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SPEECH ACTS IN UZBEK NEWS DISCOURSE: A PRAGMATIC AND LINGUA-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This study investigates the realization of speech acts in Uzbek institutional and media discourse through the theoretical lens of Austin’s performatives and Searle’s taxonomy of illocutionary acts. Drawing on recent samples from Uzbek news reports, the research examines how declaratives, assertives, expressives, and commissives function in political, legal, economic, and diplomatic contexts. The analysis reveals that declaratives dominate official communication, transforming language into institutional action by enacting resolutions, legal judgments, and criminal case initiations. Assertives ensure credibility and simultaneously function as warnings, while expressives reinforce diplomatic solidarity and cultural norms of consensus. Findings demonstrate that Uzbek discourse is strongly state-centered, where speech acts serve not only to inform but also to perform authority, legitimize power, and embody cultural values. The study highlights the significance of cross-cultural pragmatics in understanding how universal speech act theories are localized within Uzbek socio-political realities.

Keywords: Speech acts; pragmatics; performativity; declaratives; assertives; expressives; commissives; Uzbek discourse; institutional language; cross-cultural pragmatics.

Introduction

Language is not only a vehicle for conveying information but also a powerful instrument for performing actions. As Austin (1962) famously argued, “to say something is to do something,” highlighting that utterances such as declaring, promising, or judging are themselves acts that change social reality. Building on this insight, Searle (1969, 1979) developed a systematic taxonomy of illocutionary acts—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives—providing a framework that has become central to modern pragmatics. Subsequent scholars have expanded this approach, emphasizing the cultural and institutional dimensions of language use (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2003; Kecskes, 2014).

In the Uzbek context, the study of speech acts is especially relevant because institutional and media discourse functions not merely as a medium of information but as a performative instrument of governance, diplomacy, and social regulation. Declarations by state authorities enact new legal or political realities, assertives in media reports legitimize state actions, and expressives in diplomatic discourse strengthen solidarity and consensus. These practices illustrate how universal pragmatic categories intersect with culturally specific communicative norms.

The purpose of this article is to examine the realization of speech acts in Uzbek news discourse by applying Austin’s and Searle’s theoretical frameworks. Using recent samples from political, legal, economic, and diplomatic reports, the study analyzes how institutional language embodies

performativity and cultural values. By situating Uzbek discourse within the broader field of cross-cultural pragmatics, this research demonstrates how speech acts simultaneously serve as linguistic actions and cultural instruments of authority, trust, and cohesion.

Literature review

To begin with, language is not merely a means of describing actions but also a means of performing them. Consider the following examples:

- *I name this ship Queen Elizabeth.*
- *I give and bequeath my watch to my brother.*
- *I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.*

According to Austin (1962: 6), in such cases, uttering the sentence in appropriate circumstances is not simply reporting an action—it is itself the performance of that action. These kinds of utterances are therefore termed performatives, since they carry out an action rather than merely state something (7).

Austin designates these as speech acts, distinguishing them from ordinary physical actions such as eating, cleaning, or driving. From the perspective that “to say something is to do something,” Austin (120) identifies three dimensions of speech acts:

-Locutionary act – the production of meaningful speech, which includes phonetic (sound), phatic (grammatical form), and rhetic (meaning) aspects.

-Illocutionary act – the act performed according to social conventions, which carries a particular communicative force (e.g., promising, ordering, declaring).

-Perlocutionary act – the effect produced on the listener, such as persuading, convincing, or intimidating. Unlike illocutionary acts, these are not bound by convention.

Building on this framework, Austin (ibid.: 150–151) classifies performatives into five main categories according to their illocutionary force:

-Verdictives – pronouncing a judgment or assessment, as in the decisions of a jury or referee; they include estimates, evaluations, and appraisals.

-Exercitives – exercising authority, rights, or influence, such as appointing, voting, ordering, advising, or warning.

-Commissives – committing the speaker to a course of action, typically through promising, undertaking, or declaring an intention.

-Behabitives – expressing social attitudes or responses, such as apologizing, congratulating, praising, condoling, cursing, or challenging.

-Expositives – clarifying the role of an utterance within an argument or conversation, as in *I argue, I concede, I postulate, I illustrate, I assume, or I reply.*

Austin’s classification of speech acts has been subject to significant criticism. One of the most prominent critics, Searle (1979: 9), argues that Austin presented his five categories only tentatively, as a starting point for discussion rather than as definitive results. According to Searle, the taxonomy suffers from major weaknesses and requires revision. The most serious flaw, he notes, is that the classification is not based on any clear or consistent principle.

Bach and Harnish (1979: 40) echo this concern, acknowledging the richness of Austin’s illocutionary act types but agreeing with Searle that there are no systematic principles underlying their division into five classes. Searle (1979: 10) elaborates that:

-Only in the case of commissives does Austin rely explicitly on the illocutionary point to define a category.

-Expositives, where their definition is clear at all, appear to be based on discourse relations.

