Speech acts or language micro- and macro-games?

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Speech acts or language micro- and macro-games?¹

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In this paper, I will begin with a description of the origins of the speech act theory, and the classifications of speech acts. Then, I will review different camps of thought which had a bearing on our current understanding of speech acts, and specifically focus on Halliday's metafunctions, Isaacs and Clark's ostensible and genuine acts, Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, Mey's conception of pragmemes, and Wittgenstein's concept of language games. I will then put these together in my general discussion to present my own view of speech acts which I see as language micro- and macro-games. In my discussion of my own views, I will suggest that any act of language use (be it semiotic, kinesthetic, proxemic, verbal, orthographical, or otherwise) is essentially a language micro- or macro-game. Finally, I will describe my own model of 'language game constellations' which comprises language game sets, hierarchies, chains, and networks.

Keywords: Ostensible Speech Acts; Pragmemes; Metarepresentation; Staged Communicative Acts; Language Games

1. Introduction

Ever since their introduction by Austin (1962), speech acts have been one of the hot topics for pragmaticists, philosophers of language, and discourse analysts. All attempts at classifying speech acts into categories with clear boundaries failed one way or another, until Mey (2001), in his groundbreaking volume ruled out the existence of speech acts by sincerely nurturing the idea that "a fortiori, there are, strictly speaking, no such 'things' as speech acts per se, only acts of speech in a situation" (Mey, 2001, p. 24). His concept of 'pragmemes' (instead of speech acts) was later expatiated upon by Capone (2005). In a later work, Capone (2010) borrowed ideas from Wittgenstein

¹ This paper is dedicated to Professor Seyyed Mohammad Alavi. For me he has always been a mentor, an affable character, a well-mannered gentleman, a huge source of inspiration, and an honest and true friend. He is always there for me, especially in moments I desperately need one.
(1953) to broach the notion that pragmemes are in essence language games. This paper expatiates on Capone’s view of pragmemes as language games. I will borrow ideas from Swales’ (2004) treatment of genres to suggest that human communication boils down into constellations of language games which comprise language game chains, hierarchies, sets, and networks.

2. Background

The purpose of this section is to present the relevant literature which will lead to the main discussion of the paper. I will begin with a short review of the main perspectives on speech acts. In the next section, I will present an overview of Link and Kreuz’s framework. I will then respond to Link and Kreuz by presenting the main discussion of the paper.

2.1. Speech acts

Crystal (1992) proposed that the term ‘speech act’ refers to any communicative activity which can be defined with reference to the ‘intentions’ of a speaker while speaking and the ‘effects’ achieved on a listener. This is directly related to claims by pragmaticists that language forms have certain communicative functions to serve. For instance, the question “How far is it to Bethlehem?” is a linguistic form that pragmatically functions as a ‘request’ for information; hence, a requestive speech act. The classic example “Can you pass the salt?” uttered at a lunch table is also a request, but this request does not ask for information; rather, it asks for a course of action on the part of the hearer. This indicates that linguistic forms cannot always be interpreted in a purely semantic way. Semantics and pragmatics should work in tandem to ensure the correct interpretation of speakers’ pragmatic intentions (Capone, 2010; Capone & Salmani Nodoushan, 2014). It is in this tradition that communication is regarded as a combination of speech acts (i.e., a series of elements with purpose and intent). As such, speech acts are purposive functional linguistic elements that are designed to create certain effects on the environment, hearers, and/or speakers.

As early as the 1960s, J. L. Austin was well aware of this nature of communication. In Austin’s (1962) view, communication could be considered as a series of communicative acts to which he referred as ‘performative’ acts used systematically to fulfil particular communicative purposes. In a series of lectures which he had planned to give at Harvard and Oxford, Austin had described what he meant by speech acts. His lectures were posthumously published in a seminal volume entitled How to Do Things with Words. For Austin, statements uttered in marriage ceremonies or ship-naming rituals are by their very nature performative rather than being constative. “I name this ship Elizabeth,” for example, brings about a new state of affairs which did not
exist prior to its utterance; it is an effective speech act that creates a new social fact, a new-born institutional reality (See Bach and Harnish, 1979). Utterances of this kind are to be interpreted with an eye on the actions they perform, but not simply based on the semantic propositions of the lexical items comprising them (Austin, 1962).

Performative acts possess their own declarative forms. In addition, they also possess well-established and well-understood syntactic and structural characteristics (e.g., a present tense verb form, a first-person subject, and perhaps the adverb ‘hereby’). It has been suggested in the literature that the adverb ‘hereby’, when added after the subject in a statement, will reveal the performative nature of the statement. As such, ‘I hereby name this ship Elizabeth’ is a performative, and the adverb ‘hereby’ reveals its performative nature. In his evaluation of performative acts, Austin (1962) came to the conclusion that virtually any utterance partakes of the nature of actions (Salmani Nodoushan, 1995, 2006).

In this connection, Austin (1962) argued that any utterance simultaneously performs three kinds of acts called forces: (1) locutionary (or the particular sense and reference of an utterance), (2) illocutionary (or the act performed in, or by virtue of, the performance of the illocution), and (3) perlocutionary (or the act performed by means of what is said—and of course the effect achieved on the interlocutor). The locutionary force of any utterance has to do with truth-conditionality and normally falls within the purview of truth-based semantics. By way of contrast, the perlocutionary force of an utterance belongs strictly beyond the investigation of language and meaning, in that it deals with the results or effects utterances achieve (in the society or on the hearers). Illocutions occupy the middle ground between locutions and perlocutions, and this middle ground has come to be known as the territory of pragmatics—or of meaning in context. It is in this connection that Austin (1962) emphasizes that only the verbs used to describe illocutions can be used as performative verbs.

