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The Position of Intentionality in Speech Act Theory: A Comparative Study of John Langshaw Austin and John Rogers Searle

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of intentionality in the philosophy of John Langshaw Austin and John Searle, considering it a central concept in the philosophy of language and speech act theory. It discusses the view that Searle's project constitutes a direct extension of Austin's project by analyzing the position of intentionality in each philosopher's theory and explaining its implications for understanding the illocutionary act and the conditions governing its performance. The article concludes that, in Austin's account, intentionality is regarded as one of the components of the speech act, determined by pragmatic, contextual, and institutional conditions. In Searle's account, however, intentionality constitutes the foundation upon which speech acts are based, understood as an extension of intentional states that regulate the relationship between the mind and the world. Accordingly, the disagreement between the two philosophers is not limited to a reconstruction of speech act theory; rather, it reflects differing conceptions of language, meaning, and the speaking subject.

Keywords: Intentionality; John Langshaw Austin; John Searle; Speech Acts.

Introduction

The transformation that language philosophy underwent during the twentieth century marked a genuine turning point in the understanding of meaning, particularly with the shift in focus from the formal structures of language to its actual practices within contexts of use. Within this framework, intentionality emerged as a concept that makes it possible to examine the relationship between the speaking subject and the meaning produced through their utterances. It also opens up an inquiry into the extent to which the speaker's will can direct meaning within a network of linguistic and contextual conditions that contribute to its formation. Consequently, intentionality became an entry point for investigating the nature of linguistic action and the ways in which meaning emerges within linguistic practice. This turning point was closely associated with the impact of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, in which philosophical attention shifted from the question of the logical structure of language to that of its use within forms of life. As meaning came to be understood as dependent on use, language opened up to its pragmatic dimensions, thereby establishing the philosophical foundations from which John Langshaw Austin's project on speech acts emerged, before John Searle subsequently reconstructed this project within a broader theoretical framework that made intentionality central to the explanation of linguistic action and its connection to the structure of the human mind.

However, examining the foundations underlying each philosopher's project calls for a reassessment of the nature of the relationship between them. Investigating the position occupied by intentionality in each project reveals a divergence that extends beyond the construction of speech act theory to encompass the foundations underpinning their respective conceptions of language, meaning, and linguistic action. In Austin's philosophy, intentionality cannot be separated from a set of conditions in light of which the success of a speech act is determined. The speaker's intention interacts with contextual requirements, social conventions, institutional authority, and the capacity of language to accommodate multiple meanings. In Searle's account, by contrast, intentionality becomes the principle around which speech acts are organized, as linguistic action derives its meaning and conditions of success from the intentional states that establish the relationship between the subject and the world. Accordingly, the divergence between Austin and Searle extends to two distinct philosophical conceptions of the nature of meaning and the position of the subject within linguistic action. From

this perspective, the present study raises the following research question: How does the difference between Austin's and Searle's conceptions of intentionality reshape the relationship between language, the subject, and meaning?

Building on this research question, this article seeks to analyze the concept of intentionality in the philosophies of Austin and Searle in order to identify its position within each project, elucidate the philosophical foundations underlying each conception, and explain the implications for understanding the relationship between language, meaning, and illocutionary acts. To achieve this objective, the study adopts analytical and comparative approaches by examining the texts of both philosophers and then comparing them to identify their points of convergence and divergence and clarify the significance of these differences for the development of speech act theory.

1. Intentionality and the Question of Orientation Toward Meaning

Addressing intentionality in the philosophies of Austin and Searle requires examining the philosophical horizon within which this concept took shape, since its presence in contemporary philosophy of language belongs to a theoretical history that extends beyond the boundaries of analytic philosophy. Throughout its philosophical development, intentionality has been associated with attempts to explain how mental states are directed toward their objects, before assuming a central position in phenomenology, while retaining roots that extend back to Aristotelian philosophy. Building on this historical trajectory, Searle defines intentionality as "the property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about objects and states of affairs in the world"¹, explaining that this understanding belongs to a long philosophical tradition that regards orientation toward an object as the defining characteristic of mental life.

A return to Aristotle reveals that intentionality was not initially introduced as a property of consciousness, but rather within the context of reflecting on the structure of human action. Through what later came to be known as practical syllogism, action is determined through the conjunction of desire and belief. An action does not arise from an abstract inclination or isolated knowledge, but rather from the combination of what an agent desires with what they believe to be the appropriate means of achieving it. In this context, the philosopher G. E. M. Anscombe invokes this Aristotelian conception when she states: "In the practical syllogism there are two premises, one expressing a desire or intention and the other expressing a belief that this particular action is the means to satisfying that desire, and from both the action necessarily follows, desire always being the origin of the action"². This means that, from its earliest formulations, intentionality was associated with the question of the conditions that make human action intelligible and amenable to explanation. It thus became a concept at the intersection of logical, psychological, and practical dimensions. This interplay is particularly significant for the philosophy of language because it reveals that intentionality is not a concept with a single structure, but rather a domain in which multiple modes of analysis intersect, thereby explaining the differences in its position and function in the philosophies of Austin and Searle.

