

Speech acts are one of the key areas of linguistic pragmatics. Philosophers like Grice (1975), Austin (1962) and Searle (1965, 1969 and 1975) proposed the basic conceptions of this new theory of language and communication. This theory was developed based on the assumption that:

The minimal units of human communication are not linguistic expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving directions, apologizing, thanking, and so on (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989, p. 2)

### **Definition of Speech Acts**

The term 'speech act' has been defined as "a minimal unit of discourse, a basic unit of communication" (Searle, 1969, p. 16). It can be defined as **the action performed by a speaker with an utterance**. So, the term *speech act* refers to **the action speakers sometimes perform when using language**. It is a concept which is **first introduced by Austin (1962)** and then developed by Searle (1969).

According to Austin (1962), **when saying a performative utterance, a speaker is simultaneously doing something**. "I am hungry." expresses hunger= requests for something to eat.

### **Austin's Theory of Speech Acts**

Austin (1965) developed his theory of speech acts in a series of lectures which were published as a book entitled 'How to Do Things with Words'. The Speech act theory is one of the key areas of linguistic pragmatics and which claims that many utterances, termed performatives, do not **only communicate information, but are equivalent to actions**. That is to say, through the use of these utterances, people do things or have others do things for them like apologizing, making requests and complimenting, etc.

Austin assumed, first and foremost, that there is a crucial **distinction between constative 'statements' that can either be true or false and are necessarily descriptive, and non-constative 'statements' outside of the true/false dichotomy, namely those used to perform an action**. The latter had been ignored in research on the philosophy of language. Austin called such meaningful non-constative utterances '**performatives**' since **they are utterances the production of which, given certain conditions (to be investigated), serves as the performance of some conventional social act**.

### **Implicit vs. Explicit Performatives**

Austin (1962) makes a distinction between two types of performatives: implicit performatives and explicit performatives; this distinction was specified too by linguists such as Searle (1969), Levinson (1983) and Leech (1983). According to Leech, explicit performatives occur "when a speaker **needs to define his act as belonging to a particular category**" (1983, P.181). That is to say, the speaker performs an utterance explicitly when he or she uses

**performative verbs that indicate the performed action** like order, promise, request, etc... These performative verbs determine the illocutionary force of the utterance.

On the other hand, **implicit performatives are those expressions which do not include an explicit performative verb** and the speaker needs some cues to name the illocutionary force of the utterance. The following examples will illustrate more the difference between the two.

- “I shall be there”
- “I promise that I shall be there” (Austin, 1962, p. 69)

### **Austin’s Dimensions of Speech Acts**

Austin (1962) **categorises three acts in the performance of an utterance.** “To say something is to do something, or in saying something we do something, or even by saying something we do something” (Austin, 1962, p. 109). He names these acts, respectively, the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts.

**Act (A) Locution= physical utterance by the speaker**

It is the act of saying or writing something in a language.

**Act (B) Illocution= the intended meaning of the utterance by the speaker**

It is the “intention” we have when saying or writing something (The FORCE of the word).

**Act (C) Perlocution= the action that results from the locution**

It is the effect produced in the listener or reader

**Austin (1962) and Searle (1981)  
presented a complete model:**



### **1. Locutionary Act**

Locutionary act is the **act of making well-formed utterances and producing meaningful linguistic expressions.** It is the act of saying something (Austin, 1962). In locutionary acts, the focus is on the **literal meaning of words** (Yule, 1996). That is to say, it is

an utterance which is still **deprived of any speaker's meaning**. For example, in saying 'I am sorry!', the locutionary act performed is the utterance of this sentence.

## 2. Illocutionary Act

- According to Searle, the illocutionary act is an act of doing something rather than an act of saying something. An illocutionary act is **a purpose or a function in the speakers' mind**. It is the **communicative force of an utterance**. One can utter to command, offer, promise, greet, thank, etc. (Yule, 1996 & Prince, 2003).

Sometimes it is **not easy to determine what kind of illocutionary act** the speaker performs. To assume the speaker's different intentions, many indications such as explicit performative verbs, various paralinguistic features (stress and intonation) and word order should be stated. These are called the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (**IFID**).

In addition, Yule argues that **"In order to correctly decode the illocutionary act performed by the speaker, it is also necessary for the hearer to be acquainted with the context the speech act occurs in"** (1996, p. 49). According to Mey, "one should not believe a speech act to be taking place, before one has considered, or possibly created, the appropriate context." (1993, p. 139).

Austin then proposed a **tentative classification of explicit performative verbs**. He categorises them into five classes (verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives). He classifies them to offer an image of illocutionary acts that one usually performs in uttering a sentence. So, "[o]ne can **exercise judgment** (Verdictive), **exert influence or exercise power** (Exercitive), **assume obligation or declare intention** (Commissive), **adopt attitude, or express feeling** (Behabitive), and **clarify reasons, argument, or communication** (Expositive)" (Oishi, 2006, p. 4). In other words, the verdictives reflect judgments; the exercitives reflect power, the commissives reflect presumptions of obligation or declarations of intention; the behabitives reflect adoptions of attitude; and the expositives reflect the elucidation of reasons, arguments, or communications (Austin, 1962).