Austin’s proposal of performative acts created a wave of research on speech acts. One of the earliest attempts at classifying speech acts was made by Strawson (1964) who used the ‘institutional’ versus ‘noninstitutional’ dichotomy (or the ‘conventional’ versus ‘nonconventional’ classificatory principle) to present a taxonomy of speech acts. It should be noted that communicative intentions of the Gricean (1957) type lie at the heart of noninstitutional acts while institutional acts (e.g., marriage rituals) are based on certain non-linguistic conventions—usually of a social/institutional nature (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013).

In another attempt at classifying and defining the different speech acts any person can possibly perform, Searle (1969) drew on the ‘felicity’ conditions
which must be present if a given speech act is to be effectively performed. On the basis of these conditions, he proposed four types of rules: (1) **Propositional Content Rules** (which specify the kind of meaning expressed by the propositional part of an utterance), (2) **Preparatory Rules** (which delineate the conditions which are pre-requisite to the performance of the speech act), (3) **Sincerity Rules** (which outline the conditions which must obtain if the speech act is to be performed sincerely), and (4) **Essential Rules** (which specify what the speech act must conventionally count as). Searle argued that these rules can easily distinguish between different speech acts. As such, the speech act theory (described in the next section) functions as a framework for the classification of different illocutions.

Along the same lines, Bach and Harnish (1979) employed *nonlinguistic conventions* to clearly define what is meant by institutional and conventional speech acts. Drawing on Searle’s (1969) conception of felicity conditions (Searle, 1969) and Strawson’s (1964) institutional vs. noninstitutional classificatory principle, they suggested that a speech act \( X \) is conventional if, and only if, both of the interlocutors (i.e., the speaker (\( S \)) and the hearer (\( H \))) mutually and sincerely believe that that speech act counts as \( X \) in a certain conventional context. This entails that both of the interlocutors honestly believe that in that kind of context, any utterance of that kind would undoubtedly count as \( X \) (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013). As such, Bach and Harnish (1979) suggested two general categories of conventional or institutional speech acts: (a) verdictives, and (b) effectives. Verdictives are *a posteriori* in that they are performed following an already-existing natural fact (e.g., Ruhollah Khomeini’s performance of the verdictive speech act of sentencing Salman Rushdie to death after he had already authored the *Satanic Verses*). To put it another way, a verdictive speech act maps an institutional status onto an already-existing natural fact; it is an attempt at framing already existing natural facts within the frame of socially established institutions (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013). In contrast, effective speech acts are performed to create new institutional facts that could not exist prior to their performance. As such, they are *a priori* in nature (e.g., when someone resigns from his job, when a ship is named, when a priest performs marriage rituals, etc.).

It should be noted that Austin himself, too, suggested that illocutionary speech acts should be distinguished from other forms of speech actions due to their strictly conventional nature (Austin, 1975). In 1979, Searle proposed an improvement of Austin’s classification of speech acts; Searle’s improved classification (cited in Leech and Thomas, 1985, p. 179) consisted of five classes of speech acts:

1) **Assertives**: commit S(peaker) to the truth of some proposition;
2) *Directives*: count as attempts to bring about some effect through the action of H(earer);

3) *Expressives*: count as the expression of some psychological state;

4) *Commissives*: commit S to some future action;

5) *Declaratives*: are speech acts whose "successful" performance brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality.

Searle's (1979) classification of speech acts seems to have been inspired by Bühler’s (1934) ‘Organon Model’ and Jacobson's (1960) 'communication function'. In his Organon Model, Karl Bühler suggested that language is used to fulfil three communication functions which, in turn, can describe linguistic communication: (1) *Ausdrucksfunktion* or the Expressive Function, (2) *Darstellungsfunktion* or the Representation Function, and (3) *Appellfunktion* or the Conative Function—also known as the appealing function. In his description of effective acts of communication, Jacobson (1960) expatiated on Bühler’s Organon Model, to which he added the poetic, phatic and metalingual functions; as such, the model of communication functions proposed by Jacobson included six communication functions each of which had an associated factor:

1) *Metalingual*: This function focuses on the code/language itself; it aims at decoding the code. Alternative names for this function are 'metalinguistic' and 'reflexive';

2) *Expressive*: This function is sometimes called ‘emotive’ or ‘affective’. It expresses addressee’s internal states; it is speaker-oriented in the sense that it carries the speaker's intentions and expresses his internal states (e.g., interjections, sound changes, etc.). It is roughly similar to Austin's conception of the illocutionary force;

3) *Conative*: It directly engages the hearer/addressee, and is therefore hearer-oriented (e.g., summoning, address forms, imperatives, vocatives, etc.);

4) *Poetic*: This function focuses on the ‘message’ itself; it shows how the code itself operates in poetry and slogans (in terms of aesthetics and style);

5) *Phatic*: This includes fillers and phatic communion. Its job is to keep the channel of communication open. It has to do with the use of language for the sake of ‘interaction’ and is normally associated with the Contact/Channel factor (e.g., greetings, casual discussions of the
Its job is to provide the keys to open, maintain, verify or close the communication channel. As such, it is hearer-focused in the sense that it is normally used to fulfil a social purpose (e.g., to emphasize the hearer’s belonging to the speaker’s in-group); and

6) **Referential:** This is roughly similar to Austin’s locutionary force. Its job is to describe a mental state, a situation, or an object. As such, it corresponds to the factor of ‘context’ in communication, and includes definite descriptions and deictic expressions.

