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Trends in Research Articles on Speech Act Analysis in Ghana

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Abstract
This paper adopts the systematic literature review (SLR) approach to report a decade trend in research articles on speech acts analysis in Ghana from 2015 to 2024. Thirty-seven (37) articles indexed in Google Scholar and African Journals Online (AJOL) were included in the analysis. The findings demonstrate an upward trajectory in the publication. The publication peak in 2022 shows that real-world situations affect academic work. Moreover, a dualistic trend in collaboration of the studies have fed into the imbalance in the publication of Ghanaian speech act studies. Significant concentration of these studies is in sociocultural domains and political discourse with evidence of theoretical pluralism. Assertives and directives are the most frequently discussed and dominant speech act categories. Qualitative and discourse-analytic methodologies have dominantly been employed, aligning with the sub-field's focus on understanding context-specific cues. The study highlights the exigencies of expanding speech act research in Ghana through context-sensitive theoretical models.

Keywords: *Ghana – language – pragmatics - Speech acts - systematic literature review - trends*

Résumé
Cet article adopte une approche de revue systématique de la littérature (RSL) pour analyser l'évolution des publications sur l'analyse des actes de langage au Ghana sur une décennie, de 2015 à 2024. Trente-sept (37) articles indexés dans Google Scholar et African Journals Online (AJOL) ont été inclus dans l'analyse. Les résultats montrent une progression constante des publications. Le pic de publications en 2022 indique que les réalités du terrain influencent la recherche académique. Par ailleurs, une tendance dualiste dans la collaboration entre les études a contribué au déséquilibre des publications sur les actes de langage au Ghana. Ces études se concentrent principalement sur les domaines socioculturels et le discours politique, témoignant d'un pluralisme théorique. Les actes assertifs et directifs sont les catégories d'actes de langage les plus fréquemment étudiées et les plus représentées. Les méthodologies qualitatives et d'analyse du discours ont été majoritairement employées, conformément à l'intérêt porté par ce sous-domaine à la compréhension des indices contextuels. L'étude souligne la nécessité de développer la recherche sur les actes de langage au Ghana grâce à des modèles théoriques sensibles au contexte.
Mots-clés: Ghana – langue – pragmatique – actes de langage – revue systématique de la littérature – tendances

Introduction

The Oxford philosopher, J. L. Austin (1962), proposed the first-ever theory that aimed to offer a systemic attempt to examine the actional dimensions of language. His speech act theory (SAT) appeared in his posthumously published seminal book How to Do Things with Words which was later reviewed and revised by J. R. Searle in several publications (Searle, 1969, 1979). Austin (1962) rebutted the philosophical idea that sentences are assigned different sense notions based on their degree of truth values. He rather proposed the idea of doing several different things with language. The assumptions of the works of Austin, Searle, Grice and Bierwisch, whose studies have been central to SAT, are that human communications are not merely linguistic expressions; rather, they perform certain acts like making statements, interrogating, directing, thanking, apologizing, refusing, inviting, etc. (Afzaal et al., 2024). Huang (2007: 93) explains that SAT assumes "utterance as being a part of an action within a framework of social institutions and conventions". In Han's (2018) view, speech act allows us to comprehend how language is used to accomplish things. The theory, thus,

explores how humans manage to do things with words (texts) (Cooren, 2015) to achieve real-world outcomes (Abdilabbas, 2022).

The instrumental nature of SAT is evident in the magnanimous attraction the theory has received from scholars in various disciplines. Abdulhamzah (2025) holds that SAT impacts distinct populations and is, therefore, applicable to various fields and disciplines. The theory has been applied in the fields of communication (Acheoah, 2017; Schneider, 2022), marketing (Wang et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2023), politics (Ilic & Radulovic, 20215; Sadikov, 2024) and health (El-Dakhs, 2021). In language studies, SAT has been applied to political discourse analysis (Dylgjeri, 2017; Okoro, 2017), computational pragmatics (Schiffrin, 2005), digital discourses (Tsoumou, 2020; Yongping & Rong, 2022), film/TV analysis (Isnaniah, 2015; Kiuk & Ghozali, 2018), music discourses (Aritonang & Sahusilawane, 2022; Kakiay & Maitimu, 2021; Simba, 2023; Siagian et al., 2025), literary analysis (Heming & Zhaungming, 2017; Ojo, 2024; Rozik, 2000), interpretation and translation (Chunshen, 2015; Hongjun & Min, 2003) and second language, intercultural and special education contexts (Jin et al., 2020; Jieqiong, 2021).

