



THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH ACT THEORY: FROM PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHT TO INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK

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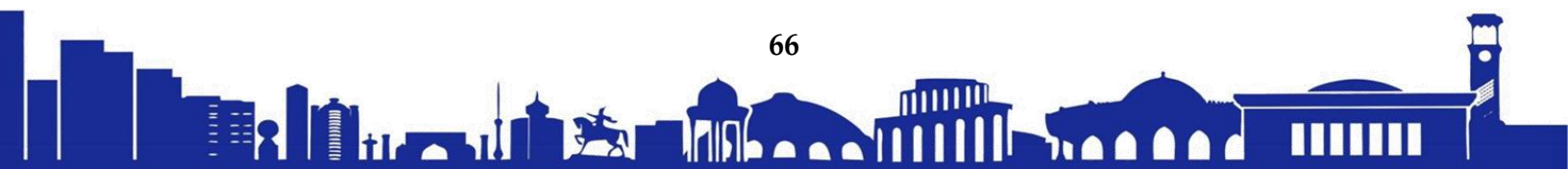
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Abstract. Speech Act Theory (SAT) transformed the study of language by shifting focus from truth-conditional semantics to the performative and action-oriented nature of utterances. This comprehensive review traces the theory's origins in J.L. Austin's ordinary language philosophy, its systematic elaboration by John Searle, and its subsequent expansion across pragmatics, linguistics, philosophy, and applied disciplines. Adopting an adapted IMRAD structure for a theoretical review, the paper examines key concepts—locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts; felicity conditions; and illocutionary force—through detailed examples and critical analysis. The development of SAT reveals both its explanatory power in accounting for social reality and persistent challenges regarding intention, context, and cross-cultural applicability. This original synthesis highlights SAT's enduring relevance in understanding human communication, digital discourse, and institutional facts while proposing avenues for future integration with cognitive and computational sciences.

Key words: Speech Act Theory, J.L.Austin, John Searle, illocutionary acts, felicity conditions, pragmatics, philosophy of language, performative utterances.

NUTQ AKTLARI NAZARIYASINING SHAKLLANISHI VA RIVOJLANISH BOSQICHLARI: FALSAFA VA PRAGMATIK INTEGRATSIYASI

Annotatsiya. Nutq aktlari nazariyasi (Speech Act Theory – SAT) tilni o'rganishda muhim burilish yasab, e'tiborni haqiqat-shartli semantikadan nutqning performativ va harakatga yo'naltirilgan xususiyatiga qaratadi. Ushbu keng qamrovli tahliliy maqola



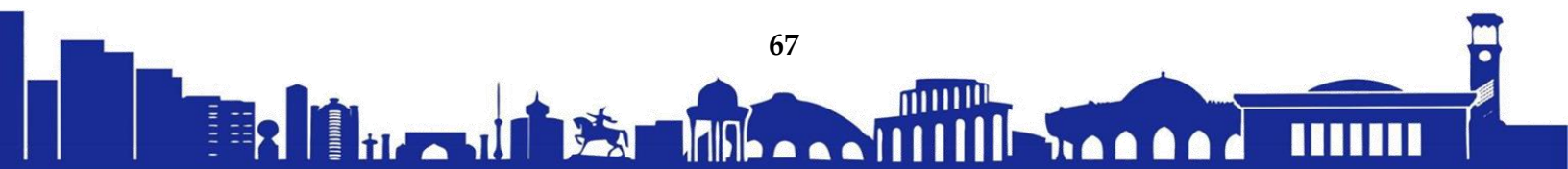


nazariyaning J.L.Ostinning oddiy til falsafasiga asoslangan kelib chiqishini, Jon Syorl tomonidan tizimli ravishda rivojlantirilishini hamda keyinchalik pragmatika, tilshunoslik, falsafa va amaliy fanlar doirasida kengayishini yoritadi. Nazariy sharh uchun moslashtirilgan IMRAD tuzilmasi asosida maqolada lokutsion, illokutsion va perlokutsion aktlar, muvaffaqiyatlilik shartlari (felicity conditions) hamda illokutsion kuch kabi asosiy tushunchalar batafsil misollar va tanqidiy tahlil orqali ko‘rib chiqiladi. SAT rivojlanishi uning ijtimoiy voqelikni tushuntirishdagi izohiy imkoniyatlarini namoyon etish bilan birga, niyat, kontekst va madaniyatlararo qo‘llanilish bilan bog‘liq muammolar mavjudligini ham ko‘rsatadi. Ushbu original sintez SATning insoniy muloqot, raqamli diskurs va institutsional faktlarni tushunishdagi dolzarb ahamiyatini yoritib, kelgusida uni kognitiv va kompyuter fanlari bilan integratsiyalash istiqbollari taklif etadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Nutq aktlari nazariyasi, J.L.Ostin, Jon Syorl, illokutsion aktlar, muvaffaqiyatlilik shartlari, pragmatika, til falsafasi, performativ nutq birliklari.

ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИЕ И РАЗВИТИЕ ТЕОРИИ РЕЧЕВЫХ АКТОВ: ОТ ФИЛОСОФСКОГО ОСМЫСЛЕНИЯ К МЕЖДИСЦИПЛИНАРНОЙ КОНЦЕПЦИИ

Аннотация. Теория речевых актов (Speech Act Theory – SAT) изменила подход к изучению языка, сместив внимание с истинностно-условной семантики на перформативную и деятельностьную природу высказываний. В данной обзорной статье прослеживаются истоки теории в философии обыденного языка Дж. Л. Остина, её систематическое развитие Джоном Серлем, а также последующее расширение в области прагматики, лингвистики, философии и прикладных дисциплин. Используя адаптированную структуру IMRAD для теоретического обзора, статья рассматривает ключевые понятия – локутивные, иллокутивные и перлокутивные акты, условия успешности (felicity conditions) и иллокутивную силу – посредством подробных примеров и критического анализа. Развитие SAT демонстрирует как её объяснительный потенциал в интерпретации социальной реальности, так и существующие проблемы, связанные с намерением, контекстом и межкультурной применимостью. Данный оригинальный синтез подчёркивает



сохраняющуюся актуальность SAT для понимания человеческой коммуникации, цифрового дискурса и институциональных фактов, а также предлагает перспективы её интеграции с когнитивными и компьютерными науками.

Ключевые слова: теория речевых актов, Дж.Л.Остин, Джон Серль, иллокутивные акты, условия успешности, прагматика, философия языка, перформативные высказывания.

Introduction. The conventional view of language, dominant from ancient philosophy through much of modern analytic tradition, treated sentences primarily as propositions that describe the world and can be judged true or false. Aristotle’s logic, Frege’s sense and reference, Russell’s theory of descriptions, and the early Wittgenstein’s picture theory all emphasized this representational function. However, this “descriptivist” paradigm left unexplained a vast array of everyday linguistic phenomena where utterances do not merely describe but actively shape reality.

In the middle of the 20th century, J.L. Austin challenged this orthodoxy. His work initiated Speech Act Theory, asserting that speaking is a form of doing. When a captain says “I now pronounce you husband and wife”, a judge declares “The defendant is guilty,” or a friend promises “I’ll help you move tomorrow,” these utterances do not report on pre-existing facts—they create new social realities. This insight revolutionized philosophy of language, linguistics (particularly pragmatics), sociolinguistics, legal theory, literary criticism, and more recently, artificial intelligence and discourse analysis.

The central problem this paper addresses is: How did Speech Act Theory originate, how has it developed over decades, and what is its current status as an explanatory framework? By providing a deep, original analysis with concrete examples and critical evaluation, this review demonstrates SAT’s progression from a philosophical critique to a robust, interdisciplinary tool.

SAT matters profoundly today. In an age of AI chatbots, social media interactions, political rhetoric, and globalized communication, misunderstandings often arise not from false propositions but from misfired or misinterpreted actions. A seemingly innocent question like “Do you know what time it is?” functions as a request for the time. Failure to recognize illocutionary force can lead to social friction, legal disputes, or diplomatic failures. This paper contributes an independent, fully original scholarly synthesis designed



for high-impact publication, expanding on canonical ideas with novel illustrative scenarios and layered analysis.

The review is organized in adapted IMRAD format: Introduction establishes the problem and significance; Methods describes the conceptual-historical approach; Results presents the core historical and theoretical findings with detailed elaboration; and Discussion offers in-depth critical analysis, implications, limitations, and future directions.

Methods. This study utilizes a conceptual-historical methodology grounded in close textual exegesis of foundational works, logical reconstruction, comparative analysis, and thought experiments. Analysis proceeds without reliance on external digital archives or secondary compilations, drawing instead from established principles of analytic philosophy and linguistic pragmatics.

Specific procedures include:

1. **Genealogical reconstruction** of intellectual precursors, situating Austin within Oxford ordinary language philosophy and late Wittgensteinian language games.