It is worth noting here that Searle is careful to distinguish intentionality as a general property of mental states from intention as a particular form of intentionality. In his terms, intentionality is the property of being directed toward an object, whereas intending to perform a particular action is merely one mode of this directedness³.

This distinction entails an important philosophical consequence: it broadens the scope of intentionality to include belief, perception, desire, memory, and other mental states, rather than restricting it to the voluntary intention accompanying an action. It is from this broader scope that the point of departure emerges at which Austin and Searle diverge in their understanding of the relationship between intentionality and language. For Austin, intentionality becomes one component of linguistic action, whereas for Searle, it becomes the underlying structure upon which that action primarily rests.

2. Intentionality in Austin

2.1. Language as Action Rather Than Description

Austin's treatment of intentionality begins with a radical reconsideration of the traditional conception of language, which restricted its function to representing facts and regarded the criterion of truth and falsity as the primary standard for evaluating utterances. In his view, this conception reflected the dominance of formal logic over the philosophy of language, whereby the value of an utterance was measured according to its correspondence with reality, while the other functions performed by language in human practice were neglected.

This shift finds its continuation in the turn brought about by Wittgenstein in his later philosophy, when he moved from viewing language as a logical system to understanding it as a practice embedded in forms of life. Austin, however, did not stop at linking meaning to use; he went further by questioning what an utterance itself accomplishes in the world. In many cases, speakers do not use language to describe an existing event but rather to bring about a new one. Promising, apologizing, declaring, and ordering, for example, are acts that are performed at the very moment of utterance. In this sense, language becomes a form of action, and the analysis of an utterance no longer depends solely on its semantic

¹ Searle, J, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, p. 1.

² Anscombe, G, *Intention*, Blackwell, 1957, p. 17.

³ Searle, J, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 3.

structure but also on the circumstances under which it becomes capable of producing its effect. An utterance derives its value from its position within a network of social practices that confer upon it its illocutionary force ⁴

This shift entails a reconsideration of the very concept of intentionality. Whereas traditional theories regard meaning as a direct reflection of what the speaker intends, Austin directs attention toward the conditions that make an intention realizable through linguistic action. Regardless of how clearly formulated it may be, intention alone does not have the power to accomplish the act, because the success of an utterance depends on a set of factors that extend beyond the speaker's consciousness and will. For this reason, Austin requires the fulfillment of what he calls *felicity conditions*, emphasizing that an utterance becomes an act only when produced under appropriate circumstances, and that its performance often requires other physical or mental acts performed by the speaker or by others ⁵.

The speech act is constituted within and through this context. Social and institutional circumstances therefore enter into the internal structure of the act, making it impossible to separate what the speaker intends from what the conditions of performance permit. It is at this point that Austin begins to displace intentionality from its central position without denying its presence, treating it instead as one among several elements that combine to produce and perform linguistic action.

To examine more precisely the layers through which Austin constructs the concept of the locutionary act, it is necessary to consider the distinction he proposes between three interrelated levels: the *phonetic act*, which consists merely in producing certain sounds; the *phatic act*, which consists in producing sounds as elements belonging to a particular language's vocabulary and conforming to its rules; and the *rhetic act*, which involves using those words with a specific or relatively specific meaning and reference ⁶. More precisely, it involves using an expression in accordance with its meaning—or one of its meanings, if it is ambiguous—while undertaking whatever is necessary to determine the reference of expressions that require their referents to be identified⁷. The phatic act alone is not sufficient to attain the level of the rhetic act. Austin requires the speaker to possess semantic competence in the expression being used and to have an intention akin to what might be called *semantic intention*: that is, the intention to use the expression according to its meaning and to determine its reference when the context requires it. This demonstrates that intentionality is present in Austin's account from the earliest stage in the formation of the locutionary act. However, its role does not extend beyond the conditions of semantic and referential competence, nor does it guarantee the illocutionary force of the utterance, which, as previously indicated, remains dependent on other conditions extending beyond the individual speaker's will.

It should be noted that the relationship between the rhetic act and the locutionary act itself remains a matter of debate among Austin's commentators. The Italian philosopher Marina Sbisa, for example, emphasizes that Austin introduced his distinctions—phonetic, phatic, and rhetic—as internal analyses of the locutionary act. Consequently, the rhetic act has been regarded in the literature as representing the locutionary act itself ⁸, and some scholars tend to treat the two as equivalent. François Recanati has shown that certain passages in Austin suggest that the particular words used enter into the constitution of the rhetic act, such that two rhetic acts count as the same act only if the same words are used in both. By contrast, two locutionary acts may count as the same even when synonymous words, including words from another language, are employed ⁹. This subtle distinction does not alter the substance of the preceding discussion concerning the requirements of semantic competence and semantic intention necessary for performing the rhetic act. Nevertheless, it leaves room for a more precise interpretation of the relationship between intentionality and linguistic action in Austin's philosophy, suggesting that another layer of intention may be involved: the intention to use these particular words rather than other synonymous expressions. Such an intention may contribute to the constitution of meaning without attaining the level of illocutionary force.

