

# Speech Act Theory and Its Usefulness in Applied Linguistics

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

Speech act theory has developed in the past four decades notably as a result of the work of three linguistic philosophers — J. L. Austin, J. R. Searle, and H. P. Grice — all of whom advocated a pragmatic approach to meaning. Speech act theory has to do with the functions and uses of language on the basis of the idea that when we speak, we perform acts. J. R. Searle went so far as to claim that ‘a theory of language is part of a theory of action’ (1969: 17). In a sense Searle even regarded the whole of linguistics as pragmatics.

This paper falls into two parts, a theoretical and an applied. In the theoretical part I shall discuss the main concepts associated with speech act theory: illocutionary force, illocutionary verbs, indirect speech acts, problems involved in taxonomy, etc. In the application part I shall consider how these ideas of speech acts have contributed to various areas of applied linguistics, particularly practical language learning/teaching, especially in the development of functional notional syllabuses and a communicative approach, and cross-linguistic pragmatic analysis

such as politeness studies. Now that the *Monbushoo* (the Ministry of Education in Japan) is promoting the place of oral communication in the curriculum for English education, it will be worthwhile to foster a deeper understanding of speech act theory, which created the theoretical foundation for the development of these communicative teaching methods.

## 1.0. THEORETICAL BASES

### 1.1. PERFORMATIVES

#### 1.1.1. DEFINITION OF SPEECH ACTS

Speech act theory deals with the functions and uses of language. We might say that speech acts, in their broadest meaning, are all the acts we perform through speaking and all the things we *do* when we speak. The underlying idea is that when we speak, we do not merely utter sentences; we also perform acts, such as *making requests or statements, giving reports, asking questions, giving warnings, making promises, giving approval, regretting and apologizing*, etc. As Wittgenstein puts it, 'the meaning of a word is revealed in its use.'

#### 1.1.2. 'EVERY SENTENCE IS A PERFORMATIVE'

Austin started by drawing a distinction between constative and performative utterances. Austin originally held, in his *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), that performative utterances are essentially different from constative (or descriptive) utterances. Although

constative utterances could be judged in traditional terms of truth-falsehood, performatives were neither true or false. However, the following findings led Austin to revise his views; a regular non-performative sentence like [1] has a meaning that can be made explicit by attaching some performative verbs at the beginning of the sentence as in [2a] or [2b].

[1] Mary did not do it.

[2a] Mary maintains that she did not do it.

[2b] Mary states that she did not do it.

(Leech 1983: 175-176)

Austin came to realize that the original distinction of 'saying something' and 'doing something' is an implausible distinction. Saying or asserting that something is X is itself a kind of doing. Constative or descriptive utterances, are therefore just one kind of performatives. This finding led Austin to the conclusion that all utterances are performatives in the sense of forming an action, rather than merely an issue of saying something. Austin made this clear by drawing a distinction between *explicit performatives*, such as

[3] I promise that I shall come to see you

and *implicit performatives* or *primary performatives*, such as

[4] I shall come to see you.

Austin came to the conclusion that in all ordinary utterances like [1]–[4], regardless of whether they have a performative verb or not, there is both a *doing* element and a *saying* element (Leech 1983: 176).

Ross (1970) explains this phenomenon from the viewpoint of generative semantics. According to Ross, ‘in its “deepest structure”, every sentence is a performative; that is, every sentence contains as its main subject a first-person pronoun, and as its main verb a performative verb in the simple present tense.’ For example, the declarative sentence

[5] Tomorrow will be rainy

has, in this view, a deep structure of a form such as one of the following:

[6a] I state that tomorrow will be rainy.

[6b] I predict that tomorrow will be rainy.

[6c] I warn you that tomorrow will be rainy.

Questions and commands are better understood with a similar deep structure analysis:

Open the door. <— I command you to open the door.

How much are those bananas? <— I request of you to tell me  
how much those bananas are.

It follows that the difference between an ordinary statement like [5] and a corresponding performative like [6a] is, in this analysis, simply that a transformational rule of performative deletion has been applied to [5], deleting from the front of it, the subject, a performative verb, and an indirect object (ibid.: 325).

Thus, contrary to his earlier distinction between *saying* something and *doing* something with language, Austin radically introduced the insightful idea that 'saying or asserting that something is so *is itself a kind of doing*. Constative utterances or statements are, therefore, just one kind of performative,' whether primary or explicit (Lyons 1977: 729; italics in original).

### 1.1.3. ILLOCUTIONARY PERFORMATIVES

In a further development of his theory of speech acts, Austin (1962) distinguished locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, as follows:

(i) A **locutionary act** is an act of saying: the production of a meaningful utterance with a certain sense and a certain reference.

(ii) An **illocutionary act** is an act performed *in* saying something: *making a statement or promise, issuing a command or request, asking a*

*question, christening a ship, etc.*

(iii) A **perlocutionary act** is an act performed *by* means of saying something: *persuading someone to do something, getting someone to believe that something is so, moving someone to anger, sadness, or happiness, etc.*

#### 1.1.4. PERFORMATIVE AS METALINGUISTIC

To conduct a careful analysis of illocutionary acts, we need to distinguish between the analysis of illocutionary force and the analysis of illocutionary verbs. Whereas illocutionary verbs are a part of grammar, which can be analyzed in clear categorical terms, illocutionary force has to be analyzed in rhetorical and non-categorical terms. Thus, the analysis of illocutionary verbs deals with grammar while the analysis of the illocutionary force of utterance has to do with pragmatics (Leech 1983: 174).

This is due to the very nature of performatives: 'performative is metalinguistic.' Ross claims that the essence of the pragmatic analysis is that 'the subject and performative verb and indirect object are "in the air" — that is, they belong to the extra-linguistic content of the utterance rather than to its actual structure' (Leech 1974: 326).

Performatives force a label on themselves; they not only clarify their illocutionary force, they also categorize it. Thus, the imperative

sentence, *Sit down*, could have an inconstant, and in a way indefinite, force that might, in different situations, be categorized as a suggestion, an invitation, an order, or an offer. However, the statement *I order you to sit down*, by defining itself as an order, creates no such ambiguities. Therefore, it is inaccurate to 'give all utterances a categorical structure which only a small number of special metalinguistic utterances possess' (Leech 1983: 182). The problems involved in taxonomy are discussed passim below.