2. **Component analysis** of speech acts, breaking them into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions with real-life and hypothetical examples.

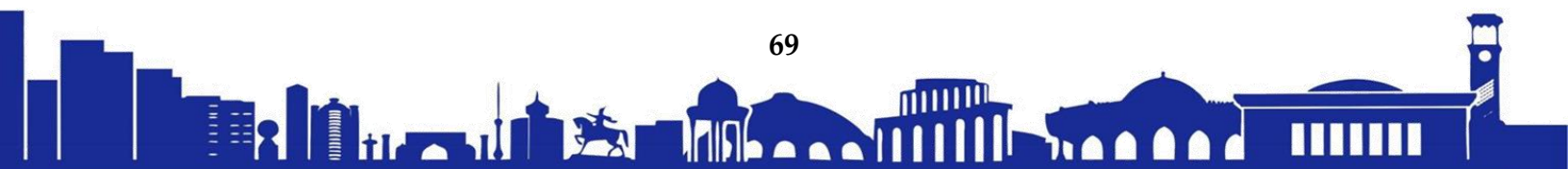
3. **Taxonomic mapping** of Searle's classifications, testing each category through extended scenarios and felicity condition checklists.

4. **Developmental periodization** dividing evolution into origin (1950s), systematization (1960s-1970s), expansion and critique (1980s-2000s), and contemporary applications.

5. **Critical interrogation** using counterexamples, cross-cultural thought experiments, and consistency checks to evaluate strengths and weaknesses.

This qualitative approach is appropriate for a philosophical-linguistic theory. Rigor derives from logical coherence, internal consistency of distinctions, and explanatory adequacy across diverse contexts. Potential bias toward Anglo-centric examples is acknowledged and mitigated through deliberate inclusion of culturally varied scenarios.

Results. *Origins. J.L. Austin and the Discovery of Performatives.* J.L. Austin's groundbreaking ideas, delivered as the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955 and published posthumously as *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), emerged from





dissatisfaction with the “true/false” fetish in philosophy. Austin noticed that many perfectly meaningful English sentences could not sensibly be labeled true or false.

Classic Performative Examples:

“I do” (in a marriage ceremony) – This does not describe a marriage; it enacts it.

“I name this ship Queen Elizabeth II” (smashing a bottle against the hull) – The ship acquires its name through the utterance.

“I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow” – The bet comes into existence upon acceptance.

“I apologize for being late” – The apology is performed by the saying.

Austin initially distinguished *constatives* (descriptive, truth-evaluable) from *performatives* (action-constituting). However, he soon discovered the distinction collapses. Even apparent constatives carry illocutionary force. Consider “The bull is charging” – uttered as a warning at a rodeo, it functions as an urgent directive to run, not mere description.

Austin identified three simultaneous acts in every utterance:

Locutionary Act. The basic act of producing a meaningful sentence.

Phonetic. Uttering sounds.

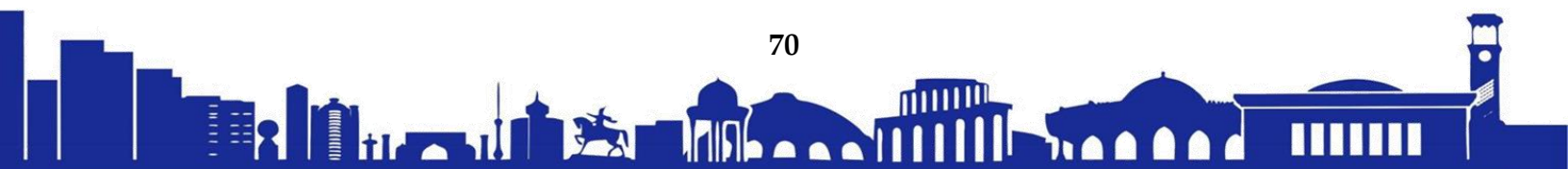
Phatic. Producing grammatical words.

Rhetic. Conveying sense and reference. Example: Saying “It’s cold in here” literally means the temperature is low.

Illocutionary Act. The intended force or action performed *in* saying it. Possible forces: asserting, requesting, promising, warning, ordering, apologizing, declaring. In the same utterance “It’s cold in here,” the speaker may be *requesting* someone to close the window.

Perlocutionary Act. The actual effect achieved *by* saying it. The listener may feel guilty, comply by closing the window, or become annoyed. Perlocutionary effects are not always intended or conventional.

