



Mapping Speech Act Studies (2000-2020): A Bibliometric Analysis*

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Received: Dec. 5, 2021

Revised: Jan. 24, 2022

Accepted: Jan. 30, 2022

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* This study was supported in part by China's National Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science grant 18BYY126.

ABSTRACT

Xia, Zongfeng, Fengguang Liu, Yaochen Deng and Se-Eun Jhang. 2022. Mapping speech act studies (2000-2020): A bibliometric analysis. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 22, 55-69.

This study explores the state of speech act research in the past two decades. It employs a bibliometric method to examine the publication trend, the most frequently discussed topics, the most influential articles, the main publication venues, and distribution among countries/regions in the area of speech act studies. The results show that the annual publications increased dramatically with an upward trend. The results concerning the most frequently addressed topics suggest that speech act study has been a fruitful domain featuring with more interdisciplinary and cross-cultural studies involving with more sociolinguist methodologies, such as discourse completion test, focus group interviews and so on, to do empirical studies. Citation and research areas results indicate that the issues about speech acts explored by most studies are not constrained within linguistics or pragmatics, usually involving multidisciplinary research areas, such as philosophy, computer science, psychology, communication and so on. Results about most productive countries or regions present that most considerable and influential publications still come out of English speaking countries and European countries, while due to the more globalized world and development in international cooperation, more and more publications are coauthored by researchers from different countries and regions, which may further prove the heterogeneous nature of speech act research.

KEYWORDS

speech act, bibliometric analysis, research trend, research topics, publication venues

1. Introduction

Speech act theory, though foreshadowed by the Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein in his language game theory (Smith 1990), was firstly proposed by Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin (1962). Austin argued against the current philosophical creed that meanings could only be assigned to sentences on the basis of their truth or falsity, and suggested that we could do many different things with language. A speech act is designed to help us understand how we accomplish things with language (Han 2018). The key principle of speech act theory is that the utterance of a sentence is, or is part of, an action within the framework of social institutions and conventions (Huang 2009, p. 93).

Of all the issues in the general theory of language usage, speech act theory has probably aroused the widest interest (Levinson 1983, p. 226). Scholars have examined speech act theory in different areas of studies. Psychologists, for example, suggested that the acquisition of the concepts underlying speech act may contribute to the acquisition of language in general (Bates 1976, Bruner 1975). Literary critics have employed speech act theory to achieve a better understanding and interpretation of the themes and subtleties of literary texts (Leech and Short 1981, Levin 1976). Anthropologists showed the mutual interaction of activities and thoughts in cultures to make clear the ways of thinking about language and about human agency and personhood are closely linked (Rosaldo 1982), while linguists have examined the notions of speech act theory from syntax (Sadock 1974), semantics (Fillmore 1971), pragmatics (Scollon and Scollon 1995), second language learning (Jakobovitz and Gordon 1974), and elsewhere.

Research on speech act theory has remained to be the widespread interest in different arenas so far, such as speech act in political discourse (Han 2021, Qi, Xiao and Kádár 2019, Zhou 2021), and so forth. Therefore, it would be worth conducting a bibliometric study of research on speech act theory to have a clear overview of the research status and development trend of it. The reason that we apply a bibliometric methodology to fulfill the study is that bibliometric analyses can provide researchers a full understanding of the state of arts and research trends within a given subject area and reveal the research performance of individuals, research groups or institutions based on a large quantity of bibliometric information (Ellegaard and Wallin 2015). To address the foregoing issues, this study particularly aims to conduct a bibliometric analysis on SCI-expanded, SSCI and A&HCI-indexed journal articles published between 2000 and 2020 on speech act. We will explore the hot and cold research topics and research trends in speech act theory. Then we will analyze the bibliometric information of the journal publications and discuss the implications of our findings and try to predict the future research trend based on the present research literature status.

