

**SPEECH ACT THEORY WITHIN THE SOCIAL CONTEXT:
EXPLORATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

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Annotation: Speech Act Theory provides a framework for analyzing how speakers perform various acts through language, such as making requests, giving commands, or expressing beliefs. This paper explores the application of Speech Act Theory within the social context, focusing on the role of language in shaping social interactions and relationships. Also it will be describing how the social context in which language is used affects human communication. Through a review of existing linguistic provisions and case studies, the work delves into the implications of Speech Act Theory for understanding communication dynamics, power structures, and cultural norms. By examining how speech acts are interpreted and reacted to within different social settings, we aim to shed light on the complexities of language use and its impact on social behavior starting with Speech Act Theory, a theory that formalizes the notion that what people actually intend their utterances to mean is often not clearly spelled out in the words that they speak or write.

Keywords: Speech Act Theory (SAT), pragmatics, locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act, social context, communication, power dynamics, politeness strategies, cultural norms.

This article explores how the social context in which language is used affects human communication. There is an obvious need to distinguish grammatical meaning from pragmatic meaning, i.e. meaning as part of our linguistic competence from the meaning obtained as a result of our interaction in specific social contexts. Thus, the discussion of work will be centered on pragmatics, it is also necessary to distinguish a sentence from an utterance, the primary unit upon which the study of pragmatic meaning is based. It will be describing how utterances are used and structured in human communication, according to SAT, a theory that formalizes the notion that what people actually intend their utterances to mean is often not clearly spelled out in the words that they speak or write. We need to understand the entire social context in which a sentence was uttered, the level of interpretation that is studied within pragmatics, which explores the role that context plays in the interpretation of what people say.

Pragmatics, according to which it is possible to factor out of the full description of linguistic activities those purely symbolic aspects which concern linguistic knowledge independently of notions of use or purpose. C.J.Fillmore (2012), declares that «The idea behind frame semantics is that speakers are aware of possibly quite complex situation types, packages of connected expectations, that go by various names - frames, schemas, scenarios, scripts, cultural narratives, memes - and the words in our language are understood with such frames as their presupposed background» [1]. So this view confirms the role that conventionality plays in language, i.e. that our interpretation of a sentence such as «Could you please pass the salt?» as a polite request is as much a matter of the social context in which this sentence is uttered as the fact that in English, «yes/no» questions with verbs such as «can/could» have been conventionalized as markers of polite requests (e.g. «Could you help me with my homework?»).

We see the study of pragmatics as crucial to understanding human language, since the study of linguistic competence is no more important than the study of communicative competence: D.Hyme’s (1971) notion that «human communication

involves not just knowledge of how to form linguistic structures but knowledge of how to use these structures in specific communicative contexts» [2]. To appreciate this perspective, an individual need only has the experience of studying a foreign language in a classroom and then traveling to a country in which the language is spoken and discovering how little he or she truly knows about the language: that its use among speakers in differing social contexts involves more than simply «knowing the rules».

Speech Act Theory (SAT), is a branch of pragmatics that investigates how speakers perform various acts through language. J.L.Austin (1962), believes that «utterances not only convey information but also perform actions» [3]. For example, when someone says, «I promise to do it» they are not just stating a fact but actually committing themselves to a future action. This distinction between the locutionary (literal meaning) and illocutionary (speech act) aspects of language is at the core of SAT. And according to J.L.Austin (1962), when speaking (or writing, for that matter), we perform various «acts»: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts [4].

Let's consider the types of speech acts:

1. Locutionary act: This refers to the literal meaning of an utterance. It includes the words used, grammar, and syntax of the statement.
2. Illocutionary act: This is the intended speech act performed by the speaker. It includes acts such as promising, requesting, commanding, apologizing, etc.
3. Perlocutionary act: This is the effect of the speech act on the listener. It refers to how the listener interprets and reacts to the utterance.

The difference between locutionary and illocutionary acts is sometimes referred to as, respectively, the difference between «saying» and «doing». Thus, if we utter «Leave!», we are on one level producing an imperative sentence having a specific form and meaning (e.g. «depart»). This is the locutionary force of this utterance, what has thus far been referred to as being a component of grammar. So,

speech acts can have real-world consequences, as they can bring about changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals.

SAT, a fundamental concept in the field of pragmatics, seeks to understand how language is used not only to convey information but also to perform various actions in social interactions. In everyday interactions, individuals engage in a complex web of speech acts that serve to communicate intentions, emotions, and establish social roles. For instance, a simple greeting like «How are you?» may function not merely as a question about one's well-being but also as a gesture of politeness, establishing a connection between the speakers. Similarly, a directive such as «Please, pass the salt» not only conveys a need but also implies a request for compliance and cooperation. Understanding the layers of meaning embedded within speech acts is crucial for navigating social relationships effectively.

