of God, from his pre-existent glory to his final glorification, especially concentrating on his earthly life. The discourse of this Gospel is how this story of Jesus' life is told, expressed, and communicated. Since a "narrative is a communication" (:28) between two parties, the identification of sender and receiver in the narrative text becomes essential for our study. For this identification my own model shall be presented here, and this model is indebted to Chatman (:151) and Staley (1988:22).

<The narrative-communication model>

a) The real author-reader level

b) The implied author-reader level (The narrator-narratee level)

c) The character level



Basically the narrative world inside the box is the object of my analysis. There are three glosses which are important to remember here. Firstly, all the personages in the box are fictional, and are not referred to as flesh and blood persons (for discussions of these terms see Iser 1974; Chatman 1978; Culpepper 1983; Petersen 1984; Du Plessis 1985; Lategan 1985, 1991; Du Rand 1986; Combrink 1988; Van Tilborg 1989; Botha 1990b, 1991a; Lemmer 1991; Van Aarde 1991; Tolmie 1995; Du Plessis 1996 and *Semeia* 48). Secondly, since there seems to be no practical advantage to making a distinction between implied reader and narratee as far as the understanding of our text is concerned, the notion of narratee is not employed. Finally, as Botha (1991a:115, 1991d, 1991e) points out, it is important to distinguish between the character level and the implied author-reader level in the text analysis.

From reader-response criticism, the notion of reader entrapment, or known as the technique of reader victimisation (Staley 1988, see also Botha 1990b, 1991a and Tolmie 1995), will be employed, and can be explicated

as follows: the implied reader is given only limited information about the story at an initial stage by the implied author so that a certain knowledge, perspective or expectation may be formed in the mind of the implied reader. Then, in the next stage, additional significant information is revealed to the implied reader with the purpose of correcting his/her first perspective or expectation. This correction leads to the final stage where the implied author wins back the allegiance of the implied reader once again. In this way, the implied reader is forcefully guided toward the goal that the implied author intends to achieve in the communication. When this literary device of reader victimisation is used in the texts, it is usually associated with other literary devices such as irony and/or misunderstanding (see Botha 1990b:45).

2.3 Basic reading scheme

In our text analysis, the utterances as individual speech acts (microspeech acts) are to be analysed basically according to each sentence formulated in the text. As my basic reading scheme in this particular study, *sentence-type* shall be firstly identified in order to assess the structural nature of an utterance. It should be remembered that the term "declarative" in this sentence-type category has nothing to do with the technical term "declarative" which is sometimes used for the taxonomic discussion among speech act theorists. For the second step, Searle's principal point as to what determines an illocutionary act is to distinguish between its content, and its function indicated by the illocutionary force (Searle [1969] 1980:31; [1979] 1981:1; 1985:128). Hence, the *propositional content* of an individual speech act shall be distinguished and extracted from the utterance. Thirdly, *illocutionary force* shall be determined for the utterance. Fourthly, *perlocutionary force* shall be also examined. These three analyses should reveal the intention of speaker or the goal of the utterance contained in a specific speech act. Then, fifthly, in order to identify how the speaker organises such a speech act to enhance the communication with the hearer, the *communicative strategy* of the speaker shall be scrutinised. Finally, a *summary* shall be presented.

3 A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

3.1 The problem defined

Chapter 9 of John's Gospel, which belongs to the book of signs, can be divided into seven dialogue scenes with a chiastic arrangement: 9:1-7; 9:8-