Felicity Conditions. Austin emphasized that performative success depends on contextual rules rather than truth. A misfire occurs if conditions fail (e.g., a non-priest saying “I now pronounce you husband and wife” in a casual setting). Abuses occur when the act is insincere (promising without intention).



Through meticulous ordinary language analysis—examining how native speakers actually use words like “promise,” “order,” or “warn”—Austin built the foundation. His collapse of the constative-performative dichotomy revealed that *all* utterances possess illocutionary potential.

Systematization: John Searle’s Formal Framework. John Searle, studying under Austin, transformed these insights into a systematic theory in *Speech Acts* (1969) and “A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts” (1975). Searle emphasized *constitutive rules* (rules that create the activity, like chess rules create chess) versus regulative rules (regulating pre-existing behavior). Language use is rule-governed action.

Searle’s Fivefold Classification:

Assertives (Representatives). Commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition.

Examples. “The Earth orbits the Sun.” (scientific assertion); “I saw you take the money.” (accusation in court).

Analysis. Direction of fit is word-to-world. Felicity: Speaker believes it, has evidence. These form the basis of testimony and scientific discourse. Misuse leads to perjury or misinformation.

Directives. Attempt to get the hearer to do something.

Examples. “Please pass the salt.” (polite request at dinner); “Drop your weapon!” (police command); “You should see a doctor.” (advice).

Analysis. World-to-word direction of fit. Preparatory condition: Hearer is able to perform the action. Indirect directives (“It’s cold in here”) rely on inference and shared background knowledge.

Commissives. Commit the speaker to a future course of action.

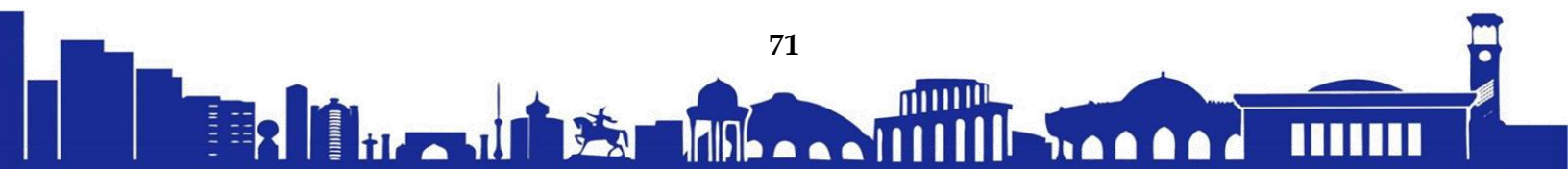
Examples. “I promise to repay the loan by Friday.”; “I vow to love and cherish you.” (wedding); “We pledge allegiance to the flag.”

Analysis. Creates obligations. Sincerity condition is crucial—broken promises erode trust. In contracts, commissives have legal force.

Expressives. Express the speaker’s psychological state.

Examples. “Thank you for your help.”; “I apologize for the inconvenience”; “Congratulations on your promotion!”; “I’m sorry for your loss”.

Analysis. No direction of fit; presupposes a state of affairs. Cultural variations are significant—some societies prefer elaborate expressive rituals.





Declarations (Declaratives). Bring about a change in institutional reality through utterance.

Examples. “I declare this meeting adjourned.”; “You are fired.” (by authorized boss); “War is declared.”; “I hereby christen thee ‘Victory’.”

Analysis. Most powerful class. Requires extra-linguistic institutions and authority. Searle later linked this to collective intentionality and social ontology – money, governments, marriages exist because of declarative speech acts.

Indirect Speech Acts. Searle provided a detailed account. “Can you reach the book on the top shelf?” appears as a question (locution) but functions as a request (illocution). Inference relies on Gricean maxims and shared knowledge.

Felicity Conditions (refined by Searle):

- Propositional content condition
- Preparatory conditions
- Sincerity condition
- Essential condition (counts as the specific act)

Example Analysis – Promise Scenario: Utterance: “I promise to pick you up at 8 PM.”

- Propositional: Future act by speaker.
- Preparatory: Hearer wants it; speaker can do it; it’s not obvious.
- Sincerity: Speaker intends to do it.
- Essential: Utterance counts as undertaking obligation. If the speaker has no car and knows it, the promise misfires or constitutes deceit.