2. Bibliometrics and Speech Act

Bibliometrics, also known as informetrics or scientometrics, is the quantitative analysis of academic literature based on relevant bibliometric information such as the authors, the publication venues, and citation counts (Ellegaard and Wallin 2015). It was first used by Alan Pritchard (Pritchard 1969). He defined the term as “the application of mathematics and statistical methods to books and other media of communication”. At the very beginning, bibliometrics were done manually until large scale electronics databases and computer calculation were able to handle with the vast number of data in most bibliometric collections. Following that, as a research methodology, bibliometrics are frequently employed in many research fields to explore the impact of their field, of a set of researchers, or of a particular publication, or to identify particularly influential papers within a specific field of research.

There have been many bibliometric studies in the past decades on natural and social sciences in general and on

various specific disciplines. Scholars conducted a large number of studies in the field of information science and library science to illustrate the applications and development of bibliometrics (Bornmann and Daniel 2008, Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016). Bibliometrics is also used in the field of management to explore the changes in the intellectual structure of strategic management research (Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruiz-Navarro 2004, Zupic and Čater 2015). There are also a number of studies on linguistics or applied linguistics (Gong, Lyu and Gao 2018, Lei and Liao 2017, Lei and Liu, 2018, Li, Lei and Cheng 2020, Liao and Lei 2017, Lin and Lei 2020). Most of them focus on the general subject of applied linguistics or one of the branches of linguistics. For instance, Lei and Liu (2018) drew a map to sketch the research interests and foci shifted in applied linguistics in 2005-2016 and concluded that applied linguistics is expanding largely on popular topics by increasingly incorporating theories and practices from distant disciplines. Liao and Lei (2017) also investigated the application of corpus in studies in linguistics between 2000 and 2015 and concluded that corpora have permeated a wide range of research areas in linguistics and have changed these areas as well. In previous research, very few studies have been focused on a certain topic or theory in linguistics such as Gong et al. (2018) and Li et al. (2020) explored the research trends of certain topics within a certain period, namely, ‘evaluation, appraisal and stance in discourse’ and ‘teaching Chinese as a second or foreign language in and outside Mainland China’.

However, based on our research, there have been no bibliometric papers on speech act theory. Given the fact that speech act theory has been widely examined and interpreted in different areas, it is worth investigating the most frequently explored research topics are and which publications are the most highly cited—the type of information that will be of much interest and importance to researchers as well as academic institutions and government or private agencies in making funding and language policy decisions. Bibliometric analysis can quickly yield both historical and current information about speech act theory studies. Given this fact, this study aims to do so by analyzing the SCI-expanded, SSCI and A&HCI-indexed journal articles published between 2000 and 2020 on speech act. This present study strives to answer the following research questions:

1. What topics have been discussed most frequently in speech act research in the past two decades?
2. Which publications have been most highly cited or most influential in speech act research field?
3. In which research areas speech act has been discussed most frequently?
4. Which journals are the most popular publication venues for speech act?
5. Which countries/regions have been most productive in research on speech act?

3. Methods

3.1 Data and General Research Trend

The data for the present study was retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection databases on Dec. 31. 2020. The search strategy for retrieving the data was “TS = ‘Speech Act’ Indexes = SCI-expanded, SSCI and A&HCI Timespan = 2000-2020.” The search results were further refined with “Language = English”. All the results were then confined to only one document type, i.e. “article”. The preliminary results with a total of 1130 items were downloaded into a file. Each bibliometric item was thoroughly read through in order to screen out the articles which are not related to or beyond the scope of the area of speech act studies. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the authors manually checked each item respectively with its title, abstract, keywords, and publication year and so on. The unrelated items are removed and a total of 1101 publications were included for the bibliometric analysis.

The number of articles published per year in the area of speech act is presented in Table 1. A linear regression model was fit and results showed that the number of articles published in the past two decades increased significantly. The publication trend is illustrated in Figure 1. It can be seen from the figure that with the annual increase of research on this topic, scholars are paying more and more attention to speech act studies. The calculation of simply linear regression ($y = 4.0338x - 8055.4$, R-squared = 0.866) also indicated an overall positive trend in the research field. In particular, over one hundred related research articles have been published in 2020 alone.

