

Original Paper

Towards an Appraisal of Searle's Pragmatic Theory

Abdullahi Sani, PhD¹

¹ Department of European Languages and Literary Studies, Federal University Birnin-Kebi, Kebi State, Nigeria

Received: January 18, 2026 Accepted: February 22, 2026 Online Published: March 12, 2026

doi:10.22158/fet.v9n1p14

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/fet.v9n1p14>

Abstract

Speech act theory examines communication activities which involve transacting meaning via reference-making. Language means in terms of internal and external referents; in line with this perspective, Searle's (1969) speech act theory is immersed in referential process. This study investigates the theory not just by evaluating its strengths, but also by examining its points of failure as far as speech act theorizing is concerned. The theoretical framework of this study is Modular Speech Act Theory. Concerning the strengths of Searle's speech act theory, this study concludes that: the theory evolves functional illocutionary act categories; it captures the pragmatics of speakers' intention; it acknowledges the institutional nature of speech acts; and it explains deep structure representations of speech acts. However, a major weakness of the theory is its inability to elucidate certain dimensions of language use owing to the non-compliant nature of illocutionary acts and speaker-meaning.

Keywords

pragmatics, speech act, Searle's speech act theory, Modular Speech Act Theory, critique

1. Introduction

Speech act theories are about speech act categories, the verbs they accommodate and their action potentials in contexts. Such theories remain contentious in the literature of pragmatics, because of the intractable nature of speech act. This view corroborates Campbell (1975) who remarks that having a workable taxonomy of illocutionary acts is not easy. In a similar vein, Lorena Pérez Hernández (2011, p. 118) submits that 'the nature of the relationship between speech act verbs and speech act categories has fuelled a wealth of debate from the 1970s to our days. Searle (1979, p. ix) has traditionally voiced the line of thought that takes this relationship to be rather loose: illocutionary acts are, so to speak, natural conceptual kinds, and we should no more suppose that our ordinary language verbs carve the conceptual field of illocutions at its semantic joints than we would suppose that our ordinary language expressions for naming and describing plants and animals correspond exactly to the natural biological

kinds.’ Working out meaning of utterance acts is the core of Searle’s speech act theory. The process is deeply rooted in speaker-hearer contributions to communication rationale. Properly used illocutionary acts can be regarded as those that fulfilled communication rationale (acceptable speaker-hearer discourse behaviour) in one way or the other. Theoretical frameworks in pragmatics facilitate the analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication. This claim is evident in speech act analysis of various discourse genres. In this sense, an integrative critique of Searle’s speech act theory is an attempt to reveal how the strengths and weaknesses of the theory can make or mar the explanation of instances of actual language use within and beyond the sentence, as this study is poised to reveal.

2. Origin and Meaning of Pragmatics

Levinson (1983) reports that ‘the interest in pragmatics developed in part as a reaction or antidote to Chomsky’s treatment of language as an abstract device, or mental ability ... (an abstraction that Chomsky drew in part from the post-Bloomfieldian structuralism that predominated immediately before transformational generative grammar). Generative semanticists looking for the means to undermine Chomsky’s position came out with philosophical thoughts devoted to the importance of the users of language to an understanding of its nature (works by Austin, Stranson, Grice and Searle in particular). To this day, most of the important concepts in pragmatics are drawn directly from philosophy of language.’ The core of a pragmatic analysis of written or spoken communication is the role of context in the use and interpretation of language. This claim will suffice in the defining of pragmatics as ‘a field of language study that is concerned with discourse participants and the factors that determine their use of linguistic and extra-linguistic elements of communication.’ According to Mey (2001), pragmatics is ‘the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of the society.’ Yule (1996) states that pragmatics is ‘the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener or reader.’ In addition, the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1994) defines pragmatics as ‘the subfield of the study of language that investigates the techniques by which language is processed for communication purposes.’ Elements of pragmatics can be regarded as common theoretical concepts in the literature. These include: (a) participants (users of language in context); (b) speech acts (‘locutionary act’ which is an utterance with determinate sense and reference; ‘illocutionary act’ which is the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence by virtue of the conventional force associated with it; and ‘perlocutionary act’ which is the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence); (c) context (refers to the relevant aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance or discourse); (d) non-verbal communication (non-linguistic communication); (e) inference (the process of making logical conclusions from all that a particular context provides to arrive at what a speaker means); (f) presupposition (facts that the participants of discourse take for granted in a particular context of communication); and (g) shared knowledge (common background information shared by the participants of discourse).