The information presented hitherto reveals that pragmaticists do not seem to agree on the exact number and types of speech acts. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that most of the existing taxonomies of speech acts have driven their classificatory principles and categorization criteria from purely formal boundaries and syntactic lines—like sentence, clause, etc. (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013). Nevertheless, several scholars have attempted to taxonomize speech acts on the basis of non-linguistic theoretical classificatory principles. For one thing, Kissine (2013) proposed three theoretical principles for the classification of speech acts: (1) speech acts as conventional actions (e.g., naming a ship), (2) speech acts as expressions of mental states (e.g., expressing hate), and (3) speech acts as linguistic actions (e.g., describing rules of grammar). Kissine’s classification of speech acts seem to have been driven from, or inspired by, Halliday’s (1994) ideational (both logical and experiential), interpersonal, and textual metafunctions which he delineated in his Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

Halliday does not claim to be a pragmaticist, but his classification of metafunctions has a direct bearing on our understanding of speech acts. His view of language differs from structural views in that he approaches the study of language from a functional and semantic perspective, but not from a formal and syntactic one. According to Halliday (1994), not only the emergence of grammar but also the specific forms that grammars take can best be explained in terms of the specific functions that language has evolved to serve. Halliday does not deny that languages and cultures are diverse, but argues that all languages have been shaped to serve three main functions which he refers to as metafunctions: (1) **ideational** (both ‘logical’ and ‘experiential’), (2) **interpersonal**, and (3) **textual**. Each metafunction is a ‘systemic cluster’ in the sense that it consists of ‘clusters of semantic systems’ which make meanings of a related kind which are mapped onto the structure of the clause.

The **ideational metafunction** (which comprises both ‘experiential’ and ‘logical’ functions) has to do with building and maintaining ‘propositions’ that turn up into a theory of experience; hence, the alternative name ‘propositional’ metafunction. This metafunction refers to the semantics of language and
forms its conceptual part. The experiential function—one of the functions in the ideational metafunction—refers to the grammatical choices that make it possible for us to make meanings about the world in which we live as well as the world inside us. It has to do with how language can be put to use to construe an abstract model of experience (Halliday, 1994). As Halliday (2003, pp. 15-16) argues:

Most obviously, perhaps, when we watch small children interacting with the objects around them we can see that they are using language to construe a theoretical model of their experience. This is language in the experiential function; the patterns of meaning are installed in the brain and continue to expand on a vast scale as each child, in cahoots with all those around, builds up, renovates and keeps in good repair the semiotic “reality” that provides the framework of day-to-day existence and is manifested in every moment of discourse, spoken or listened to. We should stress, I think, that the grammar is not merely annotating experience; it is construing experience.

Seen in this light, the experiential function views language as the end product of humans attempts at making meaning from experience—a position that clearly shows the influence of Benjamin Lee Whorf on Halliday's view of language. The ‘logical’ function is the second function found inside the ideational metafunction. This function is responsible for setting up logical-semantic relationships (i.e., taxis and logico-semantic relations) between different clausal units (e.g., subordination, coordination, etc.).

The **interpersonal** metafunction controls interpersonal communication and relations; it claims that language, in addition to construing experience, simultaneously acts out “the interpersonal encounters that are essential to our survival” (Halliday, 2003, p. 16). These encounters can range from micro-encounters in everyday life (e.g., greetings, asking for direction, etc.) to macro-encounters or institutionalized relationships (e.g., marriage rituals, funerary rites, etc.). When micro- and macro-encounters are taken together, they collectively form the social bond. Modality, polarity, and mood (e.g., optative, indicative, subjunctive, etc.) comprise the grammatical systems that fulfil the interpersonal metafunction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

The **textual** metafunction allows language user to intricately combine the experiential function and the interpersonal metafunction, and makes it possible for them to “put any interactional ‘spin’ on any representational content” (Halliday, 2003, p. 17); its object is language itself. In Halliday’s view, the textual metafunction encompasses and exhausts all of the grammatical systems (i.e., Theme, Given and New, and Cohesion) which are at work to manage the smooth flow of discourse. It gives language the ‘texture’ that is
required for the creation of ‘coherent’ and ‘cohesive’ texts. It “creates a semiotic world of its own: a parallel universe, or ‘virtual reality’ in modern terms” (Halliday, 2001, p 276).

In addition to the taxonomies described above, several other classifications of speech acts have been proposed to date. For different classifications of speech acts, please see Alston (2000), Bach and Harnish (1979), Croft (1994), Fraser (1974), Hancher (1979), McCawley (1977), Sadock (1974, 1994), Sbisà (1984), Searle (1975), Vendler (1972), and Zaefferer (2001).

2.2. Speech Act Theory and its critics

It was stated in the previous section that Austin should be credited with the proposal of performative acts. Austin's ideas spurred a lot of interest in pragmatics and speech acts in communities of linguists and philosophers of language. For one thing, Searle (1969) expatiated on Austin's perceptively-explored ideas by bringing greater systematicity to them. He specifically suggested that meaning is a 'kind of doing', and that, if anything, the study of language is just a sub-part of the 'theory of action' (Salmani Nodoushan, 1995, 2006). He crystallized Austin's conceptualizations of illocutionary acts and illocutionary forces to such an extent that it resulted in the birth of what came to be known as the speech act theory—which is in essence, and in practice, a reference to illocutionary acts (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013). His classical work on the speech act theory paved the way for subsequent work on speech acts.

Nevertheless, a clear understanding of the speech act theory requires that one distinguish between the three interrelated concepts of 'speech situation', 'speech event', and 'speech acts'.

Perhaps Dell Hymes (1972) can be credited for the most useful distinction between these terms. He argues that speech situation should be applied to any situation within a community which is associated with speech (e.g., meals, parties, etc.). Nevertheless, such situations are not in and of themselves governed by strict and consistent rules, and a relabeling of them as speech situations will not do much. It was for this very reason that Hymes argued that speech situations should be further restricted as speech events which refer to activities within speech situations that are directly governed by rules and norms that control the use of speech. Examples of speech events include private conversations, class lectures, etc., and samples of speech that occur in such events are called speech acts. As such, speech situations, speech events, and speech acts form a set—in which the term ‘speech acts’ functions as the minimal term. Seen in this light, a speech act is a functional unit in communication (Salmani Nodoushan, 2012). It is the minimal unit of pragmatic analysis.
Speech acts (e.g., citing, reporting, making promises, apologizing, etc.) are controlled and conditioned by rules of conduct and interpretation, and such rules and conditions apply to the whole of a conversation as well as to the different speech acts which comprise it. It is therefore necessary to emphasize here that a serious misconception which may stem from a misunderstanding of Searle's classification of speech acts is that each conversation consists of one and only one single speech act (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013). If not all, a good number of conversations are multi-purpose and multi-functional, and therefore consist of sets of speech acts. This was observed by Labov and Fanshel (1977, p. 29), who argued that "most utterances can be seen as performing several speech acts simultaneously." Conversation cannot be viewed as a linear chain of utterances executed one after another; rather, it should be viewed as an inter-connected matrix of rule-governed and systematic utterances and actions which are bound together by a web of understanding and reactions" (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 29).