### 1.1.5. CLASSIFYING ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE

The notion of speech acts might be best clarified by examples that classify illocutionary acts into major types. Searle (1976) presents the clearest taxonomy. For Searle, the criterion for classification is illocutionary point or purpose of act, from the speaker's perspective. According to Searle, speech acts can be grouped into the following five general categories based on the speaker's intentions:

**Representatives:** A fundamental reason for using language is to let others know the state of things (i.e., how things are) by, for example, *saying, asserting, concluding, claiming, reporting*. One test of a representative is whether it can be classified as true or false.

**Directives:** The class of directives includes all speech acts that are used as attempts by the speaker not just to refer to the world and make

statements about it, but to get the hearer to do something (e.g., *suggesting, requesting, questioning*).

**Commissives:** Commissives refer to those illocutionary acts whose purpose is to commit the speaker to do something (e.g., *promising, offering, threatening*).

Searle makes a distinction between representatives and directives /commissives on the basis of the difference in the orientation or direction of *fit* between the words of the speech act and the state of affairs in the world. In the case of representatives the direction of fit is words-to-world, that is, what is in question is whether the words uttered match the world (these are epistemic speech acts). In the case of both directives and commissives, the direction of fit is world-to-words, that is, future actions are to be done in accordance with words uttered on a previous occasion (these are deontic speech acts) (Searle 1979: 4).

**Expressives:** The intention of the utterances that belong to this class is to express feelings and attitudes about the state of affairs (e.g., *thanking, regretting, welcoming, apologizing, deploring*). There is no direction of fit in this class. Although representatives, directives, and commissives are all linked to a consistent psychological state (*belief, wish; etc.*), the psychological states conveyed by expressives are diversified and more temporary.



**Declaratives:** There are some utterances that effect changes in the world simply *through* their successful use. From the time of the utterance, 'I declare war' by the queen or the prime minister, the war is initiated. When the utterance 'You are fired' is stated by the boss, the employee must start job-hunting for a new position. The main characteristic of this class is that the performance produces a correspondence between the words and the world. This category is close to Austin's (1962) original concept of a performative, an act of doing something rather than an act of saying something. (Searle 1976: viii, discussed by Richards 1985: 104-5; Levinson 1983: 240)

### 1.1.6. PROBLEMS OF TAXONOMY

It is important to notice that categorization of the illocutionary force is subjective taxonomy, which is far from clear-cut.

#### 1.1.6.1. TAXONOMY AND PERFORMATIVE VERBS

Although the great majority of speech acts can probably be analyzed as examples of Searle's major classes, there are some speech acts that are outside these particular taxonomies. For example, Fraser (1975) adds a few categories that include 'acts of evaluating' and 'acts of suggesting'. Thus, the question of taxonomy has been quite controversial; there is no clear boundary among each class. Illocutionary force is very often a matter of *degree* rather than *kind*.

(See section 2.1.2.6. for a discussion of this.) The problem of taxonomy is due to illocutionary force's metalinguistic nature. To deal with this, it will be necessary to differentiate performative verbs from *explicit performatives* (sentence or utterance). Performative verbs are those that explicitly label the acts that are performed, for example, 'I promise to call on you', an explicit performative that contrasts with the implicit 'I'll call on you.' There are specific syntactic rules that apply when a verb is to function performatively, such as the rule that the subject (if expressed) be the first person, the addressee (if expressed) be the second person, and that the verb be in the present tense. Thus, 'I promise you that I'll call on you' is explicitly performative, but 'He promised that he'd call on you' is not a promise or commissive at all, but a report (Richards 1985: 106). More analysis of the problems involved in taxonomy and speech act verbs is presented in sections 1.2.2. and 2.1.2.6.

### 1.1.6.2. TAXONOMY AND DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

It is important to realize that speech acts also take place within discourse, and that the interpretation of speech act force is often dependent on the discourse or transactional context.<sup>1</sup> Hymes (1972) states that 'the level of speech acts *mediates* between the usual levels of grammar and the rest of a speech event in that it implicates both

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1 The importance of conversational-level analysis and speech act is recognized by analysts of modality, too. Sweetser (1990) introduces the concept of 'speech act modality' and opposes the idea of assuming a separation between speech act domain and modal operators; she stresses the importance of applying the modal concepts to the conversation interaction and speech act domains (Papafragou 2000).

linguistic form and social norm' (cited by Richards 1985: 102). There are, however, some general problems with the application of speech act theory in the analysis of conversational discourse. As Levinson puts it, 'If one looks even curiously at a transcribed record of a conversation, it becomes immediately clear that we do not know how to assign speech acts in a non-arbitrary way' (1980: 20 cited by Brown and Yule 1983: 233). It is possible that, from the speaker's perspective, not each conventional sentence-based classification, but several sentences or syntactic chunks joined together, may form a 'single act'. Thus, a relatively extended utterance could be interpreted as an apology or as a warning. On the other hand, there are cases in which one utterance may perform several concurrent speech acts. Let us consider the following utterance of a husband to his wife:

Hey, Susan, you've passed the driving test.

He may be 'doing' several things simultaneously. He may at the same time be *asserting*, *congratulating*, *apologizing* (for his doubts about her success), etc. As it is conceived now, 'speech act theory does not offer the discourse analyst a way of determining *how* a particular set of linguistic elements, uttered in a particular conversational context, comes to receive a particular interpreted meaning' (Brown and Yule 1983: 233).

### 1.1.7. INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS

In studies of speech acts, so-called indirect speech acts are another important issue. Gordon and Lakoff (1971) have, on the basis of assumptions made by Searle (1969, 1975), advocated the idea that commands may be released not only directly by an imperative sentence such as 'Open the door', but also indirectly. It is possible to perform an illocutionary act, not only by questioning, but also by stating, the hearer-based condition, so that along with 'Can you open the door?', the statement 'You can open the door' may also be uttered as an act of command (Lyons 1977: 785).

What follows is that the notion of speech acts obscures the distinction between the meaning of a sentence and the illocutionary force of an utterance. In other words, it makes it possible for an utterance to have two kinds of illocutionary force: its actual (literal) and its incidental illocutionary force. For example, 'I want you to do the job' may incidentally be meant as a statement, but actually as a request — a request made by making a statement (Searle 1975: 59). Thus, 'Can you tell me the time?' and 'Do you know what time it is?' are perhaps the most conventionally uttered sentences for making a request, and their actual illocutionary force can be explained in terms of the principles that regulate the performance of indirect illocutionary acts. It can be understood that in the context, in terms of what Grice (1975) calls conversational implicature, these sentences imply a particular request

(Lyons 1977: 785).