The ability to discern between literal statements and the implied intentions behind them enables individuals to interpret and respond appropriately in various social contexts. In social interactions, SAT provides valuable insights into how language shapes relationships, power dynamics, and cultural norms. For example, a simple request can imply much more than a basic desire for information; it can also convey authority, politeness, or even aggression depending on the context and tone of voice. SAT has influenced diverse fields such as linguistics, psychology, philosophy, and sociology. Psycholinguists study how children acquire speech acts and how this development relates to theory of mind. Sociologists analyze how speech acts reflect and reinforce social structures and hierarchies. In linguistics, researchers explore the universality of speech acts across languages and culture.

Nevertheless, SAT highlights the impact of cultural norms and values on the interpretation of speech acts. Cultural variations in language use, such as differences in politeness conventions or the perception of directness, influence how speech acts are understood and evaluated across different cultural contexts. For instance, what may be considered a courteous request in one culture might be perceived as overly deferential in another. By considering the cultural nuances of speech acts, researchers

can gain a deeper appreciation of the diversity of communicative practices worldwide. Cross-cultural studies on speech acts provide valuable insights into how cultural differences shape communication patterns, influence social interactions, and contribute to intercultural misunderstandings.

Onward in our work we will present that some practical applications of SAT in a wide range of fields, including communication studies and language teaching play an important part in human-being relationships. By equipping individuals with the tools to analyze and navigate speech acts effectively, educators, psychologists, and professionals can enhance interpersonal communication skills, foster empathy, and promote cross-cultural understanding. In sum, speech acts play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining relationships. Politeness strategies, for instance, are used to mitigate potential threats to social harmony when making requests or expressing disagreement. For instance, the concept of «face», as proposed by sociolinguists Brown et.al. (1987), highlights «the importance of maintaining one's self-image and the image of others in communication. Speech acts that threaten face, such as direct refusals or harsh criticisms, can lead to conflict and tension within social exchanges» [5].

Furthermore, power dynamics within social contexts influence how speech acts are interpreted. The speech of authority figures, such as employers or teachers, carries weight and can shape the behavior of others. Conversely, individuals with lower social status may employ strategies such as indirectness or hedging to navigate interactions with those of higher status. Gender roles, too, can impact the performative aspects of language, with men and women often socialized to use speech acts in different ways. It is reasonable to focus on the fact that, SAT uncovers the power dynamics at play in social interactions and how individuals utilize politeness strategies to negotiate these dynamics. For instance, a request made using indirect speech acts, such as «I was wondering if you could possibly help me,» may signal deference and politeness, acknowledging the social hierarchy between the

interlocutors. Conversely, a direct command like «Give me that book» may assert authority and dominance in a conversation.

In connection with the above, let's look at some examples:

1. Within a classroom setting, a teacher's statement «Please turn to page 50 for today's reading» not only conveys information but also functions as a directive, illustrating the performative nature of speech acts.
2. In a business meeting, a manager's statement «We will have the quarterly report ready by Friday» not only conveys a promise to deliver but also serves as a commitment to future action, highlighting the interplay between speech acts and social expectations.
3. Within a courtroom, a judge's statement «I hereby sentence you to five years in prison» not only conveys a decision but also has the performative effect of imposing a legal punishment, showcasing the power dynamics inherent in speech acts within institutional contexts.

Having studied these samples of speech acts in a social context, we get an idea of the complexities of communicative dynamics. S.Nodoushan and A.Mohammad (2014) assert that «misunderstandings and conflicts can arise when speech acts are interpreted differently by interlocutors, highlighting the need for effective communication skills and cross-cultural awareness» [6]. Moreover, the ways in which speech acts are used reflect broader societal norms and values, shaping the fabric of social life. Thus, by analyzing various speech acts through the lens of power and politeness, researchers can gain insights into how language reflects and reinforces social structures. Moreover, understanding the nuances of politeness strategies can help individuals navigate hierarchical relationships, avoid confrontation, and maintain harmonious interactions in various social settings.

Communication is not simply the product of decoding the words in a sentence or utterance and then determining their meaning. To summarize, we came to a conclusion that SAT offers a powerful framework for understanding how language is used to perform actions in social contexts. Recognizing the dual nature of speech acts

– their literal meaning and intended function – we can better navigate the complexities of interpersonal communication. Future research in this area promises to shed more light on the key role of language in shaping our social interactions and relationships. Simultaneously, SAT provides a valuable framework for understanding the role of language in performing actions within social contexts. So, examining speech acts through the lenses of social dynamics, power relations, cultural variations, and practical applications, researchers can deepen the insights into how language influences interpersonal communication and shapes social interactions. As we continue to explore the complexities of SAT within the social context, it is possible to conceivable to uncover new possibilities for fostering effective communication, enhancing relationships, and promoting mutual understanding in diverse communities. By recognizing «the performative nature of speech acts and the significance of social context» [7], we can enhance our understanding of communication processes and promote more effective and harmonious relationships within society.

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