Table 1. Number of Publications Published per Year

Year	Number of Publications
2020	118
2019	98
2018	76
2017	80
2016	65
2015	65
2014	60
2013	47
2012	66
2011	63
2010	58
2009	59
2008	35
2007	35
2006	33
2005	32
2004	22
2003	25
2002	19
2001	20
2000	25
Total	1101

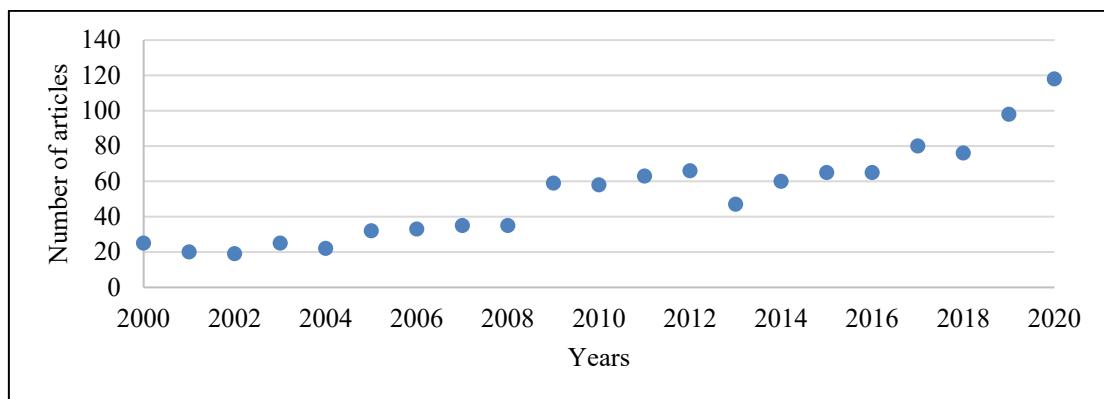


Figure 1. Publication Trend in the Examined Decades

3.2 Data Search and Analysis

To answer the research questions listed above, we first queried and analyzed the entire 21 years' data to obtain the following specific information:

- (1) Most frequent terms, or most frequently discussed topics, in the entire two decades as well as two periods of the 21 years (2000-2010, 2011-2020);
- (2) Most highly cited publications across the examined years;
- (3) Research areas paying most attention to speech act in the past two decades;
- (4) Most popular publication venues about speech act in the past two decades;
- (5) Most productive countries/regions about speech act in the past two decades.

There are several specific steps or procedures involved in the data search to obtain the information in the above list. First, let us consider the first specific information about the most frequent terms or topics. Here, the abstracts of the 1101 publications were extracted from the downloaded bibliometric data using a Python script (a programming language) and then annotated with part-of-speech and lemma information using Schmid's (1995) TreeTagger. Next, the lemmatized abstracts were submitted to AntConc to extract n-grams of up to five words in length and monograms for the entire 21 years and the two periods as mentioned above. The monograms extracted are all nouns, as individual adjectives, adverbs and verbs do not constitute research topics with sensible meanings. The procedures are as followed: (i) the n-grams of the entire span with a minimum frequency of five and a minimum range of five were extracted. The minimum frequency and range were set as such with considerations that they are neither too high to exclude important topics, nor too low to ensure the significance of the selected items. With this frequency and range criterion, our queries resulted in a total of 533 n-grams (2 to 5 grams). (ii) Of the 533 n-grams the author removed those which were not considered topics in speech act research after going through all the n-grams and discussing extensively on some controversial ones. Specifically, we removed three kinds of n-grams: word clusters common in language in general (e.g., *important role*, *same time*, *other hand* and so on); expressions common in academic writing in general (e.g., *present study*, *present paper*, *previous research* and so on); common concepts in language research which do not refer to any specific field (e.g., *language use*, *theoretical framework* and so on). After screening out the items in the above three categories, we reduced the number of n-grams to 76. Among those 76 n-grams, we further merged 4 pairs into 4 grams, such as combining *speech act* and *speech acts* to *speech act(s)*, *illocutionary act* and *illocutionary acts* to *illocutionary act(s)*, *mental state* and *mental states* to *mental state(s)*, *discourse completion* and *discourse completion test* to *discourse completion (test)*. Finally we come to 73 n-grams. (iii) the individual frequency of the 73 n-grams at the two periods (2000-2010 and 2011-2020) were checked to examine whether there was any change of statistically significance in the frequencies of these topics. We calculated their normalized frequency to ensure the validity of comparison because there are different numbers of publications in the two periods. We followed the calculating methods of Li et al. (2020). The normalized frequency is calculated by dividing the frequency of a topic in a period by the total number of journal articles in that period and then multiplying the result by 1000 in order to present much clearer chi-value and p-value results. Finally, we performed a one-way chi-square test for each of the 73 topics across the two periods to determine whether there was a statistical significance in the frequency of the topics.