12; 9:13-17; 9:18-23; 9:24-34; 9:35-38 and 9:39-41 (MacRae 1978:124; Duke 1982:181-182; Stibbe 1993:105; for a simple sevenfold demarcation see Martyn [1968] 1979:26-27; Resseguie 1982:295; Culpepper 1983:73; Mlakuzhyil 1987:116-117, 205; for a six-scene structure see Schnackenburg [1968] 1980:239; Lindars 1972:341-352; Brodie 1993:343-344; Holleran 1993a:12-14; and for a fourfold syntactic division see Du Rand 1991:98). Our text is situated in the centerpiece of this arrangement, which can be titled as the dialogue between the Jews and the blind man's parents. This dialogue is initiated by the Jewish authorities who wanted to further investigate the miracle of the first dialogue scene. The main concern of their interrogation was things such as the identity of the blind man, the state of his blindness at birth, and the process or manner of his healing. To their questions, the parents seemed to answer straightforwardly, indicating that the man was their son who was blind from birth. Furthermore, they claimed that they knew nothing about the miracle itself. Then, they told the Jews to ask their son about the matter in our text. The questions arise. Why did they make these utterances? Moreover, what is the nature of their utterances, command or petition?

3.2 Contextual survey

Since a speech act approach necessitates the identification and utilisation of specific speech situations in order to elucidate the use and meaning of utterances in a communication process, it recognises the importance of contexts - historical, social, cultural, religious, linguistic, literary and so forth (see also Combrink 1988:194). In connection with this, this study attempts to make two points. Firstly, this approach can respect and apply, instead of neglect, insights from other approaches such as social scientific criticism to a text analysis. Secondly, the following seems to be important concerning the specific speech situations (MCBs) in our text:

- The mutual contextual beliefs among the characters in our text, who all appeared to be Jewish people, presuppose that they were familiar with the language and were able to manage it properly. The same presupposition holds true for the communication between the implied author and reader.
- The implied author and reader are assumed to be observing the principles and maxims of both Interpersonal and Textual Rhetorics. And the characters are assumed to have been observing those of Interpersonal Rhetoric.

- The implied author and reader are assumed to know that the Jews in the text were considered as the Jewish authorities (see also O'Day 1995: 657).
- In terms of social and religious status, the Jews were in a superior and more authoritative position over the parents because the parents were summoned by the Jews for interrogation.
- The Jews and the parents are assumed to have known that the eyes of the blind man had been opened.
- The Jews and the parenrs are assumed to have known that the man had been born blind and had been of age.
- The reference to the Jews' agreement in verse 22 presupposes that the Jews and the parents knew the existence of such an agreement.
- The same reference also presupposes that the Jews and the parents knew that the man called Jesus existed, and that he could be called Christ by some people.

3.3 A speech act reading of the text

9:21cd: αὐτὸν ἐρωτήσατε, ἡλικίαν ἔχει, αὐτὸς περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λαλήσει.

Ask him; he is of age, he shall speak for himself.

3.3.1 Sentence-type

The sentence-types of the parents' utterances are imperative and declarative.

3.3.2 Propositional content

The propositional contents of these utterances are "you ask him," and "he is of age, he speaks for himself."

3.3.3 Illocutionary force

Traditionally, the general communicative function of the imperative sentence-type is said to be command or request (Levinson 1983:263; Yule 1996:54). However, strictly speaking, this level of information does not help us to analyse the intended meaning of the utterances spoken by the parents at all. In order to find it, the illocutionary force of their utterances needs to be determined. When one looks at the text, it is not difficult to tell that the utterances are not actually meant as a command because in order to classify an utterance as a command, the preparatory condition requires the speaker to have some kind of authority over the hearer. Since it is obvious, however, that the parents did not possess any superior authority over the

Jews, these utterances cannot be a command. It is, then, more suitable for our analysis to change one of the previous questions into the following way: what is the nature of their utterances, advice or petition? (Holleran 1993b: 370 takes it as a suggestion.)

In the case of suggestion or advice "what the speaker expresses is not the desire that *H* do a certain action but the belief that doing it is a good idea, that it is in *H*'s interest" (Bach & Harnish 1979:49). Searle ([1969] 1980: 67) also says: "Advising is more like telling you what is best for you." It is not likely that the parents meant the words to the Jews as advice, because the alternative action which the parents "suggested" was not in the Jews' interest but in the parents' own interest. As they did not want to answer themselves, they were trying to find an avenue of escape, because of the fear of the Jews. Indeed, they were in no position to give advice.