3. Theoretical Underpinning

This study is underpinned by Modular Speech Act Theory. The framework is suitable for critiquing Searle's speech act theory because it captures the notion of 'speech community', cognition and the dynamics of transacting extra-sentential meanings through the instrumentality of speech acts. Graham H. Bird cited in Savas L. Tsohatzidis (1994, pp. 317-319) reports extensively on Modular Speech Act Theory:

Modular Speech Act Theory is that part of modular pragmatics that focuses on speech acts. Accordingly, modular speech act theory is a research programme. Its theoretical objectives are delineation and explanation of some system or systems of knowledge of speech act use, in both production and understanding. Within the conceptual framework of modular cognitive pragmatics, modular speech act theory tries to depict human knowledge of using speech acts in appropriate contexts in terms of modular systems and central ones ...

Within the framework of cognitive pragmatics, the theoretical objective of the research programme is not to specify a family of verbs present in a dictionary that reflects, says, the current usage of certain words in expressions by members of the group of speakers of the cultural entity called, say, Modern British English. Cognitive studies of language do not address cultural entities of the nature of Modern British English, but rather cognitive entities, idiolects that persons have in their minds and brains. Accordingly, cognitive pragmatics does not aim at any enumeration or classification of verbs and correlative speech act types of languages such as Old English or Modern Hebrew, which are cultural entities, but rather at an adequate delineation and explanation of the class of cognitively possible speech act types, that is, types of speech acts whose existence is compatible with the cognitive constraints that are imposed on human linguistic activity by the human cognitive systems of pragmatic knowledge.

A theory of speech act force, within the conceptual framework of cognitive pragmatics, is descriptively adequate and explanatorily powerful, if it shows how the class of the cognitively possible speech act types is delineated in terms of:

(SAT 1) a general conception of speech act type as a rule-governed practice whose system of rules satisfies a restricted class of conditions;

(SAT 2) a restricted class of cognitively possible basic speech act types; and

(SAT 3) a restricted class of basic amplifications of speech act types, that is to say, operations on speech act types (functions) that generate cognitively possible speech act types (systems of rules).

Searle's theory of speech acts (Searle 1969) made several steps towards a general conception of speech act, as required by (SAT 1). The most important contribution of

that theory was the deep insight into the nature of the systems of rules that govern speech acts ...

Thus far speech act force theory has been stretched within the conceptual framework of cognitive pragmatics. Within the more specific conceptual framework of modular pragmatics, a theory of speech act force will address issues of P-modularity and centrality of related system of knowledge...

4. Searle's Speech Act Theory

Searle's seminal book, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, which was developed in subsequent works such as Searle (1979), was a speech act proposal. It explains human communication as a rule-governed activity in which speech act operates as the core. According to Searle, participants of discourse obey rules of communication intentionally. The subsequent sections of this study provide more insights on Searle's speech act theory. However, see Searle (1969) for elaborate perspectives on the theory.

5. An Appraisal of Searle's Speech Act Theory

In appraising Searle's speech act theory, this study examines the strong points and weak points therein.

5.1 Strong Points of the Theory

5.1.1 Illocutionary Act Categories

Searle's (1969) speech act taxonomy is an attempt to refine Austin's (1962) speech act taxonomy. Searle's taxonomy is based on 'illocutionary point', 'direction of fit' and 'sincerity conditions' (as well as other features including the role of authority, discourse relations, etc.). See Searle (1979, pp. 1-12) for additional tips in this regard. According to Searle (1969), 'illocutionary point' is the 'purpose' of the speech act in question. The second criterion is 'direction of fit'. It concerns the match between our words and the world. While some speech acts try to get the words (or, more specifically, their propositional content) to match the world, others try to get the world to match the words. Assertions for example, try to get our words to match the world while promises and requests try to get the world to match our words. In his analysis, Searle represents the word-to-world direction of fit with a downward arrow while an upward arrow is used to represent the world-to-word direction of fit. Searle notes that direction of fit is always a consequence of illocutionary point. A third major criterion concerns differences in the psychological states expressed. Thus, a person who 'states, explains, asserts, or claims that P' expresses the belief that P; a man who 'promises, vows, threatens, or pledges to do A' expresses a desire (want, wish) that H do A'; a man who 'apologizes for doing A' expresses regret at having done A'. The psychological state expressed in the performance of a speech act is therefore the 'sincerity condition' of the act. Apart from these three major criteria, which Searle considers the most important, he also examines other important aspects of a speech act in his taxonomy. These include the