Second, let us consider the second specific information about most highly cited publications across the examined years. Here, we extracted all the journal articles that were cited in the 1101 articles across the two decades and then computed their frequencies.

Third, let us consider the third specific information about research areas paying most attention to speech act in the past two decades. Here, we identified the research areas which pay most attention to the research of speech act in these examined journal articles. Many of them involve exploration within more than one discipline, and they will be calculated into the number of different categories of research areas.

Fourth, let us consider the fourth specific information about most popular publication venues about speech act in the past two decades: we extracted all the journals in which these 1101 articles were published and then calculated the number of these articles in each journal.

Finally, let us consider fifth specific information about most productive countries/regions about speech act in the past two decades: we identified the country/ region and calculated the number of publications produced by all the authors (not only the first authors). Some papers may be calculated twice or three times or so if the authors came from different countries/regions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Most Frequently Discussed Topics and Their Distributions across Time

In this section, major findings of the present study are reported and discussed. A total of 73 research topics met the threshold of frequency and range and were extracted and listed. The most frequently discussed topics in speech act are presented in Table 2. We organized the topics into three groups based on chi-square test results, namely, topics remaining statistically unchanged over the two decades (i.e., $p \geq 0.05$), topics whose frequency has increased significantly and decreased significantly respectively over the two decades.

A key finding regarding the overall results concerning the 73 most popular topics on speech act is that only nine (12.3 percent) of them have remained essentially constant over the past two decades. Some of the constant topics had appeared before 2000, such as *conversation analysis*, *discourse completion (test)* and *case study*, which keep being the main research methodology or tools for doing speech act research for the past two decades. As the various speech act realization means and essential felicity conditions, *indirect strategies*, *apology strategies*, *indirect speech*, *performative speech* and *propositional content* remain their popularity in research on speech act.

48 (65.8 percent) of the 73 topics did experience a significant increase in frequency over the past twenty-one years, including *illocutionary act(s)*, while a large majority of them are comparatively recent newcomers in the field, such as *social media*, *social interaction*, *corpus data*, *computer mediated communication*. They might have been concerned and explored in the first ten years of our study or before 2000, but becoming popular and salient during 2011 and 2020, therefore, we believe they might have resulted from the increased use of new technologies and social media in language learning and research. The significant increase of *focus group interviews*, *discourse analysis*, *empirical research*, and *qualitative analysis*, may suggest that, over the past decade, in addition to the traditional quantitative research, researchers have added empirical research and qualitative research, and adopted more abundant research methods, such as focus group interview, to ensure the validity and reliability of the research results. There also shows a pattern of more interdisciplinary research in the observed significant increase with *power relations*, *international relations*, and *cognitive linguistics*. Yet some of the changes do not appear to be the result of a shift in research interest. For example, the significantly increased mention of *EFL learners* and *cross cultural speech act* might be the result of today's much more globalized world with a much higher need for EFL, or due to increased publications from countries where English is a foreign language and increased publications coauthored by researchers from different countries.

There also show other patterns from the comparison of significant increase and significant decrease. For example, some of the changes seem to reflect a shift of interest in the field, while other changes seem to have resulted from other factors. The traditional speech act topics of *native speakers*, *agent communication*, and *indirect speech act* declined significantly in the second decade of our study, instead, with increasing numbers of new concerns, such as *impoliteness*. As the third wave of politeness research develops and Culpeper's (2011) seminal *Impoliteness: Using Language to Causing Offence* came out, macro tendencies of the production and evaluation of impoliteness.