Then, why did the parents speak to the Jews in the way described in the text? The most likely scenario is that the parents were asking or begging the Jews to release them from the unpleasant situation. They were put in the position of responsibility to answer to any questions the Jews may ask in their interrogation. The parents were afraid of the possibility that they may say something which would make the Jews think that they were also followers of the wonder worker, Jesus. The immediate co-text, especially verses 22-23, supports this scenario. Also most critics who comment about this verse 21cd, such as Marsh (1968:383), Michaels (1984:153), Du Rand (1991:100) and O'Day (1995:657), attribute the parents' utterances to their fear of the Jews. Accordingly, their utterances should be considered as a request or petition, and thus the speech act would be *requestive* under the general category of *directives* according to Bach and Harnish's (1979:47) taxonomy. Searle ([1969] 1980:66) lists felicity (necessary and sufficient) conditions for a speech act of request in the following way:

> *Propositional content condition*: Future act *A* of *H*.
> *Preparatory conditions*: 1. *H* is able to do *A*. *S* believes *H* is able to do *A*. 2. It is not obvious to both *S* and *H* that *H* will do *A* in the normal course of events of his own accord.
> *Sincerity condition*: *S* wants *H* to do *A*.
> *Essential condition*: Count as an attempt to get *H* to do *A*.

When the utterances are analysed according to these conditions:

> *Propositional content condition*: The Jews' future act of asking the blind man.
> *Preparatory conditions*: 1. The Jews are able to ask the blind man. The parents believe the Jews are able to ask the blind man.

2. It is not obvious to both the parents and the Jews that the Jews will ask the blind man in the normal course of events of their own accord.
Sincerity condition: The parents want the Jews to ask the blind man.
Essential condition: Count as an attempt to get the Jews to ask the blind man.

In this way, the parents' utterances satisfy these conditions, and are therefore a successful speech act. In order to validate the conclusion that the illocutionary force of their utterances is requestive, there is another issue which needs to be solved. Strictly speaking, this verse 21cd contains three Greek sentences. Since each sentence, being an utterance, is assumed to have its own speech act, how can such a conclusion be arrived at? When the three sentences are examined, the first utterance, "Ask him," would be requestive just as analysed above. The second utterance, "he is of age," could be *descriptive*, and the last, "he shall speak for himself," should be a *predictive* speech act. However, these utterances constitute a sequence of speech acts which can be assigned one global speech act with one major purpose. Since the second and third utterances are explanatory speech acts regarding the first, they can be deleted in accordance with the *Deletion macrorule*, which deletes "locally relevant detail" (Van Dijk 1980:47) and specific presuppositions of propositions (:82; for the concept of macrospeech act and macrorules, see Van Dijk 1980; Ito 2000:41-48). Consequently, a *macrospeech act* of these utterances may be said to have one major intention, namely requesting. Therefore they should be classified as a requestive.

In short, the parents had the intention to beg the Jews to release them from the interrogative situation, implying that they did not want to have anyrhing to do with this matter any more (also Neyrey 1998:93). The parents intended to opt out of the conversation. The implied author, however, intends to shift the reader's attention from the parents to the blind man once again.

3.3.4 Perlocutionary force

The Jews should accept the parents' request and let them go. The implied reader should understand the situation into which the parents were put in, and should wait and expect the story's development in the next section with a sense of thrill and suspense, focusing his/her eyes upon the blind man once again.

In the next dialogue scene, the Jews interrogated the blind man once again just as the parents requested. The Jews seemed to take no offence from the parents and simply accepted their utterances as a petition.

3.3.5 Communicative strategy

On the character level, the parents were responding to the Jews in the interrogation. As for the *CP*, all four Maxims seem to be observed in the parents' utterances. However, a further scrutiny of the *Relation Maxim* may be needed. One of the aspects of this Maxim (be relevant) is kept intact. Because the parents said that they did not know the information which the Jews wanted, it was logical for them to think that the Jews should ask the person who knew it very well. Moreover, this maxim also says: "Make your conversational contribution one that will advance the goals either of yourself or of your addressee" (Leech 1983:42). In terms of the goal of the parents to opt out of the conversation, this Maxim is uplifted in their utterances. The goal of the Jews to get the necessary information from the parents, however, is not likely to be accomplished on the other hand, for the parents begged them to go and talk to their son.