role of authority, discourse relations, the force or strength with which the illocutionary force is presented, differences in the status of speaker and hearer, differences in the way the utterance relates to the interests of the speaker and hearer, differences between acts that are always speech acts and those that can be but need not be performed as speech acts, differences between acts that require extra-linguistic institutions for their performance and those that do not.

Like Austin, Searle evolves five categories of illocutionary acts: Assertives, Directives, Commissive, Expressives and Declarations. According to Searle, ‘the point or purpose of the members of the Assertive class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something’s being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition.’ The direction of fit is one in which ‘we try to fit our words to the world’ and the psychological state expressed is ‘belief that P’. The simplest test of an Assertive is that it can literally be characterized as true or false. In very simplified terms, its deep structure can be represented as follows:

(where \rightarrow represents an assertion sign, the words-to-world direction of fit, B the sincerity condition of belief, and P the propositional content. Examples of verbs in the category of Assertives are: boast, conclude, deduce, etc. This class accommodates most of Austin’s Expositives and many of his Verdictives. Searle’s second category is Directives, in which the illocutionary point consists in the fact that ‘they are attempts ...to get the hearer to do something’. The direction of fit is world-to-words, which means that the speaker tries to get the reality of the world to conform to his words. The sincerity condition is want (or wish or desire) and its propositional content is that the Hearer (H) will perform some future action A as represented below:

! W (H does A)

(where the exclamation mark represents the illocutionary-point-indicating device for members of this class, the upward arrow the world-to-word direction of fit, and W the sincerity condition). The deep structure of Directives is as follows:

I verb you + you Fut Vol Verb (NP) Adv

I order you + you will leave (with Equi NP deletion of the repeated you).

Examples of verbs used as Directives include: ask, order, command, request, beg, pray, entreat, invite, advise. Many of Austin’s Behabitives and Exercitives fall into this category.

Searle retains Austin’s definition for his third category of speech acts which is Commissive. As with Directives, the direction of fit in Commissives is world-to-words and the propositional content is always that ‘the speaker will perform some future action A’. The sincerity condition is intention; that is, ‘S intends that some future action A be done’, It is represented below:

C I (S does A)

Its deep structure is represented as:

I verb (you) + I Fut Verb (NP) (Adv).

I promise you + I will pay you the money (with Equi NP deletion of repeated ‘I’)

The illocutionary point of the fourth category which is Expressives, is ‘to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content’. The deep structure of Expressives is represented thus:

I Verb you + I VP = = = gerundive nominalization.

I apologize for behaving badly.

Such syntactic facts, Searle points out, are consequences of the lack of direction of fit. Expressives is represented below:

$E \emptyset (p) (S/H + \text{property})$.

(where E stands for Expressives, \emptyset for the lack of a direction of fit, and P for the propositional content which ascribes to the speaker or to the hearer some property).

Verbs used as Expressives include: condole, deplore, welcome, congratulate.

Declarations are acts in which ‘the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality; successful performance guarantees that propositional content corresponds to the world’. In order that declarations be successfully performed, extra-linguistic institutions are involved, and there are rules which are ‘constitutive’ of the speech act, unlike in supernatural declarations such as when God says ‘Let there be light’ and declarations concerning language itself such as I define, I name, I call etc. Declarations are symbolically represented thus:

$D \emptyset$

As the arrow indicates, the direction of fit in Declarations is both words-to-world and world-to-words. The null symbol represents the fact that Declarations have no sincerity condition. The deep structure of Declarations may be roughly represented as follows:

I Verb NP + NP be pred

I/we (hereby) declare + state of war exists (p.26).

Some institutions require Assertive claims to be made with the force of Declarations, and this is why Searle evolves a class of Assertive Declarations, which, unlike Declarations, share with Assertives a sincerity condition. Examples are ‘I nominate you’, ‘I fire you’, etc.