The body of research on speech act analysis is evidence of the global research interest in this area. Researchers have adopted a bibliometric approach to detail the trends of research in speech act analysis. These include Xia et al. (2022) who explored speech act studies indexed in the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database in 2000-2020. Also, Arias-Chavez et al. (2023) have examined publication articles indexed in WoS Core Collection and Scopus databases. Another study by Afzaal et al. (2024) examined research articles on speech acts in international journals indexed in WoS Core Collection from 2013 to 2023. These studies generally showed an upward trend in the publication of research articles in speech act studies with particular interest in interdisciplinary and cross-cultural studies. While both Xia et al. (2022) and Afzaal et al. (2024) reported an upsurge in research publications in 2020, Arias-Chavez et al. (2023) described 2017 as the most peaked period for research publications in speech acts. These studies have generally focused on Western and Asian contexts. This has left out the nature of Speech Acts studies in Africa largely, and Ghana specifically. It is based on this that this study examined the trends in research articles on Speech Act studies in Ghana, since there have been significant contributions made to the field of SAT in the Ghanaian context (see: Agyekum, 2010; Anabila, 2020; Nartey, 2013; Obeng, 1999; Partey et

al., 2018; Totimeh & Bosiwah, 2015). This would be a great source of data to explore these trends in SAT studies. Moreover, the studies that have examined trends in speech act analysis have adopted the bibliometric approach with less attention given to other methodological perspectives.

To add a new methodological dimension, this study adopts the SLR approach to identify trends in SAT studies. Hence, the aim of this paper, therefore, is to adopt the SLR approach to report the trends in research articles on speech acts analysis in Ghana indexed in Google Scholar and AJOL database from 2015-2024. The study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What is the publication trend of Speech Act analysis in Ghana?
2. In which thematic areas has speech act in Ghana been discussed predominantly?

The findings should make an important contribution to the field of pragmatics research in Ghana and fill a gap in the literature. The current study provides (Ghanaian) researchers with relevant information on the current trends of publication in speech act analysis, including the most relevant journals, hot sub-topics and disciplines concerning speech act studies in Ghana.

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: a comprehensive description of the data and methods, presentation of the results and its discussions and conclusions and implications of the findings.

Data and Methods

Study Approach and Data Collection

This study uses the systematic literature review (SLR) approach to analyse the dataset. SLR is a method of synthesising scientific evidence to address a specific research question in a transparent and reproducible manner (Lame, 2019). It aims to incorporate all published evidence on the subject and evaluate the quality of each piece of evidence. The primary goal of the SLR approach is to lower the risk of bias and enhance transparency throughout the review process (Lame, 2019). This is achieved by employing explicit, systematic methods to reduce bias in the selection and inclusion of studies, to evaluate the quality of the included studies, and to objectively summarise them. Formulating review questions, setting inclusion and exclusion criteria, identifying studies, choosing studies, evaluating the quality of studies,

collecting data, and analysing and interpreting results constitute the conventional SLR procedure (Moher et al., 2015). Rammal (2023) suggests that SLRs give a methodical approach to addressing research problems to detect blind areas in various fields of study. In an academic/professional community, the strategy facilitates improved knowledge of and monitoring of research methods and helps to bridge disciplinary lines (Lame, 2019; Rammal, 2023). The SLR approach was adopted firstly to fill the methodological gap in research on trends of speech act analysis. Second, the approach does not focus only on how much has been studied but what has been studied and how. This gives depth to analysis of the trends in theory, methodology, data sources and the domains of theoretical application. In fields like applied linguistics where qualitative insight is important, SLR is preferred.

We followed the methodology proposed by Norris and Ortega (2000, 2006) for selecting database for meta-analysis and research synthesis. They proposed a methodology that is systematic, replicable and wide enough for retrieving relevant literature for research synthesis. An advanced search was done in the Google Scholar database. Google Scholar was selected because it includes in its database a very wide range of open-access scholarly publications. Additional records were also identified from the AJOL database. The four stages of the data search were identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA flow diagram of the data selection.