Bearing these principles in mind, we should understand that particular expressions are more popular than others in the performance of indirect speech acts. For example, 'Can you pass me the salt?' is a more normal request than 'Are you able to pass me the salt?' Moreover, such formulae as 'Can you...?' or 'Would you mind...?' have become so conventionalized that it is natural to treat them as requests rather than questions, even if they are utterances that have both an actual (literal) and an incidental illocutionary force (Lyons 1977: 786).

## 1.2. SPEECH ACT VERBS

Austin (1962) pointed out that there are over a thousand speech act verbs.<sup>2</sup> As previously mentioned, however, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of speech acts and verbs. The former is non-categorical and non-scalar, whereas the latter is categorical. As Searle says, 'differences in illocutionary verbs are a good guide, but by no means a sure guide to differences in illocutionary acts' (1979: 2). Although verbs provide a useful taxonomy for speech acts, the acts are not in fact equivalent to the verbs that frequently name them. It is misleading to assume that there is always a correspondence between performative verbs and individual speech acts (i.e., locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wierzbicka (1987) is a good lexicon of speech act verbs.

<sup>3</sup> See Leech (1983: 201-2) for further discussion of this point.

## 1.2.1. CATEGORIES OF SPEECH ACT VERBS

### 1.2.1.1. ILLOCUTIONARY AND PERLOCUTIONARY VERBS

The distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary and other speech act categories can be best illustrated by showing some examples of verbs and verb-like expressions.

**ILLOCUTIONARY:** *report, announce, predict, admit, request, suggest, order, propose, express, thank.*

**PERLOCUTIONARY:** *bring the hearer to learn that, persuade, deceive, encourage, irritate, frighten, amuse, impress, embarrass, bore.*

(Alston 1964: 35, discussed in Leech 1983: 203)

### 1.2.1.2. SYNTACTIC CLASSIFICATION OF ILLOCUTIONARY VERBS

One way of defining the illocutionary verb category is by examining the internal syntactic structure of these verbs. As a result of space restrictions, the semantic aspect cannot be considered here. In combination with the analysis of various taxonomies of illocutionary acts proposed by Austin and Searle, the syntactic characteristics of illocutionary verbs can be illustrated as follows:

1 ) **ASSERTIVE VERBS** commonly occur in the construction 'S

VERB that X', where S is the subject (referring to the speaker), and where 'that X' refers to a proposition; examples of such verbs are: *announce, assert, allege, affirm, insist, predict, forecast.*

2) **DIRECTIVE VERES** usually occur in the construction 'S VERB (O) that X' or 'S VERB O to Y', where S and O are subject and object respectively, where 'that X' is a non-indicative *that*-clause, where 'to Y' is an infinitive clause; examples of such verbs are: *ask, beg, bid, command, demand, forbid, recommend, request.*

3) **COMMISSIVE VERES** regularly occur in the construction 'S VERB that X' (where the *that*-clause is again non-indicative), or 'S VERB to Y', where 'to Y' is again an infinitive construction; examples of such verbs are: *offer, promise, swear, vow, volunteer.*

4) **EXPRESSIVE VERES** ordinarily occur in the construction 'S VERB (prep) (O) (prep) Xn', where '(prep)' is an optional preposition, and Xn is an abstract noun phrase or a gerundive phrase; examples of such verbs are: *apologize, congratulate, pardon, thank.*

(Leech 1983: 205-206)

### 1.2.2. PROBLEMS OF CLASSIFICATION AND THEIR SOLUTION

Two problems are associated with the illocutionary categories set forth by Searle in relation to speech act verbs.

### 1.2.2.1. POLYSEMY

The first problem is one of polysemy; it relates to the unclear relationship between speech act and speech act verbs. Some verbs are many-sided enough to fit both syntactically and semantically into more than one category. Thus, *advise*, *suggest*, and *tell*, for example, can be either assertive or directive.

She advised me that I was wrong.

She advised me to leave early.

As is true of the lexicon of English as a whole, this means that a lexicon of speech act verbs must contain multiple entries since some illocutionary verbs will have polysemy.

### 1.2.2.2. DISGUISED FORMS IN SURFACE STRUCTURE

A second problem has to do with a gap between the surface and deep structures of a sentence. Some verbs like *advise*, *recommend*, and *greet* are not always followed by an indirect object, or take any of the clausal complementizers described in sections 1.2.1.2 and 1.2.2.1, although semantically they might be assumed to imply one. To solve this problem, it is feasible to conclude, as Searle does, that the syntactic frames related to each verb category are deep structure that may appear in surface structure in various disguised forms. For example, the case



of *advise* followed only by a direct object, as in *The teacher advised a review*, would derive from such a deep structure as *The teacher advised the students to do a review*. A solution could be to substitute this deep structure analysis for an analysis at the level of semantic representation. As regards that point, our main interest is not speech act verbs but rather the speech act PREDICATES that they realize, where a produced utterance is expressed by a meta-propositional argument (Leech 1983: 208).

## **2.0. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS: THE RELEVANCE OF SPEECH ACT THEORY TO APPLIED LINGUISTICS**

The preceding sections on speech acts reviewed the major contributions to speech act theory that have been made by linguistic philosophers. Now let us consider the ways in which speech act theory can contribute to our understanding of second language acquisition and language teaching and cross-linguistic pragmatics. A major contribution of speech act theory is in its clarification of the notion of communicative competence, adding to our knowledge of how second or foreign languages are acquired.

### **2.1. LANGUAGE LEARNING CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

First I shall examine how speech act theory has contributed to the advancement of language learning curriculum development. Until quite recently, second language learning has generally been described as

an accumulation of increasingly complexified syntactic systems. Speech act theory, from a different perspective that specifies proficiency in terms of communicative rather than linguistic competence, goes beyond the sentence level to the question of what sentences do and how they do it when language is used. It thus sheds light on the study of how second language learners use sentences to perform speech acts and to participate in events.