- (1) **Verdictives**, which express verdicts or evaluations given by judges. Verbs such as, p. to condemn, to absolve, to judge, to estimate, to appraise.
- (2) **Exercitives**, which express the exercising of powers and rights. It includes verbs like to vote, to appoint, to excommunicate, to order, to warn.
- (3) **Commissives**, which express commitments or undertakings. Verbs belonging to this category include to promise, to guarantee, to contract, to commit. .
- (4) **Behabitives**, which have to do with social behavior or reaction to it. This category includes verbs such as to thank, to refuse, to apologize, to complain.
- (5) **Expositives**, which are used to explain or clarify reasons, arguments and communications. Verbs belonging to this category include to reply, to argue,

to concede, to assume. (1962, pp. 150-163)

Classes	Verbs
Verdictives	To reckon, to place, to grade, to assess, to calculate, to measure
Commissives	To promise, to undertake, to propose, to adopt, to espouse, to plan
Behabitives	To apologize, to condole with, to sympathize, to greet, to hope
Expositives	To affirm, to deny, to state, to identify, to testify, to classify
Exercitives	To appoint, to choose, to bequeath, to warn, to proclaim, to dismiss

**Table: 02:** The most common verbs in expressing the different classes of speech acts

### 3. Perlocutionary Act

Perlocutionary act is the **effect of the utterance on the listener**. It reveals the effect the speaker wants to exercise over the hearer (Yule, 1996). The response may **not necessarily be physical or verbal** and elicited by: Inspiring or insulting, Persuading or convincing, or Detering or scaring. Yule (1996: 48) claims that the main purpose behind uttering illocutions is to see the effects or the perlocutions of these acts on the addressees. An order means performing an illocutionary act. And succeeding or failing in making the person shut the door means performing a perlocutionary act.

#### Felicitous Speech Acts

#### Austin's Felicity Conditions

Performative utterances depend on **appropriate circumstances that would help to convey their intended meanings effectively**. These circumstances are called felicity conditions (Austin, 1962).

Pratt (1977: 81) points that:

To perform a speech act correctly, however, it is not enough merely to utter a grammatical sentence. Speech acts, like all behavior, are correctly or felicitously performed only if certain conditions obtain. The illocutionary act of promising, for example, is only felicitously carried out if the speaker is able to fulfill the promise, sincerely intends to do so, and believes that what he is promising to do is something the hearer would like him to do.

Therefore, **uttering the appropriate sentence is not enough to achieve successful communication**. There are **other necessary factors that should be present and appropriate for the situation**. In his famous book, Austin (1962: 27- 40) suggests six rules that serve to

get felicitous speech acts. Felicity conditions are summarised in **conventionality** (A), **actuality** (B) and **intentionality** (C) (Austin, 1962, pp. 14-15) as follows.

(A.1) There must exist an **accepted conventional procedure, having a certain conventional effect**, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) The particular **persons and circumstances must be appropriate** for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure **must be executed by all participants both correctly and**

(B.2) **completely.**

(C.1). Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use **by persons having certain thoughts or feelings**, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(C.2). **must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.**

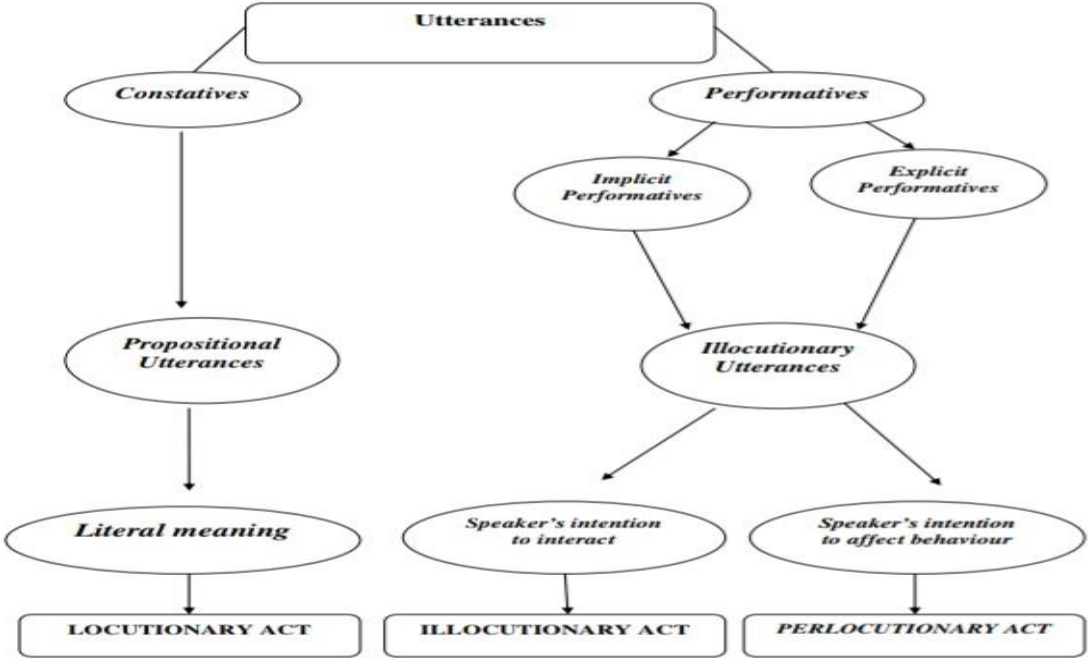


Figure 5: Types of Speech Acts (Based on Austin's (1962) Speech Acts Classification)