
A Comparative Analysis of Different Approaches to the Classification of Speech Acts

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Annotation *This paper presents a comparative analysis of major theoretical approaches to the classification of speech acts, focusing on the foundational model proposed by J.L. Austin (1962) and the more systematic framework developed by J.R. Searle (1969). The study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology based on a critical review of key works in Speech Act Theory. The analysis examines the principles and categories underlying both taxonomies and demonstrates that, although Austin's contribution was pioneering, his verb-based classification suffers from conceptual overlap and a lack of unified criteria. In contrast, Searle's five-part taxonomy – Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declarations – offers a more coherent and theoretically grounded model, relying on clearly defined notions such as illocutionary point and direction of fit. The discussion highlights the analytical advantages of Searle's framework and considers its relevance for discourse analysis, artificial intelligence, and cross-cultural communication. The paper concludes that Searle's taxonomy remains the most influential and pragmatically effective framework for analyzing the functional dimensions of language use.*

Keywords *Speech Act Theory, illocutionary act, classification, representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations*

Сравнительный анализ различных подходов к классификации речевых актов

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Аннотация *В статье представлен сравнительный анализ основных теоретических подходов к классификации речевых актов с акцентом на модель, предложенную Дж.Л. Остином (1962), и более систематизированную таксономию Дж.Р. Сёрля (1969). Методология исследования основана на описательно-аналитическом обзоре ключевых работ по теории речевых актов. Анализ показывает, что, несмотря на новаторский характер концепции Остина, его классификация, основанная на перформативных глаголах, характеризуется размытостью критериев и пересечением категорий. В отличие от этого, пятичленная таксономия Сёрля – Репрезентативы, Директивы, Коммиссивы, Экспрессивы и Декларации – отличается большей логической строгостью и опирается на четко сформулированные принципы, такие как иллокутивная цель и направление соответствия. В работе обсуждаются преимущества модели Сёрля и ее практическая значимость для анализа дискурса, искусственного*

интеллекта и межкультурной коммуникации. Делается вывод о том, что таксономия Сёрля остается наиболее влиятельным и прагматически эффективным инструментом для анализа функциональных аспектов языкового взаимодействия.

Ключевые слова Теория речевых актов, иллокутивный акт, классификация, репрезентативы, директивы, коммиссивы, экспрессивы, декларации

Nutq aktlarini tasniflashga oid turli yondashuvlarning qiyosiy tahlili

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Annotatsiya Ushbu maqolada nutqiy aktlarni tasniflashga oid asosiy nazariy yondashuvlarning qiyosiy tahlili berilgan bo'lib, unda J.L. Ostin (1962) tomonidan taklif etilgan dastlabki model hamda J.R. Syorl (1969) tomonidan ishlab chiqilgan yanada tizimliroq taksonomiya asosiy e'tiborda turadi. Tadqiqot metodologiyasi nutqiy aktlar nazariyasiga oid asosiy manbalarni tavsifiy-analitik ko'rib chiqishga asoslanadi. Shuningdek, tahlil natijalari shuni ko'rsatdiki, Ostin tasnifi ilmiy jihatdan muhim va kashshof bo'lishiga qaramay, performativ fe'llarga tayanishi sababli toifalararo mos kelmaslik va noaniqliklarga ega ekanligini ko'rsatadi. Aksincha, Syorl tomonidan taklif etilgan besh qismli taksonomiya – Vakillar, Direktivalar, Kommissivlar, Ekspressivlar va Deklaratsiyalar – illokutiv maqsad va moslik yo'nalishi kabi aniq mezonlarga asoslanib, yanada izchil va mustahkam model sifatida namoyon bo'ladi. Maqolada ushbu modelning diskurs tahlili va sun'iy intellekt va madaniyatlararo muloqotdagi ahamiyati yoritiladi hamda Syorl taksonomiyasi tilning funksional jihatlarini tahlil qilishda eng samarali asos ekanligi xulosa qilinadi.

Kalit so'zlar Nutqiy akt nazariyasi, illokutiv akt, tasniflash, vakillar, direktivalar, kommissivlar, ekspressivlar, deklaratsiyalar.