2.2. Ambiguity and the Structure of Meaning in Ordinary Language

If the first transformation in Austin's philosophy consisted in moving from language as description to language as action, the second becomes evident in his reconsideration of the very nature of meaning. He does not regard meaning as a ready-made entity residing in words prior to their use, nor as mental content transmitted directly from speaker to hearer. Rather, in his view, meaning takes shape within the space opened up by use, where linguistic rules intersect with social circumstances, the speaker's position, and the hearer's response. Accordingly, semantic plurality is an integral part of the very nature of language. Austin therefore rejects the conception that assumes the possibility of attaining a pure language whose words are transparent and whose meanings are exhausted by determinate interpretations that admit no variation. Such a conception, in his view, rests on abstracting language from the circumstances of its use and subjecting it to the standards of formal logic, which fail to reflect how language operates in everyday life. He thus points out that the assumption of the existence of a completely precise and explicit language simultaneously presupposes the possibility of

⁴ Austin, J. L., *How to Do Things with Words*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1962, p. 52.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96

⁷ Kaplan, D., *Afterthoughts*, in: *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 603.

⁸ Sbisa, M., *Locution, Illocution, Perlocution*, in: *Pragmatics of Speech Actions*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin/Boston, 2013, p. 28.

⁹ Recanati, F., *Meaning and Force: The Pragmatics of Performative Utterances*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, pp. 245–247.

eliminating every scope for interpretation, an assumption unsupported by the nature of ordinary language. Meaning remains open to multiple possibilities, and its effects take shape through use, whether or not this corresponds to the speaker's intention or extends beyond it ¹⁰[1]. Accordingly, Austin rejects approaches that regard ambiguity as a defect in linguistic performance or as evidence of speakers' inability to use language properly. On the contrary, he considers ambiguity to reveal the inherently open-ended nature of meaning itself. An utterance does not carry its meaning independently of the circumstances in which it is used, and its understanding depends on a network of elements that interact at the moment of performance. Intentionality, therefore, cannot be regarded as the sole guarantor of meaning, since meaning invariably extends beyond what the subject intends to encompass the possibilities of understanding and interpretation afforded by language.

This conception becomes particularly clear in Austin's analysis of felicity conditions, in which he demonstrates that the boundaries separating qualified from unqualified persons, or appropriate from inappropriate circumstances, remain dependent on the nature of the situation in which the speech act is performed. He therefore maintains that the distinction between cases of incapacity and cases in which a person or agent is of the inappropriate kind is neither clear-cut nor definitive ¹¹[2]. This analysis reveals that the success of a linguistic act is not determined solely by the speaker's intention, but depends on a system of conditions that extend beyond the speaker's will and contribute to determining the illocutionary force of the utterance.

On this basis, ambiguity is a natural consequence of the openness of linguistic action to conditions that are not under the speaker's sole control, insofar as meaning emerges within linguistic practice, where social conventions, institutions, contexts, and the responses of hearers intersect. It is in this respect that the concept of intentionality in Austin's philosophy acquires its true significance: it is present as one of the elements involved in the constitution of meaning, without monopolizing its interpretation or imposing definitive boundaries upon it.

2.3. The Limits of Will in Speech Acts: Uptake as a Condition of Successful Performance

Intentionality assumes its most complex form in Austin's analysis of what he calls *uptake* (understanding or recognition of the intended illocutionary force). Through this concept, he reveals that a speech act cannot be considered complete merely because an utterance has been produced by the speaker, since its completion depends on the utterance being received and its illocutionary force being understood. No matter how precisely an utterance is formulated or how clearly the speaker's intention is expressed, it does not qualify as an illocutionary act unless it is recognized as a promise, an order, a warning, an apology, or some other illocutionary force it conveys. As Austin explains, "I cannot be said to have warned someone unless he hears what I say and takes it in a certain sense ... In general, the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the utterance. Hence the performance of an illocutionary act involves securing uptake" ¹²

The philosopher Graham Bird argues that Austin's distinction between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act should be understood as an analytical distinction between two interrelated levels within a single linguistic event. From the outset, an utterance is a social practice carrying a specific illocutionary force, rather than merely the production of sounds or meaningful linguistic forms. Thus, when a speaker utters a sentence with a particular content, they perform a locutionary act while simultaneously performing an illocutionary act. Illocutionary force is therefore the dimension that makes the utterance itself an act with social and communicative significance ¹³. This explains Austin's insistence that the performance of a locutionary act generally entails the performance of an illocutionary act "by the very same token."