As regards the *Politeness Principle*, the parents' utterances do not observe the *Tact Maxim* and the *Generosity Maxim*. The parents' petition did not minimise cost to the Jews in spite of the fact that the Tact Maxim tells the speaker to minimise cost to the hearer (Leech 1983:132). When the parents could not answer as required, the Jews had to go through all the trouble of interrogating their son again. Although the Generosity Maxim tells the speaker to minimise benefit to self (:132), the parents were the ones who would receive the greatest benefit from the action of the Jews. In this sense, they were not polite. However, the parents adhered to the *Phatic Maxim*, which encourages the speaker to avoid silence or keep talking (:141). When one understands the parents' position in relation to the Jews as extremely difficult, it is possible to accept the case that the parents would keep their silence in order to save themselves as well as their son. That could be one tactic in such a dilemma. However, the parents did not prefer silence, and explicitly begged the Jews in their utterances.

The parents' utterances also indirectly violate the *Tact Maxim* in relation to their son. His cost and trouble were surely increased by their request to the Jews. Concerning his ability to be interrogated, most commentators such as Barrett (1955:299), Schnackenburg ([1968] 1980:249), Lindars (1972:347), Bruce (1983:215), Beasley-Murray (1987:157) and Carson (1991:369) agree that the expression "he is of age" indicates that the blind man was at least thirteen and was able to give legal testimony according to Jewish law, except Morris (1971:487) who states that the expression refers to the age of being able to reason rather than that of legal responsibility (for more detailed discussion, see Ito 2000:313-315).

In keeping with real life stories, this story also contains complex aspects of human life. We can point out, for example, that the parents' behaviour was not costless to themselves, either, despite all the benefits they may have gained from their request. Malina and Rohbaugh (1992:118) state that children in Palestinian society were supposed to provide security and protection for their parents when they got old. Although it may have been unrealistic for the parents to expect any security and protection from the blind man in their old age if he had not regained his sight, it became very possible for him to take care of his parents after the healing. But the parents chose to get out of the interrogative situation at the expense of their son, instead of acquiring security and protection in the future. This ultimately means that they would abandon their own son. They made their judgement that the present predicament was much more harsh than the future difficulty. Nevertheless, their judgement also cost them much. This shows the complexity of human life, and is indeed indicative of how the situation in which the parents were placed was disastrous for them.

The communication *on the implied author-reader level* is now discussed. Duke (1982:186) finds irony in the parents' utterances, as far as their fear for the Jews is concerned. However, he does not provide any details as to the kind of irony involved, nor how it functions in the story. At first glance, one may find sarcasm, a form of irony, in these utterances. The parents would then be saying sarcastically, "Do not ask us about this. You are wrong to come to us anyway. Instead, why don't you ask our son yourselves?" This, however, is an improbable reading. The parents did not share equal status with the Jews. Furthermore, they were too afraid of the Jews. Thus, according to my analysis, the irony which is found here is not verbal irony, but *irony of dilemma*. It is derived from the situation of dilemma where the parents as the victims of this irony were compelled, on the one hand, to answer to the Jews' questions, and where they did not want to answer on the other hand. Since the observer of this irony is the implied reader, this irony

is located at the text level (the implied author-reader level). It is not as significant as verbal irony. However, it helps the implied reader to understand the difficult position of the parents and interpret their utterances accordingly. The implied reader should sympathise with the parents who were in this difficult position. Moreover, the implied reader should do the same with those who experience the same kind of predicament, if the story of John 9 is a two-level drama as Martyn ([1968] 1979) suggests. Nevertheless, the implied author indicates in the narrator's comment in verse 22 that the action the parents took is not a recommended model for the implied reader.