Nevertheless, speech act theory has not been without its critics although it has been very influential in a number of fields. For one thing, Flowerdew (1990, pp. 81-103, cited in Salmani Nodoushan, 1995, 2006, 2013) proposed a list of the seven domains in which the main flaws and major drawbacks of the speech act theory can be perceived:

1) the exact number of speech acts;
2) discrete categories versus scale of meaning;
3) indirect speech acts and concept of literal force;
4) contrast between specific and diffuse acts;
5) size of speech act realization forms;
6) relation between locution, illocution, and interaction; and
7) relation between the whole and the parts in discourse.

In addition to these drawbacks, it should be noted that Austin himself too was well aware of the fact that any account of the speech act theory would be short-sighted unless felicity conditions are taken into account (Austin, 1963). He took the term ‘felicity conditions’ to refer to the criteria which must be satisfied if a speech act is to achieve its purpose (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013). In other words, there are certain social conventions and norms as well as felicity conditions that must be met if speakers want their speech acts to be appropriately performed and realized. Speakers and hearers are expected to heed these conventions, norms and conditions to guarantee the achievement of the purposes for which speech acts are performed (Searle, 1981). For
certain purposes, however, speakers may sometimes (intentionally) fail to commit the felicity conditions of an utterance. For instance, as Lyons (1977, p. 157) observed, the utterance "Will you drive?" is inappropriate as a request if the speaker knows that the hearer has not learnt to drive, and the mutual recognition of such inappropriateness would, in turn, lead to an interpretation of a different order (e.g., teasing, using irony, telling jokes, asking rhetorical questions, making sarcastic comments, telling lies, etc.). Austin (1962) referred to utterances of this kind as infelicitous (See also Clark, 1996; Haiman, 1998).

2.3. Ostensible and genuine speech acts

In their study of invitations, Isaacs and Clark (1990) came up with two types of invitations: (a) genuine, and (b) ostensible. This paved the way for them to suggest the existence of a new class of speech acts to which they referred as Ostensible Speech Acts (OSAs hereafter). OSAs are utterances that may take the ‘form’ of an invitation, a compliment, a request, and so forth but that actually functions ‘off the record’ for some other unstated purpose (Walton, 1998). As such, they cannot be judged on the basis of the ‘form’ they have taken; rather, their interpretation depends on the ‘off record’ purpose they fulfil. Isaacs and Clark (1990) and Clark (1996) took ostensible speech acts to stand for the acts that speakers perform in a non-serious way provided that hearers can clearly recognize their not being serious. It is left to the hearers to infer the speakers’ intentions. Needless to say, speakers quite frequently avoid making their thoughts explicit for hearers and expect hearers to infer their beliefs and attitudes (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Gibbs, 2000; Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

Isaacs and Clark’s conception of OSAs is based on the notions of speaker ‘sincerity’, ‘seriousness’, and ‘transparency’ (Clark, 1996; Haiman, 1998; Salmani Nodoushan, 1995, 2006). They use ostensible invitations as counter-evidence to reject Bach and Harnish’s definition of invitations as a speaker’s (S) inviting a hearer (H) to an event (E) only if S requests H’s presence and promises acceptance of his or her presence (Bach and Harnish, 1979, p. 51). They argue that ostensible invitations are sincere and that the speaker is sincere in extending them, and the hearer can clearly perceive the speaker’s sincerity and the ‘pretense’ of the act. As such, it would be wrong to see them as lies. Unlike lies, they are not extended to deceive the hearer; rather, the hearer clearly understands them for what they are—ostensible acts. Therefore, the success of ostensible speech acts lies in the hearer’s correct perception of the speaker’s ‘pretense’.

But what constitutes Ostensibility? Is ‘mutually recognized pretense’ the sufficient condition for an act to be labeled as ostensible? Isaacs and Clark
(1990) suggested that ostensible invitations (and by extension all other forms of OSAs) possess five distinctive features: (a) pretense, (b) mutual recognition, (c) collusion, (d) ambivalence, and (e) off-record purpose. In their view, these properties make ostensible invitations distinguishable from genuine invitations (See also Link and Kreuz, 2005).

(1) *Pretense*: The speaker only pretends to produce a genuine speech act. The pretense should not be opaque; it is supposed to be transparent and clearly recognizable so that speaker's sincerity is not questioned. Clark (1996) argued that the pretense is tantamount to 'transparent insincerity' and can therefore be called 'joint' pretense;

(2) *Mutual Recognition*: Speaker's intention is to make sure that his pretense is not only vividly recognized by himself but also by his interlocutor; hence, mutual recognition;

(3) *Collusion*: Hearers are intended and expected to 'collude' with the speaker on the pretense by responding in kind. They are expected to react to the speaker's pretense in an appropriate way (i.e., by providing ostensible responses);

(4) *Ambivalence*: If the speaker were asked, "Do you really mean it?" he could not honestly answer either yes or no. This is a distinctive feature of OSAs since it can differentiate 'ostensibility' from other forms of 'staged communicative acts' such as joking, irony, deceptive speech, evasive speech, etc.; and

(5) *Off-record Purpose*: This has to do with the 'plausibility' of intentions, and 'accountability' of speakers for the intentions. Genuine speech acts have clear intentions and vivid implications which are direct and on-record and for which speakers can be held accountable; OSAs, however, possess plausible but not vivid intentions and/or implications which are indirect, off-record, and tacit and for which speakers cannot be held accountable.