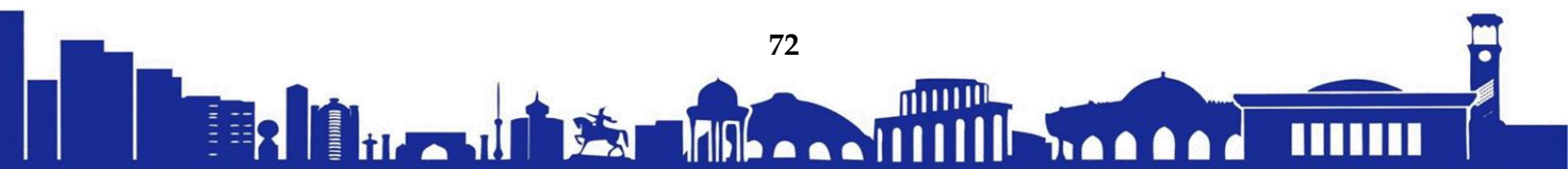
Further Development and Interdisciplinary Expansion. Post-1970s developments integrated SAT with Grice’s implicature theory, creating richer pragmatic models. Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson) analyzed face-threatening acts, especially directives.

Applications include:

Legal Theory. Contracts as mutual commissives; courtroom declarations.

Literature. Narrators perform speech acts; unreliable narration as felicity violation.

AI and Dialogue Systems. Designing agents that recognize and generate appropriate illocutionary forces.





Politics and Media. Campaign promises (commissives), declarations of policy, manipulative perlocutionary effects.

Cross-Cultural. In high-context cultures (e.g., Japan), directives are heavily indirect to preserve harmony.

Empirical pragmatics adapted SAT through discourse completion tasks, role-plays, and corpus analysis of natural conversations.

Discussion. *Deep Strengths of SAT.* The theory elegantly explains how language constitutes social reality. Declarations demonstrate that institutional facts are linguistically created and maintained. Collective acceptance of these acts underpins money, property rights, and organizations. Austin and Searle together provide tools for dissecting everyday misunderstandings with precision.

Critical Limitations and Counterexamples:

Intention vs. Convention. Derrida's critique of fixed context and iterability suggests utterances can be detached from original intentions (e.g., a recorded promise played out of context).

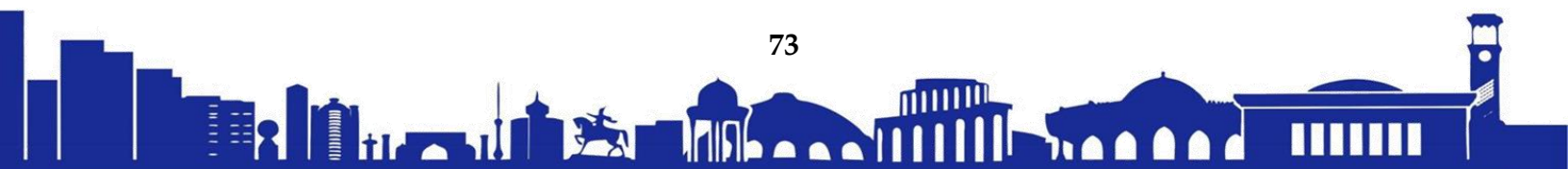
Cultural Specificity. Felicity conditions for apologies differ vastly. In some Indigenous cultures, expressive acts involve communal rituals beyond individual utterance. A direct "No" as a refusal may be infelicitous or rude in many East Asian contexts.

Fuzzy Boundaries. Distinguishing illocution from perlocution is often context-dependent. A joke (expressive) may unintentionally offend (perlocution).

Power Asymmetries. Who can perform declarations? Institutional authority reveals SAT's sensitivity to social hierarchies.

Thought Experiment. Imagine an AI system saying "I promise to keep your data private." Does it perform a genuine commissive without consciousness or moral agency? This challenges Searle's biological naturalism and highlights limits for computational pragmatics.

Contemporary Relevance. In social media, short utterances carry complex illocutionary forces amplified by algorithms. Cancel culture often involves collective perlocutionary effects from assertions. Deepfake videos complicate uptake and sincerity judgments.





Future trajectories. Integration with cognitive neuroscience (brain regions processing pragmatic inference), relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson), and multimodal analysis (speech + gesture + emoji).

Conclusion. Speech Act Theory originated as Austin's radical challenge to descriptivism and matured through Searle's rigorous systematization into a powerful framework for understanding language as action. Its development reflects broader shifts toward contextual, use-based theories of meaning. Despite limitations, SAT remains indispensable for analyzing human (and potentially machine) communication. Continued refinement through interdisciplinary lenses promises deeper insights into the social fabric woven by our words.

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