5.1.2 Intention

Searle’s speech act theory acknowledges the significance of intention in the explanation of language use. Speakers choose between direct and indirect propositions depending on the situation posed by an ongoing communication activity. In the communication of speakers’ intentions, manipulating the resources of language is fundamentally about communicative competence. Eva Alcon Soler (2012, p. 513) notes that ‘the complexity of the speech act requires face saving maneuvers to accommodate the non-compliant nature of the act. Thus, a series of pre-refusal, main refusal and post-refusal sequences, as well as the choice of direct and indirect strategies, and adjuncts to refusals can be expected to appear in negotiated sequences in response to different speech acts such as invitations, requests, suggestions, and offers. Searle’s concept of ‘expressibility’ implies that speaker-meaning cannot be dislodged in

communication analysis. Speakers can choose any illocutionary strategy or expression to convey intended meanings, irrespective of the linguistic conventions of the language engaged. The repertoire of language provides language users with linguistic elements for the use of deviant forms of communication (pragmatic choices). In this regard, there can be personalized word meanings. However, personalized word meanings should be context-sensitive as there are different contexts that impinge on utterance acts. For example, Adegbija (1999, p. 192) mentions types of contexts:

Broadly, we may identify at least four types of context as impinging on utterance interpretation: the physical, the socio-cultural, the linguistic, and the psychological. Pertinent questions for probing into the context include the following: Did the communicative exchange occur at night, in the morning, twenty years ago, at a church, at a mosque, in a bedroom, in the market, at a cemetery, at a hospital. Socio-culturally, one may ask questions such as these: what are the beliefs, habits, value systems, or cultures of those involved? Are their religious and cultural beliefs at hand? Linguistically, what are the other words appearing in the environment of the word used? What do they mean? What do they imply within the physical and socio-cultural setting? Psychologically, what is the state of mind of those involved in the interaction?

5.1.3 Institutional Acts

By contending that the performance of illocutionary acts concerns invoking social institutions, Searle positions his speech act theory as a theory that is in tandem with the view that shared knowledge is crucial in the use and interpretation of language. Speech acts are felicitous when meanings sociopragmatic factors which involve social institutions direct interlocutory roles as in conversational turns. According to Bosco et al. (2006), 'conversation is a two-fold activity in which the participants form utterances that are products of shared meaning, and such utterances produce felicitous results to the communicative event.' Austin (ibid) posits that speech acts can be felicitous (happy) when the required conditions (appropriate participants, the right words at the right place) for their performance are met. For instance, performing a felicitous speech act such as declaring a man and a woman as husband and wife presupposes that: the person making the declaration should be in a position to do so (e.g. a priest); the usual utterance should be uttered; the utterance should be uttered in the correct physical setting (e.g. a church) and the person making the declaration should have the consent of those to be declared as husband and wife. In the performance of other institutional (social) acts, felicity conditions are compulsory. A person who pronounces a man and a woman as husband and wife without ensuring that the felicity condition for doing so are met, should know that the pronouncement is null and void; no expected perlocutionary act will be achieved. In other words, a word-to-world direction of fit (as in Searle's speech act theory) is not applicable in this case.

5.1.4 Deep Structure Representations

Searle's speech act categories are like a cover-term for possible illocutionary acts in real instances of language use. Acheoah's typology of illocutionary strategies accentuates this claim. The illocutionary

act types evolved by Searle finds their relevance in different domains where language is used to inform, persuade, regulate, direct and express views on a wide range of societal phenomena. Given the fact that meaning is a clause-structure phenomenon, Searle's speech act theorizing is a giant stride in the elucidation of written and spoken communication. Around the clause, discrete illocutionary acts in Seale's speech act taxonomy can be attached or detached, thus impinging on the semantics of clause constituents. Levinson (ibid) submits that 'since the notion of indirect illocutionary force may be re-analyzed in conversation analytic terms, it follows that there are strong relations between discourse structure and sentence structure in this area too. Many of the semantic processes called 'movement rules' seem to have the function of indicating how information in the clause relates to what has been talked about before – and this is in line with conversational organization in pragmatics called 'turn-taking and repair'.' Commenting on the potential of structure to mean in discourse, Levinson (ibid) submits that 'since the notion of indirect illocutionary force may be re-analyzed in conversation analytic terms, it follows that there are strong relations between discourse structure and sentence structure in this area too. Many of the semantic processes called 'movement rules' seem to have the function of indicating how information in the clause relates to what has been talked about before – and this is in line with conversational organization in pragmatics called 'turn-taking and repair'.' Searle's notion of 'direction of fit' demonstrates the communion between language and referent. It thus makes clear the fact illocutionary acts are not unfocused acts.