The distinction between bald on-record and off-record intentions was first explained by Brown and Levinson (1978) in their seminal work on the politeness theory. Isaacs and Clark (1990) suggested that an ostensible invitation may be a means of testing the waters to see how the invitee might react. Salmani Nodoushan (1995, 2006) suggested that the off-record intention in ostensible invitations may have a politeness purpose. Walton argued that a primary "off-record" purpose of "... ostensible speech acts in general is to assert or affirm a status or power difference between speaker and addressee" (1998, p. 27). If Walton's claim is true, one should not be able to observe any ostensible speech acts in the 'solidarity' and 'deferential'
politeness systems (described by Scollon and Scollon, 2001). However, Salmani Nodoushan (1995, 2006), in his study of ostensible invitations in Persian, presented examples of ostensible invitations which had been observed among status-equals. As such, assertion or affirmation of a status or power difference between interlocutors cannot be the primary ‘off-record’ purpose in ostensible speech acts (See also Link and Kreuz, 2005).

OSAs seem to possess two layers: (a) formal layer (also called a top layer) at which a speech act which has the appearance of a genuine speech act is performed, and a functional layer (also called a bottom layer) at which both the speaker and the hearer ‘take collusive action’ towards each other by mutually recognizing that the top layer is nothing but a sincere and transparent pretense. Nevertheless, this is easier said than done. Therefore, speakers need to employ certain strategies to make sure that their interlocutors will have no difficulty in recognizing the pretense; moreover, they must be ready to take the risk and accept to be accountable for the ‘genuine’ side of the act in case things go wrong and hearers fail to perceive the pretense only to take the performed act to be a genuine one. For instance, if an inviter extends an ostensible invitation (say to a party) but fails to make the pretense clear enough for the invitee to collude with him on the ‘ostensibility’ of the invitation, he should be ready to accept the consequences and host the hearer at the party. Otherwise, his sincerity will be called into question. As such, OSAs are not, and cannot be, intended to be ambiguous.

The strategies that speakers have at their disposal to appropriately perform OSAs can be classified into two major groups: (a) four pragmatic strategies, and (b) three discursive strategies. The pragmatic strategies include: (1) speakers’ violation of one or more of the felicity/preparatory conditions, (2) hearers’ solicitation of the speech act, (3) speakers’ intentional failure to motivate the speech act beyond social courtesy, and (4) speakers’ intentional failure to persist or insist on the content of the speech act (Isaacs & Clark, 1990; Link & Kreuz, 2005; Salmani Nodoushan, 1995, 2006). The discursive strategies, on the other hand, include: (1) speakers’ being vague or fuzzy, (2) speakers’ hedging or use of ‘approximators’ and ‘shields’, and (3) speakers’ use of inappropriate cues in the delivery of the act—e.g., hesitation, eye-gaze avoidance, mumbling, rapid speech, pauses, inappropriate body posture, inappropriate intonation, filled pauses, etc. As such, OSAs require pragmatics and discourse to work in tandem.

It should be noted that OSAs are different from other forms of ‘staged communicative acts’ (SCAs, hereafter) described by Clark (1996). SCAs are pretentious and make an outward—usually exaggerated or deniable—show; they may be evasive or deceptive (e.g., lies, hyperboles, ironies, etc.). They may be intended for communication or miscommunication; however, they
certainly lack ‘ambivalence’ and cannot therefore be accepted as OSAs. In other words, ‘pretense’ is the key ingredient and distinctive feature in staged communicative acts (Anolli, 2002), while OSAs require both ‘transparent pretense’ and ‘ambivalence’ to function properly. SCAs may even enjoy ‘equivocation’, but they do not enjoy ‘ambivalence’. According to Bavelas, Black, Chovil, and Mullett (1990), speakers are apt to use equivocal language when they have to face with an avoidance-avoidance conflict (e.g., confrontations). Nevertheless, the use of equivocal, imprecise, and ambiguous cues (e.g., nonverbal deception cues, hesitation, and latency of response, etc.) is allowed in OSAs provided that they do not block hearers’ perception of the ‘pretense’ and speakers’ intended ‘ambivalence’ (Hamilton & Mineo, 1998). It is in this context that Link and Kreuz (2005) suggest that ‘ostensibility’ can occur in three types of speech acts: (a) directives, (b) commissives, and (c) expressives.

The success of OSAs lies in hearers’ metarepresentational abilities. Seen in the light of Sperber and Wilson’s (1995) ‘principle of relevance’ delineated in their famous ‘Relevance Theory’, listeners can appreciate the ‘pretense’ sugar-coated in OSAs if they make inferences about speakers’ thoughts—that is, if they can mentally represent speakers’ mental representations; as such, OSAs fit within the frame of ‘metarepresentations’ (cf. Gibbs, 2000; Leslie, 1987; Leslie & Roth, 1993; Wilson, 2000), and so do SCAs. As such, both speakers and hearers can be ascribed a ‘double knowledge’ about OSAs; for instance, they can pretend that an ‘ostensible invitation’ is a ‘genuine invitation’, but at the same time they know that it is not—that is, they know and are able to show that it is a metarepresentation of a genuine invitation which serves an ‘off-record’ purpose (usually politeness). How do they know this? The answer lies in their ‘theories of mind’ and their ‘common grounds’ which are beyond the scope of this paper (For more on these topics, please see Allen, 2013; Cummings, 2013; Kecskes, 2013).

In the following sections, I shall briefly overview the theories that can be viewed as rivals to the speech act theory. I shall then return to the issue of the classification of speech acts and shall present my own perspective on speech act taxonomies.

3. Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory (RT)

Sperber and Wilson’s (1986) Relevance Theory (RT) is based on Grice’s (1989) argument that human communication pivots on expressing and recognizing intentions. It was proposed as an alternative to the classical ‘code’ model of communication (CCMC, hereafter). The CCMC suggested that a communicator encodes his intentions which he then signals to the audience in a message; the audience uses an identical copy of the code to understand the
message. By way of contrast, RT is an ‘inferential’ model of communication. RT simply holds that a communicator “provides evidence of her intentions to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided” (Wilson & Sperber, 2004, p. 26).