### 2.1.1. 'ACQUISITION OF SPEECH ACTS PRECEDES THE ACQUISITION OF SPEECH'

Researchers like Bruner (1975), Bates (1976), Halliday (1975), and Dore (1975, 1977) have investigated the language acquisition of young children that are under one year of age and resolved that 'the acquisition of speech acts precedes, and systematically prefigures, the acquisition of speech.' In other words, knowledge of communicative function takes precedence over true language (Levinson 1983: 281; Richards 1985: 116). Dore (1975) in particular argues that illocutionary force is a language universal, that a speech act is the fundamental unit of linguistic communication, and that early language development composed of the child's pragmatic intentions gradually becomes grammaticalized (Richards 1985: 116). To put it in more concrete terms,

children's gestures and pre-verbal [*sic*] vocalizations play a role in the interaction with their caretakers closely similar to the requests and

calls for attention that manifest themselves verbally later in development. Thus, with the onset of the child's first use of free-syntactic utterances, these initial functions are already well developed — it seems indeed as if holophrases simply replace gestural indicators of force. An important suggestion that emerges is that the acquisition of illocutionary concepts is a precondition for the acquisition of language itself. (Dore 1975; Griffiths 1979: 110, discussed by Levinson 1983: 281-2)

The acquisition of pragmatic or communicative competence is another emerging interest in second language acquisition studies. Pragmatic rather than grammatical constraints are considered to be crucial in accounting for both the structuring of child language utterance and interlanguage (Richards 1985: 126). Peters (1977, discussed by Richards, *ibid.*) made a distinction between two styles of first language acquisition: an analytic style or bottom-up strategy, one word at a time, and a synthetic style, or top-down strategy or Gestalt style, an endeavor to use whole utterances in socially appropriate situations. It is reported by researchers of second language learning that second language learners tend to use the Gestalt style even more than first language learners do, using prefabricated routines and patterns (that may include speech act formulas) when trying to communicate in a socially appropriate way that exceeds their linguistic competence (Richards 1985: 126).

## **2.1.2. CONTRIBUTION OF SPEECH ACT THEORY TO THE DEVELOPMENT TO A FUNCTIONAL NOTIONAL SYLLABUS**

As mentioned above, the relevance of speech act theory and research to language teaching is noted mainly through its contribution to the theory of communicative language teaching. Writers on communicative syllabus design, such as Wilkins and Munby, make use of speech act and speech event theory in their accounts of notional and communicative syllabuses in language teaching, as have various writers on communicative teaching. As Van Ek claims, the teacher's task is to determine what language functions the students will have to be able to perform and what notions they will have to be able to handle (Van Ek and Alexander 1988: 7-9).

### **2.1.2.1. THE ADVANTAGES OF FUNCTIONAL NOTIONAL SYLLABUS**

Functional notional syllabuses were originally designed to overcome a number of criticisms that arise from traditional grammatical syllabuses. As Wilkins states,

it is very difficult for many learners to appreciate the applicability of the knowledge they gain through such an approach [i.e., the grammatical syllabus].... This approach might also be considered

inefficient since its aim is to teach the entire system regardless of the fact that not all parts of the system will be equally useful for all learners. There is, furthermore, the danger that the learning of grammar will be identified with the learning of grammatical form and that grammatical meaning will be subordinated to this. Finally, there is a more recent criticism that the bringing together of grammatically identical sentences is highly artificial, since in real acts of communication, it is sentences that are alike in meaning that occur together and not those that are alike in structure. The grammatical syllabus ... fails to provide the necessary conditions for the acquisition of communicative competence. (Wilkins: 1979, 82-83)

On the contrary, the advantage of functional notional syllabus is that

it takes the communicative fact of language into account from the beginning without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors. It is potentially superior to the grammatical syllabus because it will produce a communicative competence and because its evident concern with the use of language will sustain the motivation of the learners. (Wilkins 1976: 19)

#### **2.1.2.2. DEFINING *FUNCTION* AND *NOTION***

Recall that a functional notional approach is directed towards the purpose for which language is used, on condition that any act of speech is functionally oriented (that is, it is an attempt to do something) for a

certain situation in relation to a certain topic. Therefore, classification of items in a teaching syllabus is based more on meaning than on the grammatical structure, which was a characteristic of traditional grammatical syllabuses. Thus, functional notional syllabuses give priority to '*what* you want to say through speech,' unlike the traditional grammatical syllabus, in which '*how* you say it' is the main focus. In the following sections I shall discuss how different communicative purposes, topics, and situations guide our messages.

A functional notional approach to language learning/teaching focuses mainly on the communicative purposes of a speech act. It centers on what people want to do or what they want to perform through speech: *talking about something, inviting someone, directing someone to do or not to do something, introducing people to each other, etc.* These are examples of functions of language that all people wish to express in regards to some point; that is, they want to let others know their purpose or aim in speaking.

For instance, if the function of inviting is expressed in an explicit form by words like 'I'd like to invite', the words might not make the speaker's message clear. In order to be clear, different expressions will be called for, such as 'What are you doing this weekend?' If the response is 'Nothing in particular', the first speaker at this point might say, 'I'd like to invite you to my house for dinner' (there are a number of other ways in which the speaker could expand the invitation without even using the verb *invite*). The important point here is that functional

language must also entail a specific notion: *who*, *when*, *where* and *why*, *how long*, *how far*, *how much*, etc. (Finocchiaro and Brumfit 1983: 14).

The difference between the terms *function* and *notion* should be made clear. *Functions* have to do with social behaviour and reflect the intention of the speaker. They can be roughly likened to the communicative acts that are performed through language. *Notions*, on the other hand, represent the way in which people's minds work. They reflect the categories into which the mind (and thereby language) divides reality. Examples of such categories are: time, frequency, duration, gender, number, location, quantity, quality, etc. (Johnson and Morrow 1981: 1-11). The functional notional approach describes language in structural and functional terms, taking the view that these two are not exclusive to each other but complementary, with each supporting the other.

### 2.1.2.3. CATEGORIES OF A FUNCTIONAL NOTIONAL SYLLABUS

In order to express the communicative purposes of the speaker in a convenient way, two principal categories can be made. The first consists of semantico-grammatical categories, which more or less correspond to the *notion* mentioned above. These are categories that correlate to grammatical categories, and they tend to function like a formula or fixed expression. Thus they contribute to the grammatical contents of learning. The second set of categories can be described as

categories of communicative and functional expressions. They are concerned with the speaker's intentions and attitude.

