



Main Features Of Speech Acts And Their Place In Modern Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the concept of speech acts and their significance in modern linguistics. Speech acts represent one of the central aspects of communication because language is used not only to convey information but also to perform actions such as requesting, apologizing, promising, and advising. The purpose of this study is to analyze the theoretical foundations, classifications, and communicative functions of speech acts within contemporary linguistic research. The article applies descriptive and analytical methods to investigate how speech acts operate in spoken interaction and how they contribute to pragmatic meaning. The findings demonstrate that speech act theory occupies an important place in modern linguistics due to its connection with pragmatics, discourse analysis, and intercultural communication. The study concludes that speech acts reflect the relationship between language, intention, and social interaction.

Keywords:

Speech acts, pragmatics, communication, linguistics, discourse analysis, illocutionary act, language function.

Introduction. Modern linguistics studies language not only as a grammatical system but also as a means of communication and social interaction (Yule, 2020)¹. In everyday communication, people use language to perform various actions such as asking questions, making promises, giving commands, expressing emotions, and apologizing (Austin, 1962)². These communicative actions are commonly known as speech acts.

The theory of speech acts occupies an important position in modern linguistic studies (Levinson, 1983)³, especially within pragmatics and discourse analysis. Unlike traditional linguistic approaches that focus mainly on sentence

structure and meaning, speech act theory examines how utterances function in real communicative situations (Mey, 2001)⁴. This approach emphasizes the speaker's intention and the effect of language on listeners.

The concept of speech acts was first systematically developed by J. L. Austin (Austin, 1962). and later expanded speech act theory (Searle, 1969). by John Searle. Their theories demonstrated that language performs actions rather than simply describing reality. As a result, speech act theory became one of the most influential areas in modern pragmatics.

¹ Yule, G. (2020). *The study of language* (7th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

² Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

³ Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Publishing.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze the concept of speech acts, their classifications, functions, and importance in modern linguistics.

Literature Review. The theory of speech acts emerged within the field of pragmatics during the twentieth century. J. L. Austin introduced the idea that utterances can function as actions. According to his theory, language is performative because speakers accomplish specific purposes through speech.

Austin classified speech acts into three categories:

- locutionary acts,
- illocutionary acts,
- perlocutionary acts⁵.

A locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of an utterance, while an illocutionary act represents the speaker's communicative intention (Levinson, 1983)⁶. A perlocutionary act describes the effect of the utterance on the listener.

Later, John Searle further developed speech act theory by introducing classifications such as representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1969)⁷. His work contributed significantly to modern pragmatics and discourse studies.

Contemporary linguistics considers speech acts essential for understanding interpersonal communication, conversational analysis, and intercultural interaction. Researchers emphasize that meaning is often determined not only by grammar or vocabulary but also by context, speaker intention (Mey, 2001), and social conventions.

Research Methodology. The present study applies descriptive and analytical methods (Yule, 2020)⁸ in order to investigate speech acts and their communicative functions. The research is based on theoretical materials related to pragmatics, discourse analysis, and modern linguistic studies. Examples from spoken communication were analyzed to illustrate different types of speech acts and their pragmatic functions.

⁵ Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.

⁶ Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.

Materials and discussion. Speech acts represent communicative actions performed through language (Austin, 1962). When individuals speak, they usually intend to achieve particular goals rather than simply produce grammatical sentences. For example, a speaker may request help, express gratitude, offer advice, or apologize.

The sentence: "Could you open the window?" grammatically appears as a question; however, its communicative function is a request. This demonstrates that the meaning of an utterance often depends on context and speaker intention (Levinson, 1983).

Speech acts therefore illustrate the relationship between linguistic structure and pragmatic meaning.

One of the most influential classifications of speech acts was proposed by John Searle.

1. Representatives

These speech acts describe facts, beliefs, or opinions (Searle, 1969).

Examples:

- "The lesson starts at nine."
- "I believe this theory is correct."

2. Directives

Directives attempt to influence the listener's behavior (Searle, 1969).

Examples:

- "Please close the door."
- "Could you help me?"

3. Commissives

Commissive acts commit the speaker to future actions.

Examples:

- "I promise to call you."
- "We will complete the project."

4. Expressives

Expressive speech acts communicate emotions or psychological states (Crystal, 2008).

Examples:

- "Thank you."
- "I apologize."

5. Declarations

Declarations create changes in social or institutional reality.

⁷ Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.

⁸ Yule, G. (2020). *The study of language* (7th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Examples:

- “I now pronounce you husband and wife.”
- “The meeting is officially closed.”

Speech act theory plays a central role in pragmatics (Levinson, 1983)⁹. because it explains how meaning depends on communicative context. The same utterance may perform different functions depending on intonation (Mey, 2001), situation, and social relationship between speakers. For example: “It’s cold here.”

This sentence may function as:

- a simple statement,
- a complaint,
- or an indirect request to close the window.

Thus, speech acts demonstrate that communication involves implied meaning in addition to literal meaning.

The Role of Speech Acts in Modern Linguistics

In modern linguistics, speech acts are important for several fields including:

- pragmatics,
- discourse analysis,
- sociolinguistics,
- psycholinguistics,
- intercultural communication.

Speech act theory contributes to the understanding of how language operates in real-life communication (Yule, 2020). It also explains how social norms and cultural expectations influence interaction.

Furthermore, speech acts are significant in language teaching because learners must understand not only grammar but also appropriate communicative behavior. Incorrect use of speech acts may lead to misunderstanding or pragmatic failure (Mey, 2001) in intercultural communication.

Speech Acts in English and Uzbek Communications

Speech acts may vary across cultures and languages due to differences in politeness strategies, indirectness, and social norms (Levinson, 1983).

English communication often favors indirect requests and polite expressions such as:

- “Could you possibly help me?”

Uzbek communication also demonstrates politeness but may use different grammatical structures and honorific expressions to show respect.

As a result, understanding speech acts is important for successful intercultural communication between speakers of different languages.

Conclusion. In conclusion, speech acts occupy an important place in modern linguistics because they reveal how language functions as a form of social action. Speech act theory demonstrates that communication involves not only grammatical meaning but also speaker intention, context, and interpersonal relationships.

The study shows that speech acts perform various communicative functions including requesting, promising, apologizing, and expressing emotions. Their classification and analysis contribute significantly to pragmatics, discourse analysis, and intercultural communication studies.

Ultimately, speech acts illustrate the dynamic relationship between language and human interaction, confirming that effective communication depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on pragmatic competence and social understanding.

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6. Yule, G. (2020). *The study of language* (7th ed.). Cambridge University Press.