Searle's deep structure representations of illocutionary acts is a useful approach to the analysis of indirect speech acts because both notions concern surface and deep semantic primes of utterance acts. It is not possible to say one thing and mean something additional to what is secondarily meant (as in indirect speech acts) without acknowledging or relating the two meanings with linguistic conventions. Adegbija (1999) notes that indirect speech acts are interpreted at a higher level of inference-making which presupposes the use of linguistic and extra-linguistic variables to arrive at total meaning. In working out deeper meanings, diachronic contexts or social institutions are facilitators. Thus, Allan Keith (1986) posits that when a speaker uses an utterance, the addressee should be able to understand the world-spoken-of. David A. Brenders (1989) rightly observes that 'speech act theory, as a part of the philosophy of language, has been concerned with analyzing the performance of linguistic acts (asserting, promising, questioning) as a rule-governed form of behaviour...' Searle's 'direction of fit' captures the fundamental stance of early language philosophers, that 'words are actions'. It is also a fact that the illocutionary act categories evolved by Searle amplify the argument that 'the minimum unit of analysis of sentences is not word but the actions performed with words.'

5.2 *Weak Points of the Theory*

5.2.1 Non-compliant Nature of Illocutionary Acts

Speech act theories reveal the non-compliant nature of illocutionary acts. For example, clause structure modification can distort the illocutionary force of an utterance. This implies that the semantics of illocutionary act categories in Searle's speech act theory can be relocated. Acheoah (2014) contends

that ‘there are other illocutionary acts besides ‘doing x’ and ‘attempting to do x’ which are mentioned in Austin’s (ibid) speech act theory. In this regard, an act of promise can take the following forms:

- (a) ‘Doing x’ (i.e Doing x Unconditionally);
- (b) ‘Attempting to Do x’;
- (c) ‘Talking about Doing x’;
- (d) ‘Doing x Conditionally’.

‘Doing x’ means ‘Doing x Unconditionally’ and this is the case when a marker of the conditional clause, such as ‘if’, is not introduced into the sentence. In other words, when the markers of other adverbial clauses e.g: the adverbial clause of reason (because); adverbial clause of concession (although); adverbial clause of time (when), and so on, are the initiators of the subordinate clauses, ‘Doing x’ counts as ‘Doing x’. But this is not the case when the initiator of the subordinate clause is a marker of the conditional clause (unless, if). Consider:

A: I passed the exam.

B: Expect ₦2000 from me tomorrow (promising unconditionally).

The second turn in this conversation is informed by the first. Thus, there is a covert marker of the adverb of reason in B as the speaker’s reason for promising A is that A passed the exam. In the first conversational turn, the act is performed whether or not the reason for it is stated. However, ‘Doing x’ could occur in different types of clauses on the basis of tense as in:

- i. Expect ₦2000 from me tomorrow for passing the exam;
- ii. I am promising you ₦2000 for passing the exam;
- iii. I am to give you ₦2000 for passing the exam;
- iv. You are entitled to ₦2000 for passing the exam;
- v. ₦2000 is yours for passing the exam.

Indeed, a proper interpretation of i-iv reveals that the speaker has promised (done x) and in doing this, various clauses are involved. What is important here is that these sentences talk about a speaker’s intention to do something later (future). In (B), we are able to infer that the speaker ‘tries to do x’ but may not eventually do it if H does not fulfill the requirement for such an act to be fulfilled. Consider the extension:

C: I failed the exam.

D: Then you can no longer have the ₦2000 promised.

In (C), the speaker uses (A) as a reference or topic. This can be illustrated using the adjacency pairs below, where E and F are co- discussants:

E: I passed the exam.

F: Why telling me? I was not the one, but Otun who told you that you would get ₦2000 from him.

The underlined parts in F’s utterance, count as ‘Doing x’ when it is not in a reported speech. As can be seen above, F is ‘Talking about Doing x’ rather than (actually) ‘Doing x’.