Another irony may be identified in relation to the use of reader victimisation, which will be discussed later (see below). It can be classified as *dramatic irony* in which the irony can be perceived by the implied author's knowledge, as both the ironist and observer, of what the implied reader as the victim has yet to find out.

In the domain of *Textual Rhetoric*, the parents' utterances keep the *Economy Principle* by using the *Reduction Maxim* (pronominalisation). The parents designated their blind son as *he* or *him*. Morris (1971:487) comments about the significance of these pronouns: "In avowing their ignorance of the identity of the Healer they use the emphatic pronoun" (see also Plummer 1981:208). Although the utterances also seem to observe the *Transparency Maxim* due to a direct and transparent relationship between the message and the text, they seem to transgress the *End-Weight Maxim* because more important information is not placed in the end but in the beginning of the utterances.

In the domain of *Interpersonal Rhetoric*, the parents' utterances surprise the implied reader, and this constitutes an instance of the operation of the *Interest Principle*. Malina and Rohbaugh (1992:179) point out:

> Socially and psychologically, all family members were embedded in the family unit. Modern individualism simply did not exit. The public role was played by the males on behalf of the whole unit, while females played the private, internal role.

If what they describe concerning the respective roles of males and females in New Testament times is correct, the implied author's use of the term *parents* surprises the implied reader because the husband and wife were fulfilling a public role together in this interrogation. Especially in "a patriarchal social structure in which the male household head held precedence" (Barton 1992:100), the head of the household was supposed to come to the fore and to act as the representative for the whole family. It is

thus logical to assume that the utterances were actually articulated by the father of the blind man even though the implied author attributes them to the parents.

However, what is more interesting here is that the message of the parents betrays the implied reader's expectation. The parents are supposed to be protective toward their children. According to social scientific data about Palestinian society of New Testament times,

> [c]hildren were the weakest, most vulnerable members of society. Infant mortality rates sometimes reached 30 percent. Another 30 percent of live births were dead by age six, and 60 percent were gone by age sixteen (Malina & Rohbaugh 1992:117 and see also Osiek & Balch 1997:67).

It is amazing that a physically disabled person like the blind man could survive thus far in a society of this nature. Hence, the fact that the blind man was still alive may be indicative of his parents' love and protection. Yet they handed over the responsibility to answer to the Jews to their own son. As pointed out earlier, they tried to get out of the troublesome situation at his expense. This cold attitude is extremely surprising. However, the implied author will inform the implied reader about the reason for their cold attitude in the next verse. Nevertheless, the implied author tactically discloses the reason only after surprising the implied reader first.

It should be noted here that some critics make some severe comments about the parents' cold attitude in their request. Rensberger (1988:47) criticises the parents, saying:

> The terrible perfidy of this remark is perhaps the most shocking thing in the entire story. The parents have not only tried to shield themselves from scrutiny, they have deliberately turned the inquisitors' attention back upon their own son, knowing full well that he will be subject to the very sentence that they themselves are afraid to face.

Howard-Brook (1994:224) even considers their attitude as a sin and says: "It is not just their denial of knowledge, but their passing the buck to their son that is their 'sin'." However, Hendriksen ([1954] 1973:86) offers an opposite opinion and states:

> It is possible that the intimate knowledge which these parents had with respect to the talents and character of their son - his ability to

> defend himself, ready wit, and courage - had something to do with their desire to let him speak for himself [Hendriksen's italics].

This may be possible, but unlikely, to my mind, because if this were the case, the parents could have fully provided their own answers to the interrogators' questions. In this case the parents' feeling of fear would have nothing to do with their reply any more, for the basis of Hendriksen's opinion lies not in the situation of the parents but in the potential capacity of their son. Then, the narrator's explanation in the next verse will not make much sense. Therefore, it is more probable that the parents' request manifests their cold attitude as analysed thus far. To this, Morris (1971:487) adds: "Their reply is characterized by timidity and a complete readiness to submit to the authority of their questioners." And rhetorically the parents "serve as a foil for their son in the following scene, who will show himself to be of sterner stuff" (Holleran 1993b:371).