Marina Sbisà draws attention to this point, explaining that the concept of *uptake* has been misunderstood when it is taken as evidence that illocutionary acts derive their legitimacy from the speaker's intention, in contrast to their conventional character. In fact, in introducing this concept, Austin was not concerned with emphasizing the primacy of intentionality; rather, his focus was on demonstrating that the success of a speech act remains dependent on the social conventions that establish the conditions for its possibility. Sbisà therefore argues that the requirement of securing uptake has mistakenly been regarded as evidence of the intentional character of illocutionary acts, as opposed to their conventional character, whereas Austin actually connected this requirement to their conventional nature itself ¹⁴

Austin repeatedly pointed out that acts do not always take place in the manner intended by those who perform them. They may misfire, occur unintentionally, or be performed under circumstances in which the conditions necessary for their success are absent, making it impossible to regard them as successfully completed acts ¹⁵. The point is that no degree of clarity in subjective intention is, by itself, sufficient to confer illocutionary force upon an utterance unless the conditions governing its performance are fulfilled.

¹⁰ Austin, J. L., *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 105

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 116

¹³ Bird, G., "Austin's Theory of Illocutionary Force," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1981, p. 35.

¹⁴ Sbisà, M., "Uptake and Conventionality in Illocution," *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2009, p. 33.

¹⁵ Austin, J. L., *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 21–22

This point becomes clearer in the analysis offered by the philosopher P. F. Strawson, who distinguishes between merely attempting to perform an illocutionary act and successfully performing it. A speaker may intend to perform an act with a particular illocutionary force, but this intention alone is insufficient to establish that the act has been accomplished; its success remains contingent upon the occurrence of uptake. Strawson therefore emphasizes the need to distinguish between performing an act with a particular illocutionary force, which amounts to attempting to perform an illocutionary act, and successfully performing the illocutionary act, which requires securing uptake ¹⁶. This distinction reveals that will is not the direct source of the speech act. Rather, it constitutes an initial condition whose effect can be completed only within a framework of shared rules and forms of recognition that confer illocutionary force upon linguistic action. As the philosopher Ferguson points out, although the determination of an utterance's meaning involves the speaker's intentions concerning both meaning and reference, these intentions do not operate independently of the linguistic conventions that make their realization possible ¹⁷.

This point becomes even more evident in Austin's characterization of the illocutionary act as a *conventional act*. The illocutionary force of an utterance is not determined solely by the speaker's will; it also derives from the speaker's conformity to the conventions recognized by the linguistic community. An utterance acquires its status because the linguistic community recognizes this type of act and determines the conditions under which it becomes valid and effective. Linguistic convention should therefore be understood as part of the internal structure of the act itself, making linguistic action a social practice before it is merely an expression of a mental state.

Austin supports this conventional characterization of the illocutionary act by invoking a precise linguistic criterion that decisively distinguishes it from the perlocutionary act: the possibility of expressing it through an explicit performative formula. Acts such as making a statement in an argument or issuing a warning can be explicitly formulated as "I state" or "I warn you." By contrast, acts such as persuading, exciting, or frightening someone cannot be expressed in an equivalent formula, since a speaker cannot appropriately say "I persuade you" or "I frighten you" as a direct linguistic performance of the very act in question ¹⁸. This criterion reveals that the conventional character of the illocutionary act is a structural property reflected in the expressive possibilities of language itself. Illocutionary acts can be explicitly expressed through performative formulas because their force derives from conformity to a convention recognized by the linguistic community. Perlocutionary acts, by contrast, involve producing an actual causal effect on the hearer, something that cannot be accomplished merely by uttering a formula that declares it.

It should also be noted that, for Austin, the requirement of securing uptake is not a single condition that applies equally to all illocutionary acts. A distinction must be drawn between communicative illocutionary acts, which aim to communicate by conveying information or an attitude to the hearer and are the only acts structurally conditioned by securing the hearer's understanding, and institutional illocutionary acts, which seek to bring about or modify social facts and generally require compliance with a conventional procedure outside language in order to be performed successfully, without necessarily requiring understanding on the part of another individual. This idea is most clearly illustrated in Austin's analysis of institutional speech acts, in which the illocutionary force of an utterance varies according to the institutional position from which it is issued. When a judge, for example, says, "I sentence you to ...," the utterance does not merely express a personal opinion; rather, it creates a legal effect by virtue of being uttered. If the same words were spoken by someone without judicial authority, however, they would amount to no more than an expression of an opinion or a personal attitude ¹⁹. The authority of the utterance thus derives its legitimacy from the institutional position that confers illocutionary force upon those words.

Accordingly, meaning can no longer be explained solely by reference to the speaker's mental life. The logic underlying Austin's analysis does not permit a direct relationship to be established between language and action such that action becomes merely a transparent reflection of intentionality. This does not mean, however, that he denies the role of will; rather, he rejects the idea that it constitutes the ultimate foundation to which linguistic action can be reduced. As Ferguson points out, even the speaker's simplest intentions amount, in essence, to intending to produce sounds in accordance with the conventions that make them elements of a particular language ²⁰. This means that intentionality itself operates within a normative framework that precedes the speaker and determines the conditions under which their intentions can be realized linguistically.