Table 2. Samples of Most Frequently Explored Topics in Speech Act Research

Topics	Normed-Freq 2000-2010	Normed-Freq 2011-2020	Chi-value	p-value
Remained constant				
conversation analysis	19.28	20.33	0.03	0.87
discourse completion (test)	44.08	48.78	0.24	0.63
case study	30.30	21.68	1.43	0.23
performative speech	19.28	10.84	2.36	0.12
indirect strategies	16.53	8.13	2.86	0.09
apology strategies	27.55	16.26	2.91	0.09
indirect speech	57.85	40.65	3.00	0.08
illocutionary force	44.08	62.33	3.13	0.08
propositional content	24.79	13.55	3.30	0.07
Significantly increased				
hate speech	0.00	36.59	36.59	0.00
social media	0.00	25.75	25.75	0.00
discourse analysis	0.00	24.39	24.39	0.00
speech act participant	0.00	24.39	24.39	0.00
EFL learners	0.00	21.68	21.68	0.00
face threat	0.00	18.97	18.97	0.00
speech act recognition	0.00	17.62	17.62	0.00
communicative function	0.00	16.26	16.26	0.00
direct speech	0.00	16.26	16.26	0.00
computer mediated communication	0.00	14.91	14.91	0.00
refusal strategies	0.00	14.91	14.91	0.00
felicity conditions	0.00	13.55	13.55	0.00
impoliteness	0.00	13.55	13.55	0.00
turn taking	0.00	13.55	13.55	0.00
power relations	0.00	12.20	12.20	0.00
Significantly decreased				
speech act(s)	1798.90	1567.75	15.87	0.00
speech act theory	289.26	199.19	16.61	0.00
native speakers	104.68	65.04	9.26	0.00
agent communication	52.34	0.00	52.34	0.00
indirect speech act	52.34	32.52	4.63	0.03
interlanguage pragmatics	33.06	13.55	8.17	0.00
natural language	33.06	14.91	6.87	0.01
agent communication languages	27.55	0.00	27.55	0.00
communication languages	27.55	0.00	27.55	0.00
mental state(s)	24.79	8.13	8.43	0.00

4.2 Most Highly Cited Publications

A list of the most highly cited publications will help us better or more completely understand what the most popular publications and topics are. We presented the top 20 most highly cited or most influential articles in terms of raw citations in Table 3. The table shows authors' names, publication years, article titles, journal names and citation counts. Among the findings, the most highly cited publications can be broadly categorized into three major areas, namely, different categories of speech acts and representations from the perspective of linguistics (Vasquez 2011, Wilson 2006, Wilson, Smith and Ross 2003), security speech act and securitization from the perspective of international relations (Hansen 2000, Huysmans 2011, Wilkinson 2007) and language understanding and social or psychological cognition from the perspective of psychology of neurosciences (Callan, Jones, Munhall, Kroos and Vatikiotis-Bateson 2003, Goodman and Stuhlmüller 2013, Muller, Simion, Reviriego, Galera, Mazaux, Barat and Josheph 2010).

Most of the 20 highly cited publications listed in the table applied some sociolinguistic methodologies to conduct empirical studies, such as discourse completion test (DCT) or ethnographic observation. Among the 20 listed publications, there are 9 discussing issues within the subject of linguistics, different categories of speech acts, such as requests (Biesenbach-Lucas 2007), complaining (Vasquez 2011), lying (Wilson, et al. 2003); illocutionary force or illocutionary effect (Dresner and Herring 2010, Sbisa 2001); comparisons of linguistic use and communication between different groups of people (Diessel and Tomasello 2001, Erman 2001, Billmyer and Varghese 2000)

In the list, there are three of them (Hansen 2000, Huysmans 2011, Wilkinson 2007) discussing the issue of 'security speech act (Wæver 1995, p. 46)', which was proposed by Ole Wæver in 1995. Wæver and his colleagues at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute worked the linguistic turn in philosophy and social theory into security studies. Compared to other linguistic conceptions of security, such as language games, writing security, security discourse, the notion of security speech act expresses a more recognizable political notion (Huysmans 2011). An increasing number of people study a wide range of securitizing processes in international relations in terms of speech act theory.