### **2.1.2.3.1. SEMANTICO-GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES**

Wilkins creates six of these semantico-grammatical categories, each of them capable of further subcategorization:

#### 1. Time

- a . Point of time
- b . Duration
- c . Time relations
- d . Frequencies
- e . Sequence
- f . Age

#### 2. Quantity

- a . Grammatical number
- b . Numerals
- c . Quantifiers
- d . Operations

#### 3. Space

- a . Dimension
- b . Location
- c . Motion



4. Case

- a. Agentive
- b. Objective
- c. Dative
- d. Instrumental
- e. Locative
- f. Factitive
- g. Benefactive

5. Deixis

- a. Person
- b. Time (see above, 1. Time)
- c. Trace
- d. Anaphora (Wilkins 1976: 25-38)

Unfortunately, lack of space does not allow me to explain in detail each of these categories, but it is possible to look briefly at one of them, time relation, in order to see how syllabus decisions can be taken within this approach. In traditional grammatical syllabuses, time relations are taught on the basis of a simple three-term division of *past*, *present*, and *future*, using verb forms (tenses). However, in actual conversation, far more subtle time distinctions are suggested by verbal forms: the future as seen from the past, the past as seen from the future, and so on. Moreover, no verbal form is the only, simple realization of these complex notions of time.

Past events may be expressed by the past tense or by the present perfect, and the selection is made in line with the speaker's focus and view of events. Also, time relations are not expressed only through verbs. Notions such as *before*, *after*, *during*, or *simultaneous with* may be expressed by adverbial forms or by various combinations of grammatical forms. Adverbials realized by prepositions (*after*, *before*, *during*) or conjunctions (*before*, *after*, *while*) clarify these time relations. A wide resource of adjectives, nouns, and adverbs gives realizations of these concepts. Here is an example.

They sat looking at the clock. Mary would arrive  
   at 6 o'clock.  
   before 6 o'clock.  
   after 6 o'clock.

The *would* in this sentence corroborates the future event in relation to the past time axis determined by *sat*; the prepositions (*at*, *before*, *after*) corroborate how the event relates to a specific point in time (Wilkins 1976: 29-30).

Thus, in a notional approach, a logical division of time is taken as the starting point, and it goes beyond a simple three-term system of past, present, and future, since each of these may represent an axis in relation to which other events may be oriented. A system like this, therefore, would let us deal with more subtle time distinctions than the traditional grammatical approach would permit.

### 2.1.2.3.2. COMMUNICATIVE AND FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

The second set of categories can be described as those associated with a communicative function. They are related to expressions of the speaker's intention and attitudes.

There are various ways of labelling the major functions expressed in language. Wilkins (1979) lists the following;

**Modality** (to express the speaker's attitude towards the propositional content of an utterance):

certainty, necessity, conviction, volition, obligation, tolerance

**Moral discipline and evaluation** (to express the speaker's judgement and assessment):

approval, disapproval, judgement, release

**Suasion** (to influence the behavior and thought of the hearer):

persuasion, recommendation, prediction

**Argument** (relating to an exchange of information and views):

information asserted or sought, agreement, disagreement, denial, concession

**Rational inquiry and exposition** (categories connected to the

organization of thought and speech):

conclusion, implication, hypothesis, explanation

***Personal emotions*** (to express personal reactions to events):

positive, negative

***Emotional relations*** (to express reactions to events that include interlocutors):

greetings, flattery, hostility, etc.

***Interpersonal relations*** (forms to express human relationships):

politeness, status (degree of formality and informality)

These are the very things we use language for, and so through teaching such items to students, the teacher should let them learn how to utilize their grammatical and lexical knowledge in a creative exercise of communication.

#### **2.1.2.4. HOW *FUNCTION*, *NOTION*, *SITUATION*, AND *EXPONENTS* RELATE**

While the basic *functions* to be expressed depend on the purpose of the speaker, the specific *notions* rely on three major factors: (a) the functions (b) the elements in the situation (e.g., persons, place, time), and (c) the topic that is being discussed.

Another important concept, that of *exponents*, refers to the language utterances that derive from the function, the situation, and the topic. They are the language forms a speaker employs to express his/her message (reflecting, e.g., social roles) that will affect the formality or informality of the conversation). The *exponents* we choose rely not only on the situational elements mentioned above but also on our level of linguistic competence, our personalities, and the speaker's relationship with the hearer. Below are the possible *exponents* in one example of a request: 'I ask you to open the door.'

Please open the door.

Open the door, please.

Would you open the door?

Would you mind opening the door?

I wonder if you mind opening the door.

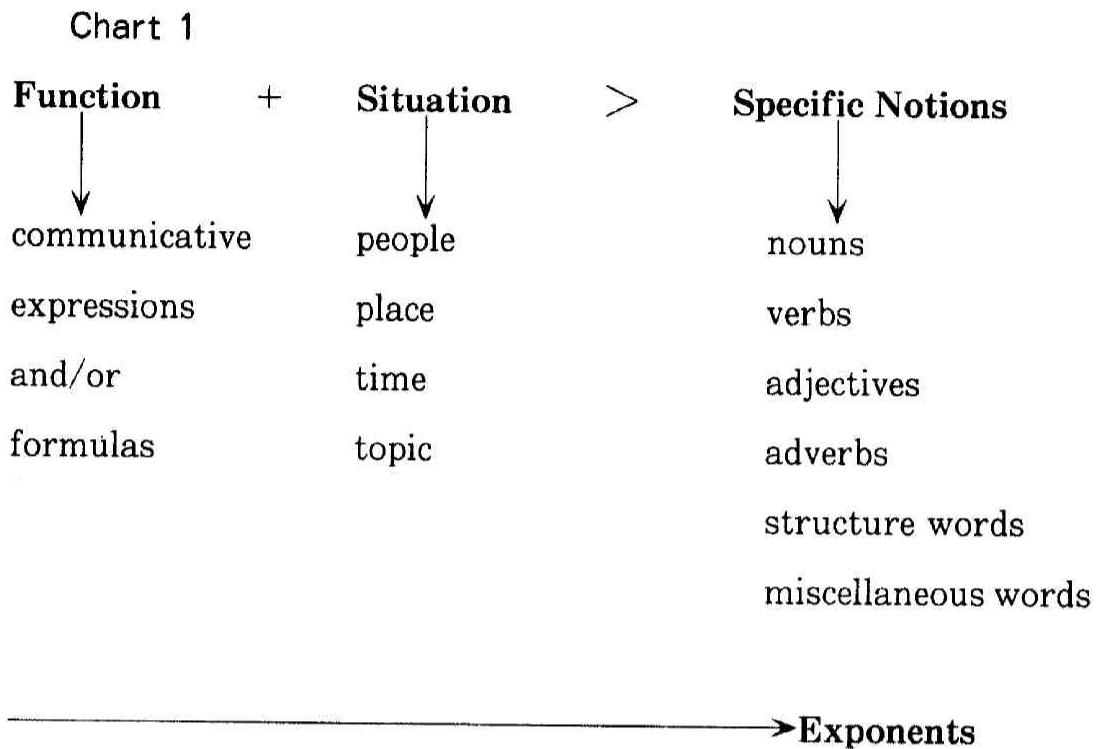
It might be a good idea to open the door.