Accordingly, intentionality in Austin's philosophy is not the organizing principle of speech act theory; rather, it constitutes one element within a more complex structure in which linguistic conventions, pragmatic contexts, social institutions, the hearer's response, and felicity conditions interact as indispensable components of speech act performance. Just as meaning cannot be reduced to what the speaker intends, neither is it entirely independent of the speaker. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of intention and performance, convention and context, where language becomes a social practice as much as

¹⁶ Strawson, P., "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 4, p. 440.

¹⁷ Ferguson, L., *Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, England, 1973, p. 164.

¹⁸ Austin, J. L., *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 104

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89

²⁰ Ferguson, L., *Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts*, p. 162

an action performed by a speaking subject. It is precisely from this point that Searle's philosophical project begins: he transforms what remained for Austin merely one condition among several into the organizing principle upon which the entire structure of linguistic action is founded.

3. Intentionality in Searle: From the Philosophy of Language to the Philosophy of Mind

3.1. Searle and the Reconstruction of Speech Act Theory

Austin's concern focused on how utterances perform actions within social practice. Accordingly, he made the analysis of felicity conditions, context, and linguistic conventions the central focus of his theory. Searle, however, argued that this approach remained incomplete unless it uncovered the foundation that makes speech acts capable of representing the world in the first place. He therefore shifted the question from the analysis of language use to the analysis of the mental states that make such use possible. Searle did not merely reformulate Austin's distinction between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act; rather, he replaced it with another conceptual distinction, separating the propositional act, understood as the act of expressing a propositional content or a particular proposition, from the illocutionary act, understood as the act that determines the illocutionary force with which that content is performed. Searle expressed this distinction in its familiar symbolic form, $F(p)$, where (p) denotes the propositional content, while (F) refers to the illocutionary force that gives the utterance its specific illocutionary type²¹

This replacement was based on an explicit argument that Searle advances against the possibility of separating the locutionary act from the illocutionary act. He observes that acts reported through indirect speech, using expressions such as "said that," "asked about," or "requested that someone do something," themselves involve illocutionary acts, albeit of a very general kind. When it is said that someone asked me to do something, for example, this general formulation encompasses more specific illocutionary acts, such as ordering, pleading, and advising. In Searle's view, therefore, acts of saying, asking, and requesting constitute general illocutionary categories under which more specific illocutionary types fall²². Consequently, there is no purely locutionary act that stands in opposition to the illocutionary act, because every sentence, by virtue of its meaning alone, carries an inherent illocutionary force, even if only of the most general kind. This is what Searle means when he states that there is no sentence entirely devoid of illocutionary force.

This transformation reveals a shift in the center of gravity from pragmatics to consciousness, and from the conditions of performance to the conditions of representation. Whereas language, for Austin, belongs primarily to the social domain, for Searle its origins lie in a mental structure that precedes it, such that speech acts become expressions of intentional states that possess an inherent capacity to be directed toward the world. It is from this point that Searle's project of re-establishing speech act theory on the foundations of the philosophy of mind begins, thereby granting intentionality a status that it did not occupy in Austin's philosophy.

3.2. The Intentional Structure of Linguistic Action

In the opening pages of *Intentionality*, Searle points out that the capacity of speech acts to represent objects and states of affairs in the world is an extension of more fundamental capacities possessed by the human mind, including belief, desire, perception, intention, and other mental states that connect living beings to the world²³. In this sense, the philosophy of language becomes a branch of the philosophy of mind, because the possibilities of representation and reference afforded by language are grounded in the intentional structure of the mind.

This shift entails a reordering of the relationship between language and thought. In Searle's view, language does not produce intentionality or establish the human relationship with the world; rather, it gives this relationship a symbolic form that can be communicated and shared. Its foundation remains the mind's capacity to be directed toward its objects prior to any linguistic expression of them. Searle therefore distinguishes between *intrinsic intentionality*, which characterizes mental states, and *derived intentionality*, which characterizes language, symbols, and other systems of signs. Words do not refer to things in their own right; rather, they derive their capacity to refer from beings that possess intentionality. Searle accordingly defines intentionality as the property characteristic of many mental states and events insofar as they are directed toward, or concern, objects and states of affairs in the world²⁴. By directedness, he means the structure through which a mental state is always determined as being about or concerning something. A belief is a belief about something, a desire is a desire for something, fear is fear of something, and perception is perception of something. In this sense, intrinsic intentionality, for Searle, constitutes an essential property of mental life itself and the characteristic that organizes its relationship with the world; it is not derived from any prior symbolic system²⁵. Language does not confer upon the mind its capacity for reference; rather, it borrows this capacity from the mind. Consequently, all linguistic meanings ultimately depend on the intentional states possessed by the speakers who use language.

²¹ Alston, W., *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2000, pp. 16–22.

²² Searle, J., "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 77, No. 4, 1968, p. 411.