With the development of the trend of integration of linguistics and other subjects, in recent years, more and more interdisciplinary studies combining neurology and cognitive science emerge as the times require. Experiments are conducted to explore how nerves or cognition act on language perception, and then to explore the formation process and mechanism of speech. The most recent article of the top 20 highly cited ones (ranked 16th and published in 2013) models the issue of language understanding as a special case of social cognition and proposes the rational speech-acts framework. Their results further boost the momentum building for quantitative models of language as a branch of rational social cognition (Goodman and Stuhlmüller 2013). Besides, there is also a trend of combining linguistic studies with computer science or tools to promote new areas of research, such as computational linguistics and corpus linguistics.

Table 3. Top 20 Influential Articles

Rank	Authors	Year	Title	Journals	Raw Citation
1	Stolcke, et al.	2000	Dialogue act modeling for automatic tagging and recognition of conversational speech	<i>Computational Linguistics</i>	340
2	Hansen, L	2000	The little mermaid's silent security dilemma and the absence of gender in the Copenhagen school	<i>Millennium-Journal of International Studies</i>	292
3	Petrides, et al.	2005	Orofacial somatomotor responses in the macaque monkey homologue of Broca's area	<i>Nature</i>	230
4	Dresner & Herring	2010	Functions of the Nonverbal in CMC: Emoticons and Illocutionary Force	<i>Communication Theory</i>	179
5	Huysmans, J	2011	What's in an act? On security speech acts and little security nothings	<i>Security Dialogue</i>	158
6	Callan, et al.	2003	Neural processes underlying perceptual enhancement by visual speech gestures	<i>Neuroreport</i>	136
7	Wilson, D	2006	The pragmatics of verbal irony: Echo or pretence?	<i>Lingua</i>	129
8	Diessel & Tomasello	2001	The acquisition of finite complement clauses in English: A corpus-based analysis	<i>Cognitive Linguistics</i>	120
9	Wilkinson, C	2007	The Copenhagen School on tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is securitization theory useable outside Europe?	<i>Security Dialogue</i>	116
10	Wilson, et al.	2003	The nature and effects of young children's lies	<i>Social Development</i>	103
11	Huckin, T	2002	Textual silence and the discourse of homelessness	<i>Discourse & Society</i>	102
12	Biesenbach-Lucas, S	2007	Students writing emails to faculty: An examination of e-politeness among native and non-native speakers of English	<i>Language Learning & Technology</i>	102
13	Erman, B	2001	Pragmatic markers revisited with a focus on you know in adult and adolescent talk	<i>Journal of Pragmatics</i>	98
14	Muller, et al.	2010	Exploring theory of mind after severe traumatic brain injury	<i>Cortex</i>	96
15	Speas, M	2004	Evidentiality, logophoricity and the syntactic representation of pragmatic features	<i>Lingua</i>	92
16	Goodman & Stuhlmüller	2013	Knowledge and Implicature: Modeling Language Understanding as Social Cognition	<i>Topics in Cognitive Science</i>	91
17	Billmyer & Varghese	2000	Investigating instrument-based pragmatic variability: Effects of enhancing discourse completion tests	<i>Applied Linguistics</i>	87
18	Sbisa, M	2001	Illocutionary force and degrees of strength in language use	<i>Journal of Pragmatics</i>	87
19	Ward & Winstanley	2005	Coming out at work: performativity and the recognition and renegotiation of identity	<i>Sociological Review</i>	87
20	Vasquez, C	2011	Complaints online: The case of TripAdvisor	<i>Journal of Pragmatics</i>	84

4.3 Research Areas Paying Most Attention to Speech Act

Table 4 reports, in ranking order, the research areas paying most attention to speech act research across the two decades. The results show that nearly half of the examined publications (485, 44.1%) explored speech act from the perspective of linguistics. In linguistic pragmatics, speech acts remain, along with presupposition and implicature in particular, one of the central phenomena that any general pragmatic theory must account for (Levinson 1983, p. 226). Within the 485 publications, there are 378 papers discussing speech act within the framework of linguistics and the other 108 papers integrating linguistics and other disciplines (mainly literature, psychology, education, etc.) together in the examination of speech act.