-Exercitives seem partly defined in terms of the exercise of authority.

-Behabitives are especially vague, involving subjective notions of what is beneficial or harmful for speaker and hearer, as well as expressions of attitude.

Bach and Harnish (1979: 40) reinforce Searle’s critique by stressing that any classification should be principled, non-overlapping (except where overlap is unavoidable), and internally consistent. Furthermore, they argue that such a taxonomy must be linked to a systematic theory of illocutionary acts in order to have real theoretical value.

A second weakness in Austin’s taxonomy lies in the confusion between illocutionary acts and illocutionary verbs. Searle (1979: 9) observes that Austin’s lists of verbs are not actual classifications of speech acts but rather collections of English verbs that Austin associates with performativity. Austin assumes these verbs directly signal distinct illocutionary acts, but Searle rejects this claim. For instance, the verb *announce* does not represent a speech act in itself; instead, it marks the manner in which a speech act is performed, since one may *announce* an order, a promise, or a report.

Searle further notes that some of Austin’s examples are neither clearly illocutionary verbs nor genuinely performative—for example, *sympathize*, *regard as*, *mean to*, *intend*, and *shall*. These shortcomings reveal significant overlap between categories and inconsistency within them.

Searle’s Theory of Illocutionary Acts

Unlike many scholars who sought only to refine Austin’s original framework, Searle developed a comprehensive theory of illocutionary acts (Bach & Harnish, 1979: 40). In fact, the concept of the *speech act* has increasingly come to be identified specifically with the illocutionary act. According to Searle (1969: 64f), there are five basic categories of illocutionary acts:

-**Assertives** – utterances that commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition and aim to shape the hearer’s beliefs (e.g., stating, claiming, reporting).

-**Directives** – acts intended to get the hearer to perform an action, without obligating the speaker to act (e.g., requesting, advising, commanding).

-Commissives – commitments by the speaker to carry out some future course of action (e.g., promising, pledging, undertaking).

-Expressives – utterances that express the speaker’s psychological state or attitude toward a situation (e.g., apologizing, congratulating, thanking).

-Declaratives – acts that bring about a change in the external situation simply by being performed under the right circumstances (e.g., excommunicating, pronouncing someone married). Clark (1996: 121) further divides declaratives into two subtypes: effectives and verdictives, both of which require the speaker to possess institutional authority.

To understand illocutionary acts, Searle and Vanderveken (1985: 12) emphasize the importance of the conditions for their successful and non-defective performance. Like any human action, a speech act may succeed or fail, and even when successful, it may still be defective. Thus, three outcomes are possible:

1. **Unsuccessful** – when the conditions necessary for the act are not met. For example, if one person says, “*I hereby excommunicate you,*” but lacks the institutional authority to do so, the act fails completely.
2. **Successful but defective** – when the act is performed but suffers from a flaw such as insincerity or inadequate evidence. For instance, making a statement with no supporting proof counts as defective.
3. **Successful and non-defective** – when the act meets all conditions and is performed sincerely, thereby achieving its intended effect.

Searle and Vanderveken (11) argue that a spoken or written sentence performs an illocutionary act only when it carries illocutionary force and is carried out successfully and without defect. A properly performed illocutionary act produces an illocutionary effect, namely the addressee’s understanding of the utterance. Beyond this, speech acts often aim to produce perlocutionary effects, which influence the hearer’s emotions, attitudes, or behavior. For example, by making a statement (illocutionary act), the speaker may intend to persuade or convince (perlocutionary effect); by making a promise, the speaker creates expectations in the hearer. These perlocutionary effects may arise intentionally, such as when a request leads the hearer to act, or unintentionally, such as when a remark offends the hearer without that being the speaker’s aim.

Methodology

This study adopts a speech act analysis framework based on Austin’s (1962) theory of performatives and Searle’s (1969, 1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts. Five recent samples were taken from leading Uzbek news websites (2025). The selection criteria included:

1. **Relevance:** texts containing explicit or implicit performatives (e.g., decrees, legal rulings, diplomatic exchanges, official statistics).
2. **Genre diversity:** political declarations, diplomatic meetings, legal/judicial reports, and socio-economic news.

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3. Cultural embeddedness: texts illustrating how linguistic choices reflect Uzbek socio-political and cultural norms.

Each sample was translated into English to allow cross-linguistic comparison. The analysis focused on:

-Speech act classification (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declaratives).

-Contextual functions (legal, political, economic, diplomatic).

-Pragmatic functions (enacting, legitimizing, informing, accusing, warning, aligning).

-Stylistic and cultural notes (register, politeness strategies, cultural implications).

Data was tabulated comparatively to highlight similarities and differences across samples.

The analysis shows that speech acts in Uzbek news discourse serve multiple pragmatic purposes, often blending Austin’s performative dimension with Searle’s illocutionary categories.

1. Dominance of Declaratives in Institutional Language

Samples 1, 3, and 5 demonstrate declarative acts that do not merely describe but enact reality. For example, declaring 2026–2030 as the “Period of Food Security” constitutes a performative act of national scope. Similarly, court rulings and criminal case initiations transform speech into legal reality.