The audience’s job is to cancel irrelevant implicatures and inferences, and to compute the relevant ones. RT suggests that hearers do so by employing two principles: (1) the positive cognitive effect principle, and (2) the processing effort principle. An input—one of the many probable meanings, inferences, implications derivable from a communicator’s message—is relevant when its processing results in a ‘positive cognitive effect’ defined as a worthwhile difference to the individual’s representation of the world (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). For instance, you are a teacher and you notice that your student, John, is falling asleep in your class—for the 20th time in a semester—and conclude that something is seriously wrong with him (e.g., He takes drugs). This is true conclusion which modifies your representation of the world. If it is the first time this is happening, however, you cancel this interpretation (probably considering it as a false conclusion), and opt for other inferences—say, staying up late last night to watch the 2014 FIFA World Cup final match. The amount of ‘processing effort’ required for computing meanings (explicatures, implicatures, inferences, . . . ) is also important; hearers are inclined towards less processing efforts.

Based on these assumptions, Sperber and Wilson (1986) suggested their ‘Cognitive Principle of Relevance’ (CPR), which holds that ‘human cognition is inclined towards the maximization of relevance’. Sperber and Wilson (1995, §3.1–2) argue that:

a) Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

b) Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

It can be inferred from the principles of RT that communication is possible even when intentions are not verbally communicated (e.g., in OSAs and SCAs). People are inclined towards picking out the most relevant inputs which they will then process to maximize their relevance. In doing so, hearers employ whatever they have at their disposal in computing meaning and resolving ambiguity, and specifically draw on what Weizman and Dascal (1991, p. 18) called ‘cues’ (i.e., contextual elements that can be used “for the detection of gaps and mismatch”) and ‘clues’ (i.e., elements of context that can be used for the “determination of utterance meaning and speaker’s meaning”)—See also Dascal and Weizman (1987). They also employ the ‘big three’ factors; (a)
common ground, (b) context (both social and interpersonal), and (c) salience (Kecskes, 2013; Salmani Nodoushan, 2014).

It is therefore possible to get things done—without communicating them—by exploiting this natural cognitive tendency. A shopkeeper who places certain items in the window of his shop is predicting and manipulating the mental states of window shoppers; he is affecting people’s thoughts in a certain way without giving them any evidence of his intentions. Just like a speaker who produces OSAs, the shopkeeper retains an ‘off-record’ intention by placing certain items in certain locations in the window of his shop. He is therefore engaging in an inferential communication—or what RT calls Ostensive-Inferential Communication (OIC).

According to RT, there are at least two intentions in an act of Ostensive-Inferential Communication: (a) an informative intention (or the intention to inform an audience of something), and (b) a communicative intention (or the intention to inform the audience of one’s informative intention). Wilson and Sperber (2004) hold that as soon as the audience recognizes the communicator’s communicative intention, understanding has taken place. That is, understanding involves hearers’ computation of communicators’ communicative intentions. Fulfillment of the informative intention, on the other hand, depends on how much the audience trusts the communicator. Wilson and Sperber argue that any attempt at ostensive-inferential communication necessarily involves the use of an ostensive stimulus—which can attract an audience’s attention and focus it on the communicator’s meaning. Ostensive stimuli are useful in that they create predictable and precise relevance expectations which will help hearers to identify the speakers’ meanings. In computing speakers’ meanings, hearers will use the ‘relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure’. According to Wilson and Sperber (2004), to compute cognitive effects, hearers:

1) follow a path of least cognitive effort in; to this end, they test interpretive hypotheses in order of accessibility—they use disambiguation strategies, resolve references, cancel certain implicatures and inferences, and so forth; and
2) stop when their expectations of relevance are satisfied, or abandoned altogether.

4. Wittgenstein’s notion of language games

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) developed the philosophical concept ‘language games’ (German: *Sprachspiel*) to refer to “simple examples of language use” as well as the “actions into which the language is woven” (Jago, 2007, p. 17). Wittgenstein rejects the notion that language is a separate entity which
corresponds to reality; rather, he argues that concepts, in order to be meaningful, do not need to be clearly defined. He distinguishes between ‘forms of language’ and the ‘entirety of language itself’, and employs ‘language games’ to refer to the former. The term, ‘language game’ designates language forms that are simpler than the entirety of language. Wittgenstein saw all of a ‘natural language’ as comprising a family of language-games (Jago, 2007). For Wittgenstein, language games are connected by ‘Familienähnlichkeit’ (or family resemblance); the speaking of language is part of an activity—a form of life—which gives language its meaning (Jago, 2007). Wittgenstein uses ‘language game’ in the following senses:

1) Fictional examples of language use: These are simpler than our own everyday language.
2) Simple uses of language: These are used in teaching language to children—training in language);
3) Specific regions of our language: This includes specific language activities (e.g., indirect reports) and their grammars and relations to other language-games.

Wittgenstein’s notion of language games analogized language rules to rules of games; this entails that saying something in a language is comparable to making a move in a game. An interpretation of this notion is that words find different meanings depending on the use to which they are put in different activities of human life.

Lyotard (1979), in *The postmodern condition*, developed his own theory of metanarratives (especially in such contexts as authority, power and legitimation) by basing it on Wittgenstein’s concept of language games. Lyotard’s work pertains to literary analysis; it does not claim to have any bearing on the philosophy of language.