Second to linguistics, 157 of the examined 1101 publications discuss speech act from the perspective of philosophy, from which the basic theory comes. As one of the theories of language philosophy, speech act theory originated from and developed with its profound philosophical foundation and background. Speech act theory was originally foreshadowed by the Austrian philosopher Wittgenstein's views about language game. Then it was proposed by the philosopher John L. Austin, the founding father of philosophical speech act theory. In a lecture delivered at Harvard in 1955, later published as the monograph *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), Austin argued against the current philosophical creed that meanings could only be assigned to sentences on the basis of their correspondence with truth, and showed that there are many different things we do with language. Put in slogan form, "saying is doing, or words are deeds" (Huang 2009, p. 93). By tracing back to the philosophical research tradition of "saying is doing, or words are deeds", one can better understand the characteristics of ordinary language philosophy and the philosophical background and theoretical basis of speech act theory.

The findings reveal that the issues about speech acts explored by most studies are not limited to one specific discipline, usually involving two or more research areas. We can conclude that in recent years, the research about speech act presents a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary trend.

Table 4. Top 10 Research Areas about Speech Act

Rank	Research Areas	Number of articles
1	Linguistics	486
2	Philosophy	157
3	Computer Science	101
4	Psychology	86
5	Communication	68
6	Social Sciences - Other Topics	57
7	Literature	53
8	Education & Educational Research	44
9	Business & Economics	34
10	Arts & Humanities - Other Topics	21

4.4 Most Popular Publication Venues

The popular publication venues refer to the journals which published the largest number of articles on the research topic of speech act between 2000 and 2020. The journals which published no less than 10 articles are listed in Table 5. There are nine journals which published more than 10 articles about speech act in the last two decades.

Journal of Pragmatics, which published 137 articles (12.4% of the 1101 articles) between 2000 and 2020, is the most popular publication venue about speech act. The journal is an interdisciplinary journal of language studies, which has provided a forum for bringing together a wide range of research in pragmatics and related fields since 1977. Speech act theory, as a major topic in pragmatics, is absolutely one of the most interested issues of the journal. Besides, *Journal of Pragmatics* devoted a typical issue on speech acts in legal language in volume 41 and issue 3 of 2009. Kryk-Kastovsky (2009) argued that court trial records are shown to be particularly suitable for analysis from the framework of speech act theory due to their linguistic characteristics, as there is an abundance of illocutions and perlocutions as well as question-and-answer exchanges which are interpretable as indirect speech acts. *Pragmatics*, *Lingua* and *Intercultural Pragmatics* are ranked the second, third and fourth most popular journals with a total number of 58 papers on the topic of speech act. These three journals are all major publication venues for linguistic and pragmatic topics. Except *Synthesis* and *Philosophical Studies*, however, the rest seven of the nine listed journals are publications mainly about language use and research. As the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research trend has developed, they are all not restricted by disciplinary boundaries, which helps linguists to develop linguistic theory and to better understand mechanisms of language as a vehicle for communication.

The results show that speech act theory is still discussed and explored from linguistics most, compared with other disciplines.

Table 5. Most Popular Publication Venues about Speech Act (2000-2020)

Rank	Titles of Journals	Number of articles
1	JOURNAL OF PRAGMATICS	137
2	PRAGMATICS	21
3	LINGUA	19
4	INTERCULTURAL PRAGMATICS	18
5	SYNTHESE	17
6	PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES	16
7	JOURNAL OF POLITENESS RESEARCH-LANGUAGE BEHAVIOUR CULTURE	11
8	MULTILINGUA-JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL AND INTERLANGUAGE COMMUNICATION LANGUAGE SCIENCES	10
		10

4.5 Most Productive Countries/Regions

Table 6 presents the top 21 countries/regions that published most articles about speech act. The table is supposed to list the top 15 contributing counties/regions individually with the number of their contributions, while it comes to 21 countries/regions because two tied for the 8th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 15th.