In relation to the above observation concerning the Interest Principle, there is an important communicative strategy of the implied author which should not escape our attention. The starting point of this strategy is the fact that the parents, by uttering their request, tried to disengage themselves from the dialogue with the Jews. They were unwilling to co-operate in the way the CP requires. Of course, this puts the CP in jeopardy. However, the position into which the implied reader is placed at this point, brought about by the parents' (sudden and unusual) request, is of more significance. Since the beginning of this chapter the implied reader has shared privileged information with the implied author which the characters in the story sometimes do not have. But, for the first time in this narrative, the implied author lays a trap for the implied reader or manipulates him/her, by not supplying information about the reason for the parents' petition. Both the implied author and the parents (and of course the Jews) know the astonishing agreement by the Jewish authorities mentioned in verse 22. Only the implied reader does not know of it (*dramatic irony*). The profound effect is that the parents' request surprises the implied reader so much. The intended perlocution of this *reader "victimization"*, to use Staley's (1988:95) term, is to make the implied reader re-examine the way in which s/he should read the story and to force him/her to explore any possibility of deeper meaning in the text. It is to make him/her understand how severely the Jewish opposition against Christ affects ordinary people like the parents. It is to make him/her grasp how difficult it is to obey God rather than to obey (authoritative) men. But most of all, it is to make him/her realise how significant this fourth scene is in the entire narrative of chapter 9, for this special technique of reader victimisation is only used here in this fourth

scene. The implied author thus designs the whole structure of his narrative in the way that s/he may have the maximum rhetorical impact on the implied reader. On account of this, it is worth noting that my speech act analysis also supports the view which finds this fourth scene central in the structure of chapter 9 (for more discussion of the centrality of this fourth scene, see MacRae 1978:126; Duke 1982:186; Stibbe 1993:105-106; Ito 2000:481-482).

3.3.6 Summary

The theory of speech acts successfully determines and describes the parents' utterances in John 9:21cd as a requestive macrospeech act: petition. The parents were dying to escape from the burdensome situation by begging the Jews to interrogate their son and not themselves. In their utterances, while the Politeness Principle plays a significant role in the characters' organisation of their speech act, the important factor which enhances the communication between the implied author and reader is, not irony, but the observation of the Interest Principle and the technique of reader victimisation. Chiefly in this way, the implied author effectively increases the implied reader's interest in the story.

4 CONCLUSION

It is hoped that my analysis successfully accomplished the goal set out at the beginning, namely to continue to show the validity of this speech act approach and to develop it further in the reading of a biblical text. Furthermore, it is also hoped that the way in which a speech act approach is utilised here will stimulate other exegetes to consider the employment of this theory in their studies one way or the other, because this theory indeed has a great potential for a better understanding of biblical texts.

Appendix

<Diagram of Interpersonal and Textual Rhetorics>

The following diagram has been prepared for this article. (Terms and definitions are taken from Grice 1975:45-46 and Leech1983:22-147 unless otherwise stated.)