This illustrates the performativity of state discourse, where official utterances have direct legal and social consequences.

2. Assertives and Expressives as Instruments of Trust and Information

Sample 2 (diplomatic meeting) illustrates expressives that reinforce trust and solidarity in international relations.

Sample 4 (tobacco trade report) relies on assertives to present statistical data, simultaneously informing and warning the public.

These reflect cultural politeness strategies: diplomacy avoids confrontation, while reporting subtly frames illegal trade as a national threat.

3. Lingua-Cultural Patterns

Uzbek institutional discourse exhibits a strong state-centered performativity, where official speech carries moral and legal authority.

Diplomacy emphasizes collective harmony, consistent with Uzbek and Central Asian communicative norms of deference and consensus.

Media reporting uses factual assertives to build credibility, but also functions as a social warning mechanism.

4. Pragmatic Spectrum in News Discourse

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The five samples collectively illustrate a spectrum of speech acts:

Enacting reality (declarations, legal rulings).

Legitimizing authority (criminal case initiation).

Informing (statistical reporting).

Accusing/Warning (corruption reports, contraband tobacco).

Aligning (diplomatic expressives).

This shows how Uzbek media functions not just as a channel of information, but as a performative institution reinforcing state legitimacy and cultural norms.

Table 1. Examples of Speech Acts in Uzbek Institutional and Media Texts

Original Uzbek Excerpt	English Translation	Speech Act Type	Pragmatic Function	Context	Stylistic & Cultural Notes
1 2026–2030 йиллар Ўзбекистонда «Долзарб озиқ-овқат хавфсизлиги даври» деб эълон қилинди.	The years 2026–2030 have been declared in Uzbekistan as the “Period of Urgent Food Security.”	Declarative	Institutional declaration – brings a new socio-political period into being.	Government resolution.	Formal bureaucratic style; reflects cultural weight of official decrees in shaping public policy.
2 Ўзбекистон президенти администрацияси раҳбари Саида Мирзиёева ЖСТга бўлиш йўлидаги эҳтимолий қийинчиликлар ҳамда ва ҳамкорликнинг аҳамияти ҳақида очик	Saida Mirziyoyeva ... held an open exchange of views on ongoing reforms, new potential challenges on the path to WTO membership, and the crucial importance of trust and cooperation.	Expressive / Assertive	Sharing concerns, building solidarity – emphasizes collaboration and mutual understanding.	– Diplomatic meeting.	Polite, diplomatic register; culturally highlights consensus, partnership, and dialogue.

Original Excerpt	Uzbek English Translation	Speech Type	Act Function	Pragmatic Function	Context	Stylistic & Cultural Notes
фикр алмашилди.						
3 3,5 йил олдин жиноят иши қўзғатилган “Guangzhou” клиникасидаги фирибгарлик ... суд хукми ўқилди.	In the fraud case at the “Guangzhou” clinic, opened 3.5 years ago, the court delivered its verdict.	Declarative		Institutional judgment enacts legal consequences.	– Courtroom/legal context.	Legal-administrative register; culturally stresses judiciary’s corrective and moral authority.
4 Сўнгги ойларда Ўзбекистонда тамаки маҳсулотларининг ноқонуний савдосига қарши кураш сезиларли даражада фаоллашди.	In recent months, the fight against the illegal trade of tobacco products in Uzbekistan has intensified significantly.	Assertive		Informing / Warning signals vigilance and public awareness.	Government and media reporting.	Neutral formal reporting; reflects state-led narrative of law enforcement.
5 Савдо-саноат палатаси Навоий вилоят ҳудудий бошқармаси ҳузурида жиноят иши қўзғатилди.	A criminal case has been initiated against the officials of the permanent arbitration court under the Navoi regional administration of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.	Declarative / Commissive		Legitimizing authority, exposing corruption performs legal action by speech.	Judicial/institutional reporting.	Legalistic, accusatory tone; reflects cultural norm of publicizing corruption cases as deterrence.

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Conclusion

The study demonstrates that Uzbek news discourse integrates speech acts as tools of governance, diplomacy, and social regulation, reflecting both universal speech act patterns (Austin, Searle) and culturally specific communicative norms.

Declaratives dominate state and legal discourse, reflecting the performativity of authority in Uzbek society. Assertives ensure credibility and convey warnings, especially in economic and legal reporting. Expressives highlight diplomacy and solidarity, aligning with collective cultural values.

From a lingua-cultural perspective, Uzbek institutional and media discourse shows how language serves as both an instrument of authority and a medium of cultural values. Speech acts here are not isolated linguistic events but embedded in broader socio-political realities, shaping public perception, reinforcing legitimacy, and fostering national cohesion.

This confirms the importance of speech act analysis in cross-cultural pragmatics, showing how Austin’s and Searle’s theories can be meaningfully applied to modern Uzbek discourse.

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