5. **Mey’s perspective on societal pragmatics and pragmemes**

Mey’s (2001) ‘pragmatic act theory’ is connected to the socio-cultural-interactional line of research which “has resulted in societal-centered theories where interpretation goes from-the-outside-in (holistic) and less attention is paid to the proposition expressed” (Kecskes, 2013, p. 38). Mey’s theory emphasizes the priority of socio-cultural and societal factors in the

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2 According to Dascal, Hintikka, and Lorenz (1996), this shows “the shift (in Wittgenstein’s thought) from phenomenalism to physicalism, in the sense that language is no longer conceived of as a means of representing reality but as a means of creating (social) reality” (Capone, 2012, p. 597).
construction as well as the comprehension of meaning. It challenges the traditional Speech Act Theory on the ground that it lacks a theory of action, and that even if it does, it is individual-centered rather than being society-centered (Mey, 2001). In describing his ‘pragmatic act theory’, Mey (2006, p. 542) eloquently argues:

The theory of pragmatic acts does not explain human language use starting from the words uttered by a single, idealized speaker. Instead, it focuses on the interactional situation in which both speakers and hearers realize their aims. The explanatory movement is from the outside in, one could say, rather than from the inside out: instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation where the words fit is invoked to explain what can be (and is actually being) said.

The theory argues that speech acts need to be situated if they aim to be effective; they have to “both rely on, and actively create, the situation in which they are realized . . . there are no speech acts, but only situated speech acts, or instantiated pragmatic acts.” (Mey, 2001, p. 218). For Mey, no “conversational contribution at all can be understood properly unless it is situated within the environment in which it was meant to be understood” (Mey, 2001, p. 217). This implies that people are ‘situated’ in social contexts, and that social contexts and the conditions of their social lives empower and limit them. Mey emphasizes that it is the situation (of language use) as well as such extralinguistic factors as intonation and gestures—but not wording—that define pragmatic acts. Mey sincerely nurtures the idea that “a fortiori, there are, strictly speaking, no such ‘things’ as speech acts per se, only acts of speech in a situation.” He also argues that “indirect speech acts derive their force, not from their lexico-semantic build-up, but instead, from the situation in which they are appropriately uttered” (Mey, 2006, p. 24). As such, in Mey’s (2001) ‘pragmatic act theory’, any act of conversation is in essence a language game that is situated in social context; it is ‘social context’ that determines and provides the rules necessary for the construction and interpretation of meaning. Pragmatic acts, that can cluster together to form what Mey calls ‘pragmemes’, are ‘situation-derived’ and ‘situation-constrained’ (Kecskes, 2013).

Mey’s perspective is rooted in earlier considerations of ‘context’ (both social and interpersonal) (See Hymes, 1974; Dittmar, 1976; Gumperz, 1982; and Wolfson, 1989), ‘felicity conditions (See Austin, 1963), and the distinction between ‘pragmalinguistics’ and ‘sociopragmatics’ (See Leech, 1983). It has also been informed by the classical distinction among ‘speech situation’, ‘speech event’, and ‘speech acts’ (described above; See also Hymes, 1972).
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Hymes’s ideas were further developed by Mey (2001) who formulated and expressed what he eloquently called ‘pragmemes’. He assumes that speech acts need to be situated if they want to be effective; they need to “both rely on, and actively create, the situation in which they are realized” (Mey, 2001, cited in Capone, 2005, p. 1356). In this connection, it should be noted that descriptions of felicity conditions have a lot to do with the social roles of speech acts. Capone (2005) drew on the concepts of speech events, felicity conditions, and social context to expatiate on Mey’s concept of pragmemes; a pragmeme is:

... a situated speech act in which the rules of language and of society combine in determining meaning, intended as a socially recognized object sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which the utterance to be interpreted is embedded (Capone, 2005, p. 1355).

Speech acts, seen from Mey’s (2001) perspective, are doomed to be situated; therefore, their analysis must also be situated. This emphasizes the role of (social) context in the analysis and realization of speech acts. Along the same lines, Verschueren (1999) argued that “allowing context into linguistic analysis is ... a prerequisite for precision” (cited in Capone, 2005, p. 1356). For Mey (2001), in a pragmeme, context is social; it encompasses the internal organization of a society, its intentions, internal differences, sub-groupings, and so on (Salmani Nodoushan, 2013).

The interpretation of a pragmeme cannot be based on the linguistic elements that are found in it; it comes from the ‘social’ situation in which the pragmeme is embedded. In this connection, Mey (2001, p. 219) argues that:

The theory of pragmatic acts does not try to explain language use from the inside out, from words having their origin in a sovereign speaker and going out to an equally sovereign hearer (...). Rather, its explanatory movement is from the outside in: the focus is on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said on the situation, as well as on what is actually being said.

Mey’s perspective argues that meaning is not an innate quality of utterances; that is, utterances are not born with meaning. Meaning is injected into them from outside. Seen in this light, any given speech act acquires its interpretation from the social event in which the producer of the speech act is engaged (Capone, 2010). In an earlier work, Capone (2005) had argued that any pragmeme draws its meaning from (a) semantic rules of language, (b) pragmatic procedures for determining articulated explicatures, and (c) social
conventions for linking utterances and contexts of use (See also Salmani Nodoushan, 2013). It is on this ground that pragmemes can be referred to as “speech acts in context.” Pragmemes are deeply rooted in the idea that, rather than being the representation of (linguistic/literal) meaning, the primary aim of language use is to fulfill social function (See also Malinowski, 1923; Wierzbicka, 2006).

In the following section I shall put all the information presented hitherto together to present my own view of speech acts.

6. General discussion

Based on the information presented above, I would like to suggest that speech acts as well as pragmemes are essentially language micro- and macro-games sensitive to contextual factors and to the context of speech. No matter what form speech acts take on (be it genuine, staged, or ostensible), they are part and parcel of communication, and are therefore subject to the operation of the principles of relevance theory. I would also like to emphasize that speech acts can take any form ranging from single utterances or language micro-games (e.g., I hereby name this ship Elizabeth) to discourse segments or language macro-games (e.g., funerary rituals). I would like to further emphasize that no matter what form speech acts take on, they are rule-governed and therefore fit well within the frame of language games (described by Wittgenstein (1953)).