		Maxims	Definitions and/or explanations
INTERPERSONAL RHETORIC	Cooperative Principle (CP)	Quantity	Be economical. a) 'Make your contribution as informative as is required.' b) 'Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.'
		Quality	Be sincere. Be true. a) 'Do not say what you believe to be false.' b) 'Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.'
		Relation	'Be relevant.' 'Make your conversational contribution one that will advance the goals either of yourself or of your addressee.'
		Manner	Be clear, or explicit (perspicuous). a) 'Avoid obscurity of expression.' b) 'Avoid ambiguity.' c) 'Be brief.' d) 'Be orderly.'
	Politeness Principle (PP)	Tact	'a) Minimize cost to other. b) Maximize benefit to other.'
		Generosity	'a) Minimize benefit to self. b) Maximize cost to self.'
		Approbation	'a) Minimize dispraise of other. b) Maximize praise of other.'
		Modesty	'a) Minimize praise of self. b) Maximize dispraise of self.'
		Agreement	'a) Minimize disagreement between self and other. b) Maximize agreement between self and other.'
		Sympathy	'a) Minimize antipathy between self and other. b) Maximize sympathy between self and other.'
		Phatic	'a) Avoid silence. b) Keep talking.'
	Irony Principle (IP)	'[I]rony is an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock-politeness)'.	
		'If you must cause offense, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP.' Allow the hearer to grasp your offensive point by implicature.	
		'The ironic force of a remark is often signaled by exaggeration or understatement'. Exaggeration (hyperbole) and understatement (litotes or meiosis) are 'actually used to deceive the addressee'.	
		The function of the IP is to keep 'aggression away from the brink of conflict'.	
		The implicature of the IP: What *s* says is polite to *h* and is clearly not true. Therefore what *s* really means is impolite to *h* and true.	
	Banter Principle (BP)	Banter 'is an offensive way of being friendly (mock-impoliteness)'.	
		Underpoliteness 'can have the opposite effect of establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity'.	
		The 'more intimate the relationship, the less important it is to be polite. Hence lack of politeness in itself can become a sign of intimacy'.	
		The implicature of the BP (the opposite of that of IP): 'What *s* says is impolite to *h* and is clearly untrue. Therefore what *s* really means is polite to *h* and true'.	
	Interest Principle	'Say what is unpredictable, and hence interesting....[C]onversation which is interesting, in the sense of having unpredictability or news value, is preferred to conversation which is boring and predictable' (cf Tellability).	

	Pollyanna Principle	It 'means postulating that participants in a conversation will prefer pleasant topics of conversation to unpleasant ones'. (It elucidates the motivation for litotes.)	
		It uses the terms like *a bit, a little, rather,* when minimising adverbials of degree.	
		'The negative aspect of this principle is...EUPHEMISM: one can disguise unpleasant subjects by referring to them by means of apparently inoffensive expressions'. (e g, pass away = die)	
	Morality Principle (This could be a Maxim.)	'The speaker (in speaking) behaves morally, that is, *S*: a) does not reveal information he ought not reveal, b) does not ask for information he shouldn't have, c) does not direct *H* to do/tell something *H* shouldn't do/tell, d) does not commit himself to do something for *H* that *H* does not want done' (Bach & Harnish 1979:64).	
TEXTUAL RHETORIC	Processibility	'[T]he text should be presented in a manner which makes it easy for the hearer to decode in time. A text (in contrast to a message) is essentially linear and time-bound'. This principle also applies 'to syntactic and semantic aspects of the text'.	
		End- Focus	'[I]f the rules of the language allow it, the part of a clause which contains new information should be placed at the end'.
		End-Weight	It 'induces a syntactic structure in which "light" constituents precede "heavy" ones'.
		End-Scope	'[L]ogical operators such as a negative operator or a quantifier precede, rather than follow, the elements (including other logical operators) which are within their scope'.
	Clarity	This 'Principle might be regarded as subordinate to the Processibility Principle'.	
		Transparency	'Retain a direct and transparent relationship between semantic and phonological structure (i.e. between message and text)'.
		Ambiguity	'Avoid ambiguity'.
	Economy	'If one can shorten the text while keeping the message unimpaired, this reduces the amount of time and effort involved both in encoding and in decoding. As this description implies, the Economy principle is continually at war with the Clarity principle'.	
		Reduction	'Reduce where possible', a) by pronominalisation, b) by substitution by other pro-forms, e g, do, so, and c) by ellipsis (or deletion).
	Expressivity	This is 'concerned with effectiveness in a broad sense which includes expressive and aesthetic aspects of communication, rather than simply with efficiency'. This principle operates because of 'expressive repetition, where the emphasis of repetition has some rhetorical value such as surprising, impressing, or rousing the interest of the addressee'.	
		Iconicity	It 'invites the user, all other things being equal, to make the text imitate aspects of the message'.

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