Among the 1101 publications, nearly one third (315, 28.6%) of which were authored or coauthored by contributors from US. US is followed by England, Germany, Australia, Italy, Spain, China, Canada, Netherlands, France, Sweden and South Korea. Among the top 21 countries/ regions with the largest number of publications, 13 of them are European nations. Scholars from European academic institutions have contributed significantly to the interest in speech act theory. American and European countries remain to be at the top as publication powerhouses. However, these findings also suggest that more and more scholars from outside the traditional powerhouse countries are publishing in international journals about speech act. Except Northern American continent and Europe, scholars from Asia, mainly from China, South Korea, Iran and Japan also contribute a lot

to speech act research in these years. Especially, China has been listed 7th top productive country with 45 publications, most of which were funded by government research projects. This shows that government funding and support in China play an important role in its research productivity and development.

Table 6. Top 21 Countries/Regions with the Largest Number of Publications

Rank	Country/region	Number of articles
1	USA	315
2	England	130
3	Germany	92
4	Australia	51
5	Italy	50
6	Spain	48
7	China	45
8	Canada	44
	Netherlands	44
9	France	37
10	Sweden	31
	South Korea	31
11	Iran	22
	Belgium	22
12	Japan	21
	Switzerland	21
13	Poland	15
	Russia	15
14	Denmark	14
15	South Africa	13
	Finland	13

5. Conclusion and Implications

The present study offers a bibliometric profile of journal contributions of speech act between 2000 and 2020. The general trend of this theory shows that the number of publications has experienced an overall steady increase in the past two decades. This upward trend may suggest that speech act study is receiving considerable attention from researchers in different fields, presenting a trend of more interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. Key findings that carry significant implications for further research on speech act are summarized as follows.

The first finding is that results of the most popular topics show that speech act (theory) has been a fruitful research domain in terms of language use dimension. Over the past twenty years, the most frequently explored topics did experience a significant change together with application of abundant research methods. There also shows a pattern of more interdisciplinary research in the observed significant increase, triggering more popular topics including the impacts of new technology, social media, globalization on language use, and corpus-based investigation of field-specific discourse and variations.

The second finding is that the most highly cited publications present that study on speech act has expanded from

traditional pragmatics by increasingly incorporating theories and practices from distant disciplines, such as international relations, cognitive science and computer science. For instance, an increasing number of studies discuss the issue of ‘security speech act’ or securitizing processes in international relations in terms of speech act theory. This finding should encourage speech act research to continue the trend by further exploring its practices, realization and functions in other fields.

The third finding is that speech act remains to be one of the central phenomena discussed in the field of linguistics, while it is still growing and can benefit from the developments in its mother field, namely, philosophy. The flexible nature of speech act theory also allows for collaboration with other models and disciplines, for example, literature, psychology, education. The expansion of the research territory of speech act is obvious not only in the number of subthemes but also in the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary trends under investigation.

The fourth finding is that *Journal of Pragmatics* remains to be the research frontier for pragmatic studies, especially for speech act. It is probably because of its interdisciplinary orientation. The journal constantly provides a forum for bringing together a wide range of research in pragmatics and related fields. As the disciplinary boundaries begin to blur, more and more journals have published articles about speech act, other than typical journals for pragmatics and linguistics, in order to better understand mechanisms of language as a vehicle for communication.

The fifth finding is that results reveal a substantial increase in the number of contributions by non-Western countries/regions (e.g., China, South Korea), suggesting noticeable research progress in those countries/regions. Besides, there are a considerable number of publications coauthored by researchers from different countries/regions, implying academic research without borders. In order to generate more fruitful produces in research, scholars from different parts of the world should work jointly and positively to promote international coordination and cooperation in the future.

Although the study has obtained findings that may illuminate the research area, it is also limited in the type and time span of the data. Only journal articles published between 2000 and 2020 were used for the analyses. Future research may extend the study to other data types such as theses, dissertations, edited books and monographs published in a larger span of time in order to map a fuller picture of the state of the arts and research trends in the area of speech act. Besides, more samples and more periods to compare can generate much clearer visualized results statistically.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: All