Introduction

The mid-20th century witnessed a significant "pragmatic turn" in philosophy and linguistics, shifting focus from language as an abstract, self-contained system to language as a dynamic form of social action embedded in real communicative contexts. This shift marked a departure from purely structural and formal approaches and emphasized the role of speakers, intentions, and situational factors in meaning construction. At the forefront of this movement stands Speech Act Theory, which

fundamentally redefined the understanding of linguistic meaning by asserting that utterances do not merely describe reality but actively perform actions. When speakers produce sentences, they engage in purposeful acts such as making promises, issuing commands, asking questions, expressing feelings, or offering apologies.

Central to Speech Act Theory is the assumption that the immense diversity of human communicative intentions is not random but can be systematically organized

and classified into a finite set of functional categories, commonly referred to as "speech acts." (Allan, 1994) Early functional insights into language use were offered by scholars such as Bronisław Malinowski, who emphasized the social function of language (Malinowski, 1923), and Karl Bühler, who proposed an organon model of linguistic functions (Bühler, 1934). However, these early frameworks remained relatively general and lacked a comprehensive taxonomy of linguistic actions.

A major breakthrough occurred with J.L. Austin, whose seminal work "How to Do Things with Words" (1962) laid the conceptual foundations of Speech Act Theory. Austin introduced key distinctions between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts and offered an initial classification of illocutionary forces. Building on and refining Austin's ideas, his student John R. Searle presented a more systematic and logically consistent taxonomy in "Speech Acts" (1969), addressing theoretical ambiguities and strengthening the criteria for classification.

This article provides a detailed comparative analysis of these two foundational classification systems. It aims to examine the underlying principles of each taxonomy, compare their respective categories, and critically assess the reasons why Searle's model is widely regarded as a more coherent and theoretically robust framework. Through this comparative perspective, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of pragmatic theory and highlights the functional, action-oriented nature of language in human communication.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical and comparative methodology, based on a critical review of the foundational literature in Speech Act Theory. The primary sources are Austin's "How to Do Things with Words" and Searle's "Speech Acts". The method involves, first, a descriptive analysis of each theorist's classification system, outlining the core principles, categories, and illustrative

examples. Second, a comparative framework is used to juxtapose the two models, evaluating them based on criteria such as systematicity, clarity, and the mutual exclusivity of their categories (Mey, 1993). This approach allows for a systematic evaluation of the theoretical progression from Austin's initial framework to Searle's refined taxonomy.

Results

The Taxonomies of Speech Acts

This section outlines the classification systems proposed by Austin and Searle, which form the core of our comparison.

J.L. Austin's Five-Class Taxonomy (1962)

Austin's classification was a pioneering effort derived from his study of English performative verbs (Austin, 1962). He grouped these verbs and their associated acts into five general classes, acknowledging their potential for overlap.

- a. *Verdictives*: These are acts involving judgment or the giving of a verdict, such as acquitting, diagnosing, or estimating. They are concerned with establishing truth or value. Example: "We find the urgent solution to the problem."
- b. *Exercitives*: This class involves the exercising of power, rights, or influence. It includes acts of ordering, appointing, advising, and warning. Example: "I order you to do the task on time."
- c. *Commissives*: These speech acts commit the speaker to a future course of action. They are typified by promising but also include offering and vowing. Example: "I promise I will complete the task tomorrow."
- d. *Behabitives*: This is a miscellaneous group related to social attitudes and behavior, including acts of apologizing, congratulating, thanking, and condoling. Example: "I apologize for my rude behavior."
- e. *Expositives*: These acts are used to clarify how our utterances fit into an argument or conversation. They include acts of affirming, postulating, and replying.

Example: "I argue that his premise is flawed."

Austin's system was foundational but was criticized for its lack of a single, consistent classificatory principle, which resulted in fuzzy and overlapping categories.

J.R. Searle's Five-Class Taxonomy (1969)

Searle proposed a more principled taxonomy based on abstract criteria, most importantly the "illocutionary point" (the purpose of the act) and the "direction of fit" (the relationship between the words and the world).

- a. *Representatives (or Assertives)*: The point is to commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. The direction of fit is "words-to-world", as the words are meant to match reality. They can be true or false. Examples: "The Earth is round", "It will likely hotter tomorrow."
- b. *Directives*: The point is to get the hearer to do something. The direction of fit is "world-to-words", as the world is meant to change to match the words through the hearer's action. Examples: "Please close the window," "Could you pass the napkin?"
- c. *Commissives*: The point is to commit the speaker to a future action. The direction of fit is "world-to-words", as the world is meant to change to match the words through the speaker's action. Examples: "I will be there at 6 o'clock," "I promise to finish the essay."
- d. *Expressives*: The point is to express the speaker's psychological state about a state of affairs. There is "no direction of fit", as the truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed. Examples: "Wow! That was a brilliant presentation," "I am so sorry for a late reply."
- e. *Declarations*: The point is to bring about a change in the world simply by virtue of the utterance. The direction of fit is "both words-to-world and world-to-words" simultaneously. These require an extra-linguistic institution for their

successful performance. Examples: "You're hired!," "I declare this meeting adjourned."