²³ Searle, J., *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, p. vii

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. vii

Searle argues that the relationship between language and intentionality is based on a structural correspondence that makes speech acts extensions of the intentional states expressed by the speaker. He therefore does not regard linguistic action as a phenomenon independent of mental life, but studies it as the external manifestation of an underlying structure that precedes it. Language is what gives meaning a pragmatic form that can be communicated. On the basis of this conception, Searle argues that intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the world in the same way as speech acts do²⁶. This correspondence is first manifested in the distinction between representational content and psychological mode. A mental state cannot be reduced to its object; it is also determined by the manner in which it relates to that object. According to Searle, this structure corresponds precisely to what occurs in speech acts, where the propositional content remains constant while the illocutionary force varies. The same sentence may constitute a promise, a question, a command, or an assertion, depending on the manner in which it is performed.

The second dimension of this correspondence lies in what Searle calls *Direction of Fit*. This concept is among his most distinctive contributions because it demonstrates that the relationship between the mind and the world does not always proceed in a single direction. A belief aims to fit the world; if it proves false, the belief must be revised to correspond to reality. Its direction of fit is therefore from mind to world. A desire or an intention, by contrast, seeks to make the world conform to what the agent wants. If the desired outcome is not achieved, the initial requirement is not necessarily to revise the desire, but rather to change reality so that it corresponds to that desire. The direction of fit is therefore from world to mind²⁷. Searle applies this analysis to speech acts, distinguishing between acts that describe the world and those that aim to change it.

The correspondence is manifested, thirdly, in the relationship between the speech act and the intentional state it expresses. For Searle, the illocutionary act is the linguistic expression of a particular intentional state. He therefore maintains that performing every illocutionary act with propositional content requires expressing the corresponding intentional state²⁸. An assertion expresses a belief, a promise expresses an intention, a command expresses a desire, and an apology expresses a particular psychological attitude. Consequently, the illocutionary force of an act derives not solely from linguistic conventions, but also from its connection to the mental state that underlies it. This structure is completed through the concept of *Conditions of Satisfaction*. An intentional state is associated with conditions whose fulfillment makes it possible to say that the state has achieved its aim. The same applies to speech acts: the validity of an assertion, for example, depends on whether the facts it asserts obtain, while a promise is fulfilled only if the promised action is performed. Searle therefore maintains that what satisfies a speech act consists of the facts that make it successful or true, depending on the type of act in question²⁹.

This structural parallel reveals that Searle views language as a continuation of the very structure of the mind. Accordingly, the analysis of speech acts begins with the analysis of the intentional states that confer meaning and force upon them. In this way, Searle re-establishes speech act theory on a mental foundation, presenting linguistic action as a mirror of the intentional structure of consciousness, whereas it had previously been understood as a social practice governed by conventions.

3.3. Will and Self-Referential Causation

Searle's conception of intentionality can be understood more deeply through his analysis of the will, which he treats as the principle that explains the occurrence of action. At this level, the concept of intentionality shifts from directedness toward the world to the capacity to bring about change in it. An intentional action then becomes an event that occurs because the will itself was a direct cause of its performance. From this perspective, Searle rejects the interpretation of willing as a desire followed by an action merely by chance or as a result of the succession of events. The distinction between movement and action requires that the action occur through the will itself, rather than that the will and its occurrence merely coincide³⁰.

Searle formulates this idea through what he calls *self-referential causation*. By this, he means that the will refers to itself as the cause through which the action is supposed to occur. The intended result must therefore come about in the manner specified by the will. It follows that intentionality is assessed in terms of how the consequences of an action come about, since an action acquires its voluntary character from the fact that the will itself produces it. Searle thus moves from the analysis of meaning to the analysis of causation, making the will a constitutive element in the explanatory structure of human action.

In this context, Searle distinguishes between *prior intention* and *intention-in-action*. A prior intention is formed before an action begins and represents a decision or plan to perform it in the future. Intention-in-action, by contrast, accompanies the performance itself and constitutes part of its internal structure. He therefore maintains that every intentional action

²⁶ Searle, J., *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 11

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85

involves an intention-in-action, whereas not every intentional action requires a prior intention, since a person may perform intentional actions in response to an unexpected situation without having planned them in advance ³¹.

It should be noted here that making intentionality the foundation of action does not mean, for Searle, that everything resulting from an action falls within the scope of the will or forms part of its intentional content. Practical life continually reveals actions that lead to outcomes the agent neither anticipated nor intended. Such cases lead Searle to define the scope of intentionality more precisely without abandoning it as a theoretical principle. In his view, intentionality concerns what guides an action at the moment of its performance, whereas outcomes that extend beyond this content do not form part of its structure, even when they are causally connected to the action.

Searle illustrates this idea by drawing on the famous example from the tragedy of Oedipus. Oedipus intended to marry Jocasta, but he did not know that she was his mother. Consequently, marrying his mother was not part of the intentional content of his will, even though the marriage actually took place ³². This example demonstrates that intentionality is assessed in terms of the content embodied in an action at the moment it is performed by the agent, rather than in terms of what the action ultimately brings about in reality. This distinction implies that an action may be considered a single event in terms of its causal structure while involving two different levels of analysis: one concerning what the agent intended and another concerning the consequences the action produced in the world. In Searle's view, these two levels must not be confused, because including all consequences within intentional content would make the concept of intentionality so broad that it would lose its explanatory value.