It's very hot in here, isn't it?

As we have seen in the section on indirect speech acts (see 1.1.7. above), most usages of *request* are indirect. As this case suggests, the explicit imperative form is very rarely used to issue requests in English; instead, people tend to employ *exponents* that only indirectly do requesting. The kinds of *exponents* that are thus employed show there is a variety of ways to realize a single illocutionary force of *requesting*.

The items discussed so far can be summarized in the following

diagram:



(Finocchiaro and Brumfit 1983: 17)

### 2.1.2.5. SAMLE OF A FUNCTIONAL NOTIONAL CURRICULUM

A mini sample of a functional notional curriculum, incorporating ideas discussed to this point, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Unit	1	2	3
Title & function	Apologizing	Requesting directions	Asking for information
Situation	Department store (Returning something)	At the bus stop	In a post office
Communicative expressions or formulas	<i>I'm sorry. Would it be possible...?</i>	<i>Pardon me. Could you tell me?</i>	<i>Excuse me. Where would I find...?</i>

Unit	1	2	3
Structures	Simple past Present Perfect	Interrogatives Modal – <i>must</i>	Modal – <i>can</i>
Nouns	Shirt	Names of places	Stamps, Savings account
Verbs	<i>Buy, wear</i>	<i>Must, get to, Get off, take</i>	<i>Sell, buy, open</i>
Adjectives	<i>Small</i>		
Adverbs	<i>Too</i>	<i>How, where</i>	
Structure words	<i>You</i>	<i>Us</i>	
Activities	Dialogue, role play Indirect speech Paired practice Changing register	Reading Questions & answers Cloze procedures Dictation	Expanding sentences  Role playing

(ibid.: 38-39)

To sum up, the following are some of the characteristics of the functional notional syllabus.

a ) The title of the unit is often expressed in functional terms (*apologizing, requesting*) and in this way students are first of all given the mental set or readiness necessary for directing their attention to the communicative purpose of the dialogue.

b ) The same functions (*requesting* and *apologizing*, for example) may be introduced in different situations in two or more continuing units. Conversely, different functions may be shown in the same or in different situations.

The advantages of having students comprehend the use of the same function in more than one situation are obvious: (1) students realize that language makes 'infinite use of finite means', that is, 'the unlimited use in actual speech of a limited number of communicative functions as well as of sounds, verb forms, and other linguistic elements'; (2) students also learn a wide range of notions related to everyday topics; (3) the grammar and vocabulary taught in each unit derive from a combination of function and situation.

(Finocchiaro and Brumfit 1983: 37)

In this way, the functional notional approach aims to have students exploit grammatical and lexical knowledge in inventive stages of communication. The functional notional syllabuses that expanded upon speech act theory thus created the bases for the subsequent development of syllabus designs. It is noticeable that many English textbooks today follow these patterns and are functionally oriented in the structuring of their organization. Here are some examples of this:

1. Checking in and out at a hotel; asking directions; making a dinner reservation; making a phone call; going to a doctor (Sato 1997).
2. Airplane announcements and immigration; getting permission and asking for favors; making an overseas call; talking about Japan's climate; talking about schools and Japanese houses; buying a souvenir (Shimada and Cantor 1999).
3. Greeting people formally and informally; introducing oneself formally and informally; describing hobbies and interests; expressing



preferences; talking about the past; talking about one's family; describing health problems; making an appointment; making and responding to requests; leaving a message on the telephone; asking and talking about the weather; making and accepting invitations; asking to speak to someone on the telephone (Sampson 1999).

4. Asking directions; making a phone call; losing traveler's checks and asking for a refund; making a complaint and checking out at a hotel (Shimada 1999).

These textbooks usually do not use the terms *functions* or *notions*. Instead, some adopt terms such as *encounter* or *types of communication*, but what they mean is the same. Here is a sample of the curriculum found in Wajnryb's *Travel and Tourism* (2000).

Table 2

AREA OF WORK	ENCOUNTERS	TYPES OF COMMUNICATION	VOCABULARY FOCUS
The airport	Checking in	Face to face Documentation Forms	Flight information Luggage Regulations Schedule
	Providing landing information		
	Dealing with lost luggage inquiries		
The hotel	Checking in	Bills Documentation Face to face Forms Messages On the telephone	Billing Directions Complaints Facilities Fax and e-mail Locations Personal Information Services
	Explaining a room's facilities		
	Dealing with complaints		
	Receiving directions and getting a taxi		

AREA OF WORK	ENCOUNTERS	TYPES OF COMMUNICATION	VOCABULARY FOCUS
The bar and restaurants	Welcoming and seating	Bills Face to face	Bills Drinks and food
	Taking orders for food and drinks	Menus Wine lists	
The tour guide	Greeting clients at the airport	Advice Answering questions Brochures Credit cards Directions Introductions	Consulates Costs Factual information Itineraries Places Police reports
	Providing information about rental cars		
	Advising on tours		

(Wajnryb 2000: vi - vii)

### 2.1.2.6. PROBLEMS

In spite of many advantages of a functional notional syllabus, it is not free from criticism. Mostly criticized have been the problem of the nomenclature of speech acts, or the classification of illocutionary acts. That is because all categories into which items in the list are located will be arbitrary, simply because they tend to reflect the syllabus designer's personal view on the high frequency of language patterns, on the language learning process, and on the relations between each act that occurs in reality; also, the taxonomy in the list is subject to the views of the syllabus designer. 'Labels like "command", "offer"... etc. tempt one to consider them as transparent semantic primitives, when in fact they

are convenient lexicalizations of complex configurations of meaning' (Mitchell 1980: 105). So the difference in the classification of illocutionary force is very often a matter of degree rather than kind. To understand what I mean, consider the following set of sentences:

I'd like you to shut the door.

I wonder if you'd mind shutting the door.

Could you shut the door?

Will you shut the door?

Can you shut the door?

Shut the door.

In these cases, it is difficult to say at what point the act of *telling* shifts to the act of *request* (Leech 1974: 336).

The problems can be summarized as follows.

