Faculty of Arts (Department of English Translation)

**The Assignment**

**Pragmatics**

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**Fourth Year**

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# SPEECH ACTS

# Interpreting Discourses

➢ **Key aspects of contexts crucial to the production and interpretation of discourse**
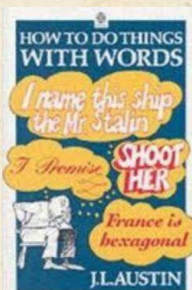
1. Situational context: What people know about what they can see around them (physical, social, linguistic).

2. Co-textual context: What people know about what they have been saying.

3. Background context: What people know about each other and the world (cultural knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, knowledge about life, norms and expectations of particular discourse communities)

## How is meaning produced?

➢ Meaning is jointly accomplished by both the speaker and the listener, or the writer and the reader. *Meaning involves social, psychological, and cognitive factors.

➢ Discourse is a „collaborative social action" in which language users „jointly collaborate in the production of meanings and inferences."

## Two influential works in pragmatics

**Austin's (1962) How to Do Things with Words**          **Searle's (1969) Speech Acts**
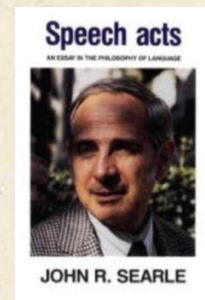
### Austin and Searle

➢ Their work appeared during the time when logical positivism prevailed, which stressed that:

➢ Language is to describe a fact or a state of affairs } If a statement cannot be tested for truth or falsity, it is meaningless

➢ They argued that language is used to "do things" other than refer to the truth or falseness of statements.

➢ We perform "acts" by using language - in the same way we perform physical acts.

# Speech Acts

We use the term **speech acts** to describe actions such as:

- ♣ Asking questions
- ♣ Giving orders
- ♣ Giving advice

- ♣ Making requests
- ♣ Making promises
- ♣ Making threats

♣ Speech Acts: **Action performed by a speaker with an utterance.** Speech act, **a variety of verbal communication and also a subdivision of pragmatics, often takes place in verbal and nonverbal communication.**

♣ **i.e. we do things by language rather than just referring to the truth or falsity of a particular statement.**

# Types of Acts

> **Austin refers to three types of acts that occur in everything we say:**

**1. Locutionary act:** **The literal meaning of the actual words.** ♣ **i.e. the basic act of utterance**

**2. Illocutionary act:** **The intention of the speaker when uttering those words.** ♣ **Normally we don't just produce well-formed utterances with no purpose. We form an utterance with some kinds of function in mind.** ♣ **We might utter "I've just made some coffee" to make a statement, an offer, or an explanation or any other communicative purpose.**

**3. Perlocutionary act:** **The effect the utterance has upon the thoughts of the listener.** ♣ **We do not simply create an utterance with a function without intending it to have an effect.** ♣ Depending on the circumstances, you will utter "I've just made some coffee" on the assumption that the hearer will recognize the effect you intended (for example, to get the hearer to drink coffee).

♣ **The term "speech act" is generally interpreted quite narrowly to mean only the illocutionary force of an utterance.**

➢ **As it represents in the following example:**

**"It is hot in here."**

| Locutionary Act | Illocutionary Force | Perlocutionary Effect |
|---|---|---|
| • Referring to the temperature. | •Request for someone to turn on the air conditioning. | • Someone getting up and turning on the air conditioning. |

# Categories of Speech Acts:

## Illocutionary Acts

According to Searle, these speech acts are:

1. <mark>Representatives:</mark> Utterances used to describe some state of affairs. ⟩ Stating, informing, predicting, notifying. **For Example, The weather will be cold tomorrow.**

2. <mark>Directives:</mark> Utterances used to get the hearer to do (or not do) something. ♣ They express what the speaker wants. ♣ Requesting, ordering, forbidding, advising, suggesting, insisting, recommending. ♣ They can be positive or negative

3. <mark>Questions:</mark> Utterances used to get the hearer to provide information. ⟩ They are not restricted to the form of a question. ♣ Asking and inquiring. ♣ Example: Were you absent yesterday?

4. <mark>Commissives:</mark> Utterances used to commit the SPEAKER to do some act. ♣ They express what the speaker intends. ♣ They can be performed by the speaker alone, or by the speaker as a member of the group. ♣ Promising,

threatening, volunteering, offering, guaranteeing, refusals, and pledges. **For example,** I'm going to get it right next time.


5. <mark>**Expressives:**</mark> **Utterances used to express the emotional state of the speaker.** ♣ **They express psychological states and can be statements of pleasure, pain, likes, dislikes, or sorrow.** ♣ **They can be caused by something the speaker does or the hearer does, but they are about the speaker's experience.** ♣ **Apologizing, thanking, congratulating, condoling, welcoming. Examples:** ♣ **I'm really sorry.** ♣ **Congratulations!**

6. <mark>**Declarations:**</mark> **Utterances used to change the state of some entity.** } **The status of the entity changes by the mere uttering of the words.** ♣ **In order to perform a declaration properly, the speaker has to have a special institutional role (power) in a specific context,** ♣ **Naming, appointing, resigning, firing, marrying, divorcing.** ♣ **Example:** **Priest: I now pronounce you husband and wife.**


**Direct & Indirect Speech Acts**

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➢ **Whenever there is a** <mark>**direct relationship**</mark> **between a structure and a function, we have a direct speech act.** **Whenever** **there is** <mark>**an indirect**</mark> **relationship between a structure and a function, we have an indirect speech act.**

| Function | Structure | Utterance |
|---|---|---|
| Question | Interrogative | Did you eat the pizza? |
| Command (or request) | Imperative | Eat the pizza (please)! |
| Statement | Declarative | You ate the pizza. |

## Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

| Structure (direct for each) | Illocutionary Act |
|---|---|
| Declarative | Representative |
| interrogative | Questions |
| Imperative | Directives |
| Declarative | Commissives |
| Exclamatory - Declarative | Expressives |
| Declarative | Declaration |

## Example:

It's cold outside.

{I am telling you that it is cold outside.}   Statement (direct speech act)

OR

{I am asking you to close the door.}   Request (indirect speech act)

## In conclusion,

| Speech act type | Direction of fit | S= Speaker, X= Situation |
|---|---|---|
| Declarations | Words change the world | S causes X |
| Representative | Make words fit the world | S believes X |
| Expressive | Make words fit the world | S feels X |
| Directives | Make the world fit words | S wants X |
| Commissive | Make the world fit words | S intends X |