

A LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF SPEECH ACTS

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Abstract. This article examines the study of speech acts in linguistics. Speech acts are actions performed through language, playing a crucial role in understanding social interactions, communication, and human dialogue. The article analyzes the types of speech acts, their linguistic and pragmatic analysis, and their role in social contexts. Speech acts mainly include requests, commands, offers, acceptance, or refusal, and they reflect the social functions of language. This analysis contributes to the development of pragmatics and communication theories in linguistics.

Keywords: speech act, pragmatics, linguistics, communication, linguistics, social interaction, semantics, utterance act, discourse, grammatical structure.

Introduction

Speech acts are an important concept in linguistics, as they study language not only as a means of communication but also as an element reflecting social and psychological contexts. Through speech acts, people manage interpersonal relations, exchange ideas, and achieve social roles and expected outcomes. This concept is central to the pragmatic and linguistic theories of scholars such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin. A speech act is generally understood as an action or set of actions performed through language, encompassing any type of utterance or speech combination. This article analyzes the study of speech acts in linguistics and their social, pragmatic, and linguistic significance. Linguists investigate the variety of speech acts, their structure, purposes, and dependence on context. Moreover, the article explores the role of pragmatics and communication theory in analyzing speech acts.

Main part

The concept of a speech act was first introduced by the English philosopher J. L. Austin, who, in his work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), emphasized that words are used not only to convey meaning but also to perform specific actions. Austin divided speech into three main acts:

1. Locutionary act – the linguistically and semantically structured part of an utterance (i.e., language units and their grammatical construction).
2. Illocutionary act – the part of an utterance that expresses its communicative purpose (e.g., giving advice, issuing a command, apologizing).
3. Perlocutionary act – the effect or result an utterance has on the listener (e.g., persuading, motivating someone to act).

Later, this concept was further developed by John Searle (1969), who classified speech acts more precisely and expanded their communicative functions. According to him, speech acts can be divided into the following five types:

- Assertive acts – providing information or affirming something (e.g., “The weather is nice today”).
- Directive acts – commands, advice, requests (e.g., “Give me the book”).
- Commissive acts – making promises or commitments (e.g., “I will help you tomorrow”).
- Expressive acts – expressing gratitude, apology, congratulations (e.g., “Happy Birthday!”).
- Declarative acts – acts that bring about legal or social changes (e.g., “I now pronounce you husband and wife”).

The study of speech acts in linguistics examines language as a tool not only for communication but also for expressing social and psychological contexts. Speech acts are actions performed through language, playing a crucial role in understanding interpersonal relationships, communication, and dialogue. They enable individuals to exchange ideas, achieve social goals, and manage expectations. This concept, central to the pragmatic and linguistic theories of scholars such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, provides insight into how language functions in both social and individual contexts. A speech act is generally understood as an action or a set of actions performed through language, encompassing any type of utterance. J. L. Austin, in his work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), emphasized that words are used not only to convey meaning but also to perform specific actions. He divided speech into three main acts: locutionary acts, which are the linguistically and semantically structured parts of an utterance; illocutionary acts, which express the speaker's communicative intent, such as giving advice, issuing commands, or apologizing; and perlocutionary acts, which refer to the effects of an utterance on the listener, such as persuading or motivating action.

John Searle (1969) further developed this framework and classified speech acts into five types: assertive acts, which provide information or affirm something; directive acts, which include commands, requests, or advice; commissive acts, which involve promises or commitments; expressive acts, which convey gratitude, apologies, or congratulations; and declarative acts, which bring about legal or social changes. Speech acts are always embedded within social and cultural contexts, so their form and style vary across different languages and cultures. For instance, giving advice in English is often expressed politely and indirectly, using phrases such as “You might want to consider...” or “It would be a good idea to...,” whereas in Uzbek, advice is frequently direct and explicit, for example, “Sizga maslahat beraman...” (I advise you...) or “Bunday qilganingiz ma’qul.” (It would be good to do this.) Such differences highlight the importance of pragmatic competence in language learning, emphasizing that understanding speech acts requires awareness of both grammatical rules and culturally appropriate usage.

In contemporary research, speech acts are studied in multiple areas, including discourse analysis, which identifies speech acts in written and spoken texts; corpus linguistics, which examines the frequency of speech act usage across languages; computational linguistics and artificial intelligence, which apply speech acts in machine translation and chatbot development; and pragmatic competence and language learning, which explore how speech acts can be effectively taught to foreign language learners. Methodologies for studying speech acts include classical linguistic analysis, which examines their grammatical and semantic structure; pragmatic analysis, which investigates the social and goal-directed context in which they are used; discourse analysis, which considers their role and adaptation in extended conversations; and experiments and interviews, which gather participants’ perceptions and data on real-life usage.

Research has identified several primary types of speech acts, including questions, which are used to obtain information or responses; commands, which express demands or instructions and play an important role in both formal and informal contexts; suggestions, which are polite and cooperative, aiming to maintain relationships or reach agreements; accepting and rejecting acts, which manage social interactions and agreements; and affective speech acts, which convey emotions such as gratitude, apologies, or appreciation, reinforcing social norms and interpersonal connections. The study of speech acts reveals that language functions as a key instrument of social interaction, enabling individuals to convey intentions, negotiate meaning, and achieve social goals.

Pragmatics, in particular, plays a central role in understanding these functions, bridging the gap between linguistic structures and their use in cultural and social contexts.

In conclusion, speech acts are fundamental for understanding language as both a communicative tool and a mechanism for social interaction. Their study provides insight into the structure, function, and cultural specificity of language, contributing to fields such as linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and language education. Recognizing and analyzing speech acts is essential for effective communication, cross-cultural understanding, and the development of linguistic theory, demonstrating that language is more than a set of grammatical rules—it is a living, socially embedded system of action and meaning.

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