In the examples below, the non-compliant nature of illocutionary acts is further explained using an illocutionary act of insulting:

S: Have you brought my money?

H: Not at all.

S: If the money is not given to me by tomorrow, I shall insult you.

The condition for fulfilling the act of insulting in this adjacency pairs is 'H not giving S the money'. To determine the illocutionary force of an utterance H needs know whether S is 'Doing x', 'Attempting to Do x', 'Talking about Doing x' or 'Doing x Conditionally'. As Austin rightly notes, whether or not speakers have the intention to produce effects or not, such effects may occur. The goal of the Illocutionary Frames Principle is not to state the conditions for perlocutionary acts, but to state the various forms of uptake in instances of language use. If H knows that S is not insulting or promising or commanding, but merely talking about insulting, promising or commanding, then perlocutionary sequels become predictable.

5.2.2 The Pragmatic Constraints of Speaker-meaning

Speaker-meaning is immersed in speakers' intention, which remains a problematic component of communication, because it is neither fixed nor specific. Intention changes in ongoing communication as other variables unfold. There may be need to declare speakers' intention for a communication activity to progresses. These facts distort Searle's notions such as 'utterance act' and 'psychological state expressed'. For example, the encoder of an illocutionary act of promise may not have the desire to fulfill it. Intention is crucial in the use of illocutionary acts. If speakers' intention is not unfolding or aligning with the context and illocutionary acts deployed in a communicative event, the rule-governed perspective of human communication which Searle (1969) holds, is dislodged. Savas L. T. (1994) observes that 'the study of illocutionary act should be acknowledged as an indispensable component of the study of meaning.' To be involved in deductions on speakers' intentions for using certain utterance acts in certain contexts, the linguistic items that convey such utterance acts are first understood by hearers as they mean in the grammar/structure and vocabulary conventions of the language that conveys the communication activity. In terms of speaker-meaning, Searle's deep structure representations of illocutionary acts resonate with psychological underpinnings of language use. Participants of discourse do not converge with empty mindsets. There is usually speaker-hearer understanding that illocutionary acts have underlying principles behind their use from speaker-end. Searle's speech act theory attempts to bring these phenomena to the fore, with an approach that have converging and diverging points from predating speech act theories. The points of convergence and divergence can be construed in terms of the complexity and intractable nature of focused speaker-meaning. David Harrah cited in Savas L. T. (1994) asserts that 'most speech acts seem to be focused and directed. They are intended as coming from the agent and going to the receivers or audience. They are intended to have a certain point, and they are intended to be construed as having a certain point.' When expressions or illocutionary acts are used outside their denotative or structural

sense, psychological states expressed and propositional contents are often difficult to ascertain. Perlocutionary acts expected may also not be achieved. Consider the examples below:

Buyer: By this time tomorrow, I shall pay three naira for everything. I promise you.

Trader: How?

The encoder of 'I promise you' is not promising. He is 'threatening' the addressee because unknown to this addressee, there will be forceful implementation of price reduction the following day (Emergent Context). Acheoah (2015) evolves Emergent Context (EC) to refer to sudden discourse phenomena that have the potential to relocate illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

The constraints of speaker-meaning and its implications on Searle's speech act postulations are also noticeable in the following utterances in which the speaker personalizes meaning:

- (1) The shirt was robbed.
- (2) The bank was robbed.
- (3) The shirt was stolen.