Discussion

The transition from Austin's taxonomy to Searle's framework represents a decisive shift from an intuitive, verb-based classification system toward a more abstract, logically structured, and principle-driven model of speech act analysis (Allan, 1994). While Austin's approach was groundbreaking in drawing attention to the performative nature of language, it relied heavily on surface-level linguistic forms, particularly English performative verbs (Austin, 1962). As a result, his categories often lacked clear boundaries and were prone to overlap. Searle's framework, by contrast, is widely regarded as superior due to its internal coherence, systematic organization, and the conceptual clarity of its categories.

One of the primary weaknesses of Austin's model was its dependence on grouping speech acts according to verb types, which led to ambiguity and inconsistency. For example, the act of "warning" could be interpreted both as an Exercitive, because it attempts to influence the hearer's future behavior, and as a Behabitive, since it may express the speaker's concern or attitude. Searle addressed this problem by shifting the focus from linguistic form to the underlying illocutionary purpose of the act. Within his system, Austin's Verdictives and Expositives are largely subsumed under the category of "Representatives", as their central function is to commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition or to describe a state of affairs. Austin's Exercitives correspond closely to "Directives", which aim to get the hearer to perform some action, while Behabitives are refined into the more narrowly defined category of "Expressives", emphasizing the expression of psychological states. The category of "Commissives" remains largely unchanged in both models, reflecting its clear and stable functional definition across

theoretical perspectives. Searle's most significant conceptual innovation is the category of "Declarations", which explicitly captures the institutional and world-altering power of language – such as pronouncing someone married or declaring a meeting open – a function that in Austin's taxonomy was dispersed across several categories.

The practical value of Searle's classification is considerable and extends far beyond theoretical linguistics. In discourse analysis, it provides a reliable framework for examining conversational organization, speaker intentions, and underlying power relations. In the field of artificial intelligence, accurate speech act recognition is essential for the development of intelligent chatbots and virtual assistants capable of interpreting user intent beyond literal semantic content (Trosborg, 1995). In cross-cultural communication, the theory helps explain pragmatic misunderstandings, such as why a request phrased politely in one language may be perceived as overly direct or even rude in another, due to differing sociocultural norms. Finally, in second language acquisition, speech act theory offers a valuable pedagogical foundation for teaching learners not only grammatical competence but also pragmatic competence, enabling them to perform social actions appropriately and effectively in a new linguistic and cultural environment (Britton, 1970).

Despite its strengths, Searle's model is not without limitations. One of the most frequently discussed challenges concerns the treatment of indirect speech acts, in which the speaker's intended meaning diverges from the literal form of the utterance, as in statements like "It's cold in here" functioning as a request to close a window. Nevertheless, even with these challenges, Searle's taxonomy remains the most robust, flexible, and widely adopted

framework for functional and pragmatic analysis of language use.

Conclusion

The classification of speech acts constitutes a cornerstone of pragmatic theory, as it reveals the fundamental ways in which language operates not merely as a system of symbols, but as an effective instrument of social action and interaction. Through speech acts, speakers shape social relationships, perform institutional roles, and influence the beliefs and behavior of others. J.L. Austin's pioneering contribution laid the conceptual groundwork for this paradigm by demonstrating that utterances can be actions in themselves. However, despite its originality and theoretical importance, Austin's initial taxonomy of illocutionary acts remained somewhat fragmented and lacked the systematic rigor required for precise and consistent analytical application across diverse communicative contexts.

J.R. Searle advanced this theoretical framework by refining and restructuring Austin's insights into a logically grounded and methodologically sound classification system. By introducing explicit criteria such as illocutionary point, direction of fit, and sincerity conditions, Searle established a more coherent and operational model (Searle, 1969). His five categories – Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declarations – have since become the dominant framework for identifying and analyzing the illocutionary force of utterances. This refined taxonomy not only offers a more comprehensive representation of human communicative intentions but also serves as an indispensable analytical tool with significant implications for discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and the study of language use in an increasingly interconnected and technologically mediated world.

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