I also agree with Mey (2001) and Capone (2005) that meaning is injected to language micro- and macro-games from outside. As such, speech acts boil down into ‘pragmemes’, and pragmemes can range from micro-linguistic single utterances to macro-linguistic discourse segments. In injecting meaning into micro- and macro-games, speakers and hearers not only draw on their core socio-cultural ‘knowledge structures’ and conventions (e.g., shared beliefs, shared cultural background, shared experiences, and social-cultural norms, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts) but also negotiate and co-construct emergent knowledge structures that influence and affect communication as it goes on in real time (Salmani Nodoushan, 2014). As such, my perspective on speech acts (or what I would like to call language micro- and macro-games) is dialogic in nature in that, like Kecskes (2013), I believe that both ‘a priori’ and ‘emergent’ factors are precursor to assigning meaning to utterances from-the-outside-in.

I am inspired by Swales (2004) treatment of ‘genre’ to suggest that, in my view, communication, of which speech acts are part and parcel, should be viewed as ‘constellations’ of language games (See also Salmani Nodoushan, 2011). The term ‘language game constellations’ can be used as an umbrella term which includes ‘language game hierarchies’, ‘language game sets’,
‘language game chains’, and ‘language game networks/systems’.

The first term within language game constellations is language game hierarchies. In each discourse institution (e.g., religion, politics, etc.) there are many different forms of language games that professional as well as junior members of those institutions commonly use. In religion, for instance, marriage rituals, funeral rites, Sunday church gatherings, king crowning rituals, and so forth are the most common kinds of language games. These games do not have equal status; rather, they are hierarchically ordered. In politics, on the other hand, language games turn up into public lectures, demonstrations, live TV interviews, and so on. Like religious language games, these games are hierarchically ordered. It should be remembered that different discourse communities do not assign the same degree of importance to the same form of language game. For example, live TV interviews in communist countries and liberal western countries are not treated as equally important. This ends up in different classifications of language games in terms of importance, and it is therefore quite natural to see discrepancies in the hierarchical ordering of language games when similar discourse institutions from different human populations are juxtaposed.

Unlike language game hierarchies that have to do with the ordering of language games in any discourse institution in terms of level of importance, language game chains have to do with the linear ordering of language games in one specific communicative event in any given discourse institution. Funerary rites, for instance, can be considered as just one communicative event in the discourse institution of religion. Performing funerary rites (from the start of the rituals until they come to an end), however, requires a sequential and linear ordering and execution of different forms of language games. As Salmani Nodoushan (2013) observed, performing these rituals in Shia communities of central Iran, these language games (be they semiotic, verbal, or otherwise) are played sequentially:

- Halting the routines of everyday life for forty days
- Proclaiming Azan (the Islamic summons for religious rituals) to announce the death
- Putting on black suits
- Neighbors gathering in the house of the deceased
- Their carrying of the deceased in a coffin towards the cemetery while repeating religious phrases keyed to them by a mullah
- Washing and enshrouding the body while reciting certain religious phrases
- Saying funeral prayers (only in correct Arabic) to petition the God for forgiveness of the deceased
• Burying the body while keying to him/her the correct answers to certain to-be-asked-by-Nakir-and-Monkar questions
• Holding mourning sessions

It should be emphasized that chain of language games in each communicative event within each discourse institution is culture-bound, and the same chain is not necessarily observed in different cultures. Capone’s (2010) analysis of Catholic funerary rites in Italy, for instance, shows remarkable differences (in the chain of language games) with the one described by Salmani Nodoushan (2013) for Shia Iran (See also Heart, 2014; Sahoo, 2014). It should also be emphasized that each step within a language-game chain is in itself a language game (or mini-game), and these games go together to accomplish the communicative event within the discourse institution. The concept of language-game chains, therefore, illustrates how proxemic, kinesthetic, verbal, orthographical, semiotic, and other forms of representation cluster together in any given communicative context within any given discourse institution. As such, language game chains link together social events in different social/institutional practices, different communities and countries, and across different times.

The concept of ‘language game sets’ designates the totality of the different language games in which any junior or professional member of any given discourse institution engages. Priests, for instance, may perform marriage rituals, funerary rites, and so forth. Each one of these activities is in itself a language game (which may contain its own chain of language mini-games), and together they form a language game set. Language game sets never stand in isolation, because junior and professional individuals from discourse institutions engage in them as part of their institutional practices—either or both productively and receptively.

The concept of ‘language game networks’ (also called ‘language game systems’) refers to the sources from which each language game originates. This means that language games do not come out of the blue sky overnight; rather, they have their roots in other language games. The language game of ‘Shia funerary rites’, for instance, is not the brain child of a single person. Rather, the Shia religious institution has stitched together (by inversion, displacement, combination, etc.) information from various ‘manifest’ and ‘hidden’ sources (in the form of citations, quotations, exegesis, etc.) to create a new language game. Needless to say, the institutional reuse of the language game of Shia funerary rites through time has helped it to evolve into a ‘biologically conventionalized language game.’ I would like to borrow ideas

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3 See also Bakhtin (1986), Devitt (1991), and Fairclough (1992).
from Millikan (1984) and Kissine (2013) to explain what I mean by ‘biologically conventionalized language games’: An entity X has the function F iff the capacity to perform F is what explains X’s evolutionary history. My primary suggestion is that all language games are originally conventional, but that sets of language games are designated and determined by biological functions, speakers’ intentions and purposes, or social and/or institutional conventions.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I began with a description of the origins of the speech act theory, and the classifications of speech acts. Then, I reviewed different camps of thought which had a bearing on our understanding of speech acts, and specifically focused on Halliday’s metafunctions, Isaacs and Clark’s ostensible and genuine acts, Sperber and Wilson’s relevance theory, Mey’s conception of pragmemics, and Wittgenstein’s concept of language games. Then I put these together in my general discussion to present my own view of speech acts which I see as language micro- and macro-games. In my discussion of my own views, I suggested that any act of language use (be it semiotic, kinesthetic, proxemic, verbal, orthographical, or otherwise) is essentially a language micro- or macro-game. I then described my own model of ‘language game constellations’ which comprises language game sets, hierarchies, chains, and networks.

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