For this reason, Searle also takes care to distinguish intentionality from responsibility. People are often held responsible for consequences they did not intend, just as they may intend actions for which they bear no moral or legal responsibility. The relationship between will and responsibility is therefore not one of identity, since the criteria for moral or legal attribution differ from those that determine the intentional structure of an action ³³.

This analysis reveals Searle's concern with preserving the internal coherence of his theory. He acknowledges the complexity of human action and the fact that its consequences may extend beyond what the agent intended, but he rejects the idea that this should undermine the centrality of intentionality. In his view, intentional content remains the point of reference for determining the nature of an action, even when consequences arise that were not encompassed by the will.

3.4. Naturalism and the Re-establishment of Intentionality

Searle's theory of intentionality ultimately leads to a naturalistic thesis that regards the mind and language as extensions of the biological organization of human beings. In his view, intentionality is a property that emerges within the biological structure of a living organism and serves a specific function in regulating its relationship with the world. Accordingly, explaining language requires returning to mental processes, which are natural phenomena with a neurological and biological basis. He therefore considers perception and action to be the primary forms of intentionality, since they constitute the means through which a living organism enters into a direct causal relationship with its environment. Perception connects the subject to the world by receiving facts, whereas voluntary action connects the world to the subject by changing those facts in accordance with the will. Intentionality thus represents the mechanism through which a living organism's interaction with its surroundings is organized, and upon which its survival and continuity depend ³⁴.

On this biological basis, language itself becomes a phenomenon derived from prior mental capacities. Words, symbols, and speech acts derive their intentionality from the original intentionality that characterizes the human mind. Accordingly, the representational function of language is explained both through social conventions and through the biological capacity of human beings to form mental states directed toward the world and representing it.

4. Intentionality in Austin and Searle: Differences in Philosophical Foundations

The preceding analysis of the projects of Austin and Searle makes it possible to summarize the main differences between their approaches in the following points:

4.1. Two Different Starting Points for Understanding Language

A reflection on the philosophies of Austin and Searle reveals a difference in their respective starting points for understanding linguistic action. Austin began with language in its actual use, making the analysis of everyday linguistic practices a means of understanding how actions are performed through speech. Searle, by contrast, adopted a different approach, taking the analysis of intentional states of the mind as the starting point for explaining language, such that speech acts became expressions of an underlying mental structure. The difference between them therefore concerns two distinct conceptions of the very nature of language. Whereas language appears in Austin's account as a social practice whose meanings are determined within context, in Searle's account it emerges as a representational system that derives its meaning from the original intentionality of mental states. Consequently, Austin focuses on analyzing the conditions of performance, while Searle focuses on analyzing the conditions of representation.

This difference has led to Austin's project often being interpreted through the conceptual framework developed by Searle, thereby obscuring the profound distinctions between the two projects. Marina Sbisà points out that many scholars became

³¹ Ibid., p. 84

³² Ibid., p. 101

³³ Ibid., p. 103

³⁴ Ibid., p. 105

acquainted with Austin's concepts through Searle's works before turning to Austin's own texts, which meant that their reading of the former was shaped by the latter's theoretical assumptions³⁵

4.2. Intentionality Between the Pragmatic Horizon and the Mental Horizon

The most profound difference between Austin and Searle lies in the position occupied by intentionality in their respective explanations of linguistic action. The two philosophers do not disagree over its presence, but rather over the function it performs and the extent to which it can explain meaning. Accordingly, intentionality in each philosopher's account reflects a different conception of the nature of language and of the relationship between the subject and the world.

Austin views intentionality as an element operating within a broader network of conditions upon which the success of an act depends. Meaning takes shape within a space in which the speaker's will interacts with linguistic conventions, context, institutional position, the addressee's response, and the possibilities of both understanding and misunderstanding afforded by use. Intentionality therefore remains part of the act without exhausting its explanation or monopolizing the production of meaning. Consequently, the effect produced by an utterance does not always correspond to what the speaker intended. An act may succeed despite limitations in the speaker's will, or it may fail despite the clarity of that will. An utterance may also produce effects that were not included in the speaker's intention. These possibilities are integral to the nature of ordinary language, which cannot be separated from the conditions of its use or from its constant openness to interpretation. Austin therefore has no difficulty acknowledging that a speech act may produce effects that go beyond what the speaker intended and that its success remains dependent on a set of conditions over which an individual cannot exercise control alone. In Searle's account, however, intentionality constitutes the structure around which the entire theory of linguistic action is organized. Every speech act is, in essence, an expression of an intentional state, and it acquires meaning only insofar as it expresses that state and fulfills its conditions of satisfaction. He therefore emphasizes that the conditions of satisfaction of a speech act correspond to the conditions of satisfaction of the intentional state it expresses, such that the success of the act is directly linked to the fulfillment of intentionality itself. Consequently, no separation remains between will and meaning, since the latter finds its foundation in the former.