1 ) It is highly likely that not all kinds of language functions (illocutionary forces) are included in designing syllabuses since the focus naturally tends to be on only those acts that most likely take place in daily situations. Also, it is uncertain how many of the functions listed in 2.1.2.3.2. are fully envisaged in courses.

2 ) As regards to cultural and linguistic diversities, attention should be paid to cross-linguistic comparison in order to check whether different languages utilize the same classes of speech acts and

similar strategies for actualizing and interpreting speech acts (see section 2.2. below).

3 ) There is no clear-cut correspondence between an individual illocutionary act and an individual performative verb (see section 1.2. above).

3.1) Some speech act verbs are potentially ambiguous; it is possible that the same verb can be used to perform two or more types of acts.

3.2) There are a number of verbs or nouns for realizing what is inherently the same speech act. (Note, for example, the synonyms of *beg*, *entreat*, and *implore*.)

3.3) There are types of illocutionary acts that should be taught for which no performative verb exists. (For example, what act is being performed when the speaker says 'You might as well take a taxi'?)

These examples reveal that 'it is ... only analysing each type of act into its meaning component ... that will form the basis of classification' (Mitchell 1980: 105).

4 ) Another criticism of the functional notional syllabus has to do with its lack of attention to the discourse dimension of speech

(discussed in section 1.1.6.2.). Candlin (1976) says 'an item-bank of speech acts ... cannot serve any more than sentences as the direct end-point of a communicative syllabus' (quoted in Yalden 1987). The other component of meaning has been pushed aside, and the textual component has especially been neglected. This dimension remains to be restored to course design by discourse analysts (Yalden 1987).

Indeed, the main focus of a functional notional syllabus is on individual sentences and not on discourse. Nevertheless, the discourse dimension plays a more important role in real communication. Therefore, more consideration should somehow be given to discourse aspects so that the functional notional approach may not repeat the mistake of the traditional grammatical approach, which tried to build courses only on the structural aspects of meaning.

## 2.2. CROSS-LINGUISTIC COMPARISONS OF SPEECH ACTS

Performing an accurate speech act requires different conditions across cultures. There are some acts that lead to non-transferability of routines in different cultures. French and Japanese, for example, both have adopted a routine before eating, the saying of *bon appétit* and *itadakimasu*, respectively. However, unlike its French counterpart, the Japanese formula cannot be used by the one who provides the meal but only by those who are invited (Coulmas 1979).

Also, very often, different languages employ a different class of

speech acts in order to realize the same communicative purpose. In teaching languages, such a cross-linguistic dimension of speech acts should be taken into consideration in order to avoid possible cross-cultural misunderstandings.

I shall illustrate two more examples of situations that we are likely to encounter in teaching Japanese to English-speaking students or, vice versa, in teaching Japanese to non-Japanese students.

In Japanese society, where seniority and politeness are considered high social values, the mechanism of expressing politeness is different from the mechanism in an English-speaking society. When you want to invite an 'elder' person (a person who is older than you or higher than you in social status), it is considered to be impolite to inquire about the person's WILLINGNESS to come, asking '*kitai desuka?*' A different speech act is called for; rather than inquiring about the person's *willingness* to come, we should ask (ENTREAT) the person to come; that is, ask the person to *condescend* to come. So, instead of saying 'I was wondering if you'd like to come' (*kitai desuka?*), we should say 'I was wondering if you could come' (*kite-itadake masuka?*).

The difference between these two expressions lies in which side (the speaker's or the hearer's) interest is shown to. In the case of INVITING someone, the interest is obviously on the hearer's side, whereas in the case of entreating someone to come, or asking someone to condescend to come, the interest is on the speaker's side. The implicit

assumption in the latter case (preferred in Japan) is the idea that 'although my dinner party is trivial and unworthy of your attendance, I'm wondering if you would honor us with your presence at our party.' Although the communicative goals of these cases (i.e., *inviting* and *entreating someone to come*) are similar, the speech act patterns represented are different.

Here is another example of a different use of speech acts in English and Japanese cultures. In Japanese society there is a tendency to avoid direct expressions of disagreement or refusal, for fear of disturbing the harmony of the group (another important social value). As a result, indirect speech acts play greater role in Japanese speech activity than in British or American counterpart. Ueda (1974) discusses this point in his article, 'Sixteen Ways to Avoid Saying "No" in Japan.' For example, when Japanese have to turn down a proposal, instead of saying directly, 'No, we can't possibly do it,' they normally say, 'We'll positively consider the plan,' or 'We'll think it over' (which in Japanese cultural context are equivalent to negative response). A native English speaker may interpret these utterances literally, as proposals to act, rather than the acts of *refusal* intended by the Japanese speaker. Such misinterpretation can cause serious cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Thus, attention also should be paid to cross-linguistic comparisons aimed at resolving whether different languages utilize the same classes of speech acts and similar strategies for actualizing and interpreting speech acts.

### 2.3. EXPLAINING GRAMMAR BY EMPLOYING PERFORMATIVE ANALYSIS

Let me bring up another case in which speech act theory or performative analysis is made use of in teaching settings. By exploiting the theory of performative analysis, a teacher can explain seemingly illogical sentences grammatically. (Students occasionally expect a teacher to give grammatical explanations in language lessons in Japan.) Note the following examples;

[1] If you're hungry, the cake is in the cupboard.

[2] He is in London, because I had a phone call from him this morning.

Recall the distinction between the deep and the surface structure of a sentence. As Ross put it, in its deepest structure, every sentence is a performative; that is, every sentence includes as its main subject a first person pronoun, and as its main verb a performative verb in the simple present tense (Leech 1974: 323 discussed in section 1.1.2.). According to the performative analysis, the underlying structures of these sentences can be described as the following;

[1'] If you're hungry, *I'm telling you* that the cake is in the cupboard.



[2'] *I'm telling you* that he is in London, because I had a phone call from him this morning.

When a sentence construction of the deep structure is 'S ASSERTIVE VERB that X', where S is the subject (referring to the speaker), and where 'that X' refers to a proposition, 'S ASSERTIVE VERB that' part is deleted in the transformational process to the surface structure, on the condition that 'S believes X to be true' (Rutherford 1970: 105). The need for this condition may be explained by a comparison of the following two sentences.

[3] The earth is at the centre of the universe.

[4] *I say that* the earth is at the centre of the universe because I am afraid of offending the Church.

It can be inferred that the speaker of the sentence in [3] believes the proposition (the earth is...) to be true, whereas the speaker of the sentence [4] does not. That is why in sentence [4], the 'I say that' part is not deleted and still appears in its surface structure (Rutherford 1970: 105).