In discourse, the meaning-potential of utterance acts depends not just on the encoder of the act, but also on encoder-decoder relationship. It may also depend on the sociolinguistic attributes of the addressee. For example, a son who 'warns' his father does not 'warn', but 'insults'; but a father who 'warns' his son, actually 'warns'. Participant element plays crucial roles in human communication because it affects different aspects of the activity including what Searle calls 'psychological state expressed'. If a politician says 'Vote me into power, and I will build free housing estates in the country', the psychological state expressed may not be 'desire to do A' (action), depending on how the addressees explore world knowledge and the situational context. These discourse realities imply that Searle's speech act theorizing cannot adequately account for certain dimensions of language use. In countries where politicians fulfill promises, the encoder of a promise is believed to be 'expressing a desire to do A'. This perspective of illocutionary acts captures cross-cultural pragmatics, which accentuate the unresolved state of speech act theorizing. If Searle's speech act theory elucidates the influence of discourse participants' relationship in the understanding of utterance acts, the theory can be much more incisive in speaker-meaning postulations. For example, Adebija (ibid) says the encoder of 'hello' is not 'greeting', but 'warning' when the utterance is made by a father to prevent his little son from going near fire. In some contexts, 'sincerity condition' and 'expressibility principle may not even apply. Considering the fact that pragmatic theories of classical theorists including Searle desire critical breakdown to capture illocutionary act types, Acheoah (2018) evolves illocutionary strategies that cover literal and non-literal utterance acts, in addition to being a response to the generic feature of Searle's speech act theorizing. Illocutionary act strategies in Acheoah (2018) include: ascribing quality to the object requested; using a constituent to demand a whole; offering to do what H will not accept; declaring what H will not do if he/she possesses a certain quality; mentioning a constitutive referent;

and making an ironical remark. See the theory for sentential examples and their non-literal/indirect propositional potentials.

6. Conclusion

Within the purview of Cognitive Speech Act Theory, this study investigates the strengths and weaknesses of Searle's (1969) speech act theory. Searle's speech act theory is a springboard for understanding the production and processing of speech acts. It gives fascinating insights on Modular Pragmatics theorizing. This is crucial as illocutionary acts are believed to have non-compliant nature and the cognition-related attributes of human communication. The study acknowledges that speech act theories, including that of Searle are works-in-progress because human communication is too intriguing, fascinating and complex to be explained by a single linguistic theory. According to Levinson (ibid), 'the various inadequacies of speech act theories have called for greater focus on theories which widely capture how language functions according to geographical locations in which it is used. In this way, speech act theory is being currently undermined from the outside by the growth of disciplines concerned with the empirical study of natural language use (as Austin indeed foresaw). There are two major traditions that concern themselves with the details of actual language use in a way pertinent to theories of speech acts. One is the 'ethnography of speaking', which has been concerned with the cross-cultural study of language usage.' Conclusively, Searle's speech act theory is a remarkable effort because: it provides illocutionary act categories; it covers speaker-meaning-related pragmatics, intention, deep structure phenomenon, and the institutional dimension of communication activity. However, the theory has to be advanced to provide richer insights on the pragmatics of human communication via the instrumentality of speech acts.

References

- Acheoah, J. E. (2014). The illocutionary frames principle (IFP) and the Austinian Ppostulations: A clause-structure investigative discourse. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science, Linguistics and Psychology*, 13(13), 21-29.
- Acheoah, J. E. (2015). The pragma-crafting theory: A proposed theoretical framework for pragmatic analysis. *ARJEL*, 1(2), 21-32.
- Acheoah, J. E. (2018). Towards a typology of illocutionary strategies: A case Study of selected Nigerian film discourses. *Bulletin of Advanced English Studies*, 1(2), 150-159. <https://doi.org/10.31559/baes2018.1.2.3>
- Adegbija, E. F. (Ed.) (1999). *The English language and literature in English: An introductory handbook*. Ilorin: University of Ilorin.
- Allan, K. (1986). *Linguistic Meaning* Vols. I and II. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Austin, J. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Bosco, F., Monica, B. & Bara, B. (2004). The fundamental context categories in understanding communicative intentions. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36, 467-48. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(03\)00055-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(03)00055-9)
- Brenders, D. A. (1982). Fallacies in the coordinated management of meaning: A philosophy of language critique of the Hierarchical Organization of Coherent Conversation and Related Theory. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73, 329-348. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638709383812>
- Campbell, B. G. (1975). Towards a workable taxonomy of illocutionary forces, and its implication to works of imaginative literature. In *Language and Style* 8.
- Encyclopedia Americana* vol. 22. (1994). (p. 514). New York: Americana Group Ltd.
- Eva, A. S. (2012). Teachability and bilingualism effects on third language learners' pragmatic knowledge. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 9(4), 511-541. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ip-2012-0028>
- Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813313>
- Mey, J. (2001). *An introduction to pragmatics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Savas, L. T. (1994). Ways of doing things with words: An introduction. In L. T. Savas (Ed.), *Foundations of speech acts theory: philosophical and linguistic perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Searle, J. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173438>
- Searle, J. (1979). *Expression and meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609213>