This difference reveals two contrasting conceptions of the nature of meaning. Whereas meaning in Austin's account is determined within pragmatic practice and the conditions and contexts accompanying it, in Searle's account it is determined within the intentional structure of mental states. Austin's philosophy therefore focuses on analyzing the circumstances that make an act possible, while Searle's philosophy focuses on analyzing the conditions that make representation itself possible. It can thus be argued that the former approaches language through its use, whereas the latter approaches it through the mind that produces it.

This difference extends to two distinct conceptions of the relationship between human beings and language. If language, for Austin, is a domain in which intentions intersect with conventions, institutions, and contexts, then for Searle it is an expression of an intrinsic mental capacity that precedes all social use. Intentionality in Austin's account therefore appears open to factors that transcend it, whereas in Searle's account it reclaims its position as the principle around which all other elements are organized.

4.3 The Position of the Speaking Subject

The difference in the status of intentionality in Austin and Searle reveals two distinct conceptions of the speaking subject. The question of the source of meaning is, at the same time, a question about the nature of the subject who speaks: does this subject possess the meaning of their speech before uttering it, or is meaning determined within the context of use in which the linguistic act takes place?

In Austin's philosophy, the subject does not appear as an independent center that produces meaning through its own will, but rather as a participant in a social practice governed by rules, conventions, and institutions that precede the subject and make the performance of its acts possible. In this sense, the subject enters a network of relationships within which the significance and effects of its actions are determined. In Searle's account, however, the subject occupies a different position. It is the entity that possesses intentional states, from which language derives its capacity for reference and representation. A speech act is therefore the external expression of a prior mental state, making consciousness the starting point for explaining meaning. Peter Strawson drew attention to this distinction, noting that the difference between the two philosophers reflects two different conceptions of the speech act itself: it may be understood either as an intentional act whose primary aim is for the addressee to recognize the speaker's intention, or as an act governed by social rules and conventions that transcend individual will³⁶. The issue, therefore, concerns identifying which element takes priority in the explanation of meaning.

Conclusion

This article has sought to examine the relationship between intentionality and speech act theory, taking the comparison between Austin and Searle as a starting point for identifying the philosophical foundations underpinning each project. The analysis has demonstrated that what initially appears to be a continuation between the two philosophers conceals a profound shift in the understanding of language, meaning, and human action, involving a reconstruction of speech act theory within a different philosophical horizon.

³⁵ Sbisà, M., "How to Read Austin," *Pragmatics*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2007, p. 461

³⁶ Strawson, P., "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts," p. 439

The study has reached several conclusions. First, intentionality does not occupy the same position in the two projects. In Austin's account, it constitutes one element of the speech act, interacting with context, conventions, institutions, and the addressee's response in the production of meaning. In Searle's account, by contrast, it constitutes the principle around which the entire theory is organized, as the property that endows language with its capacity for representation and reference. Second, the difference between the two philosophers extends to two distinct conceptions of language itself: for Austin, language is a social practice whose meaning is determined through use, whereas for Searle, it expresses intrinsic intentional states belonging to the structure of the mind. The third conclusion is that this shift has reformulated the conception of the speaking subject. In Austin's account, the subject is one of the elements involved in the formation of linguistic action, rather than the sole source of meaning. In Searle's account, however, the subject regains a central position, becoming the primary bearer of intentionality and the point of departure from which language derives its legitimacy.

These findings call for a reconsideration of the widespread interpretation that presents Searle as merely extending Austin's project. A reading closer to the texts suggests that, with Searle, speech act theory branched into a new philosophical trajectory that shifted the focus of attention from the analysis of linguistic use to the analysis of the intentional structure of the mind. This transition brought about profound changes in the understanding of the relationship between language, the subject, and the world.

The significance of this conclusion lies in its demonstration that the question of intentionality extends beyond the narrow scope of the philosophy of language to encompass broader philosophical problems concerning the nature of the subject, the limits of the will, the source of meaning, and the relationship between the mental and pragmatic dimensions of human action. Accordingly, the comparison between Austin and Searle helps clarify one of the major transformations in contemporary philosophy of language, as attention shifted from the conditions governing language use to the mental conditions that make such use possible.

On this basis, the present study opens up several avenues for further research. It would be useful to extend the comparison to include critical interpretations that have reconsidered the centrality of intentionality, particularly the works of Marina Sbisa, which offer opportunities to reassess the concept of the illocutionary act and the limits of the authority of the speaker's intention. There is also a need to investigate the impact of this shift on contemporary debates in pragmatics, philosophy of mind, and social theories of language, thereby enabling the relationship between intentionality and use to be reconsidered in light of subsequent philosophical contributions.

Within this horizon, intentionality remains one of the most vital questions in the philosophy of language, because it concerns how meaning is constituted and where the authority of the subject reaches its limits in relation to language, context, and the other. Rethinking intentionality therefore entails re-examining the foundations upon which our understanding of linguistic action and the relationship between human beings and the world rests.

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