There are many sentences like [1] or [2] in daily speech, in which case the 'I say that' or 'I state that' part is not verbalized (for the reasons mentioned above). That is why, as Ross asserts, EVERY SENTENCE IS A PERFORMATIVE and has a functional element in its deep

structure although it is hidden in a surface structure.

By briefly giving students (advanced level, of course) such grammatical insights based on performative analysis, their understanding of the structure and functions of the English language might even be enriched.

### 3.0. CONCLUSION

In the elaboration of speech act theory, the classification of illocutionary acts was integral to a comprehensive investigation of 'the things we can do with words.' However, in the area of speech act verbs, as in many areas of lexicon, language creates fuzzy category distinctions, while the realities to which these categories hold are often indeterminate. The implication of this idea for speech act theory is that, as we have seen, it is imprudent to assign a rigid taxonomy of illocutionary acts.

Wittgenstein stated that there are countless kinds of speech acts (1953, para. 23, discussed by Searle 1979: viii), whereas the number of speech act verbs is limited. The different nature of the task of analyzing speech activity and speech act verbs will have been manifest up to this point. Speech activity can be diverse along many different dimensions: with various goals, and with goals of varying degrees of indirectness. (Pragmatics is fundamentally more concerned with the goals or intentions of the speaker rather than with the results of the

speech activity.)

It should also be pointed out that speech act activity can not be classified into discrete acts in the way that speech act theory assumed in the beginning. For this reason, the selection of speech act verbs for reporting a speech act is not free from simplification, selection, and the imposition of a categorical structure on the data of conversation.

Despite all these problems, it is still possible, and illuminating, to attempt a taxonomy of illocutionary verbs or illocutionary predicates. It is reasonable to speculate that the aspects of contrast applicable to the case of illocutionary verbs will also be pertinent in large part to the analysis of illocutionary activities.

The contribution of speech act theory to the area of practical language teaching in the past three decades is considerable indeed, especially in the development of functional notional syllabuses and communicative approach. Exploiting the ideas of communicative acts and function, teachers give students opportunities to learn to utilize their grammatical and lexical information in inventive exercises of communication to achieve what they want to say, rather than worry about how they say it. Of course, the functional notional approach is not free from problems; it is not completely apparent just how many of the communicative functions are successfully realized, and it is inevitable that a great degree of linguistic diversity is involved. Nevertheless, our task is to improve the communicative competence of

students, and in this regard the functional and notional approach provides us with a chance to consider the communicative value of things that are taught. The set of categories of what we do with language gives us a notion of language useful for describing the communication needs of different types of students.

However, such priority given to communicative purposes does not necessarily imply that coverage of the grammatical dimension will be minimized or neglected. The functional notional approach involves this aspect, since each category of function has a particular set of grammatical realizations (see Table 1), and the objective of each syllabus is to make sure that these are taught. Functional syllabuses provide an opportunity to make a new advance in defining the concept of a foreign language curriculum.

Speech act theory has also contributed to the area of cross-cultural pragmatics. In cross-cultural encounters, a number of differences in speech act realization patterns are observed and naturally a direct transfer of a pattern from one's own language to that of another language can cause serious problems. Speech act theory has provided a theoretical framework to reveal and highlight these cross-cultural problems and hence has stimulated insights into and taught tactics needed to conduct successful intercultural communication.

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## スピーチ・アクト理論と応用言語学におけるその有用性

岩本典子

本稿では、まずスピーチ・アクト（発話行為論）の序論と概略を述べた後（第一部）、英語教育や、談話分析といった応用言語学の諸分野に、どのように理論的土台を提供してきたかを、紹介した（第二部）。この理論は、日常言語哲学の潮流をくむ、John Austin と John Searle によって提唱された考えである。

第一部の理論紹介部においては、まず、スピーチ・アクトの定義を示し、遂行文（performative）や、発話行為（speech act）の本質や、遂行動詞（performative verb）、直接発話行為（direct speech act）と間接発話行為（indirect speech act）、さらに発話の機能について述べた。

1955年、John Austin は、「発話はそれ自体が行為である」という、当時としては、斬新的な見解を発表した。これは、発話というものは、単に物事を記述的に述べることを示すのではなく、発話すること自体が、なんらかの行為を行うことを含んでいるという見解である。たとえば、伝達、約束、謝罪、依頼、申し出、といった具合に。Searle は、さらにこの考えを発展させて、「あらゆる発話は、行為である」と述べ、スピーチ・アクト（発話行為）という用語が生み出された。これは、現在、談話（discourse）を構成する基本単位として、重要な位置を占めている。Searle は、発話行為を次の三つのレベル、すなわち発語行為（locutionary act）、発語内行為（illocutionary act）、発語媒介行為（perlocutionary act）に分類した。さらに、Searle（1976）は、発話行為は、いくつかの機能から構成さ



れていると述べた。すなわち、表示 (representatives)、指示 (directives)、行為拘束宣言 (commissives)、表出 (expressives)、宣言 (declaratives) といった諸機能である。

第二部の応用編においては、スピーチ・アクト理論が、応用言語学の諸分野にどのように貢献してきたかを扱った。とくに、英語教育への影響はめざましく、notional functional syllabus, communicative approach, ひいては oral communication に理論的基盤を提供してきた。今日使用されている英語教材も *function*、*notion* といった学術用語自体は、使われていないものの、その概念そのものは、影響を与えている。たとえば、コミュニケーションの多くのシラバスが、「道を尋ねる」、「情報を求める」、「助言をする」、「不平を言う」、といった項目ごとに構成されていることから、発話行為、および notional functional syllabus という概念が、土台になっていることがわかる。

また、スピーチ・アクト理論は、その他、語用論や談話分析といった分野にも理論的枠組みを提供してきた。本稿では、スピーチ・アクトの日英の違いについて紹介した。たとえば、日本では、目上の人を招待するのに、「来たいですか?」と相手の「希望や、意向を直接的に尋ねる」のは、失礼とされ、「来ていただけますか?」と「へりくだって依頼する」表現を使用しなければならない。一方、英語では、‘I was wondering if you'd like to come’ と「相手の意向や希望を尋ねる」ことは、相手の意思を尊重するという意味で望ましいとされている。これも、スピーチ・アクトの文化的差異という枠組みを使うことにより、解明、説明をすることができる。

以上述べたようにスピーチ・アクト理論の適用範囲は広く、今日的な意義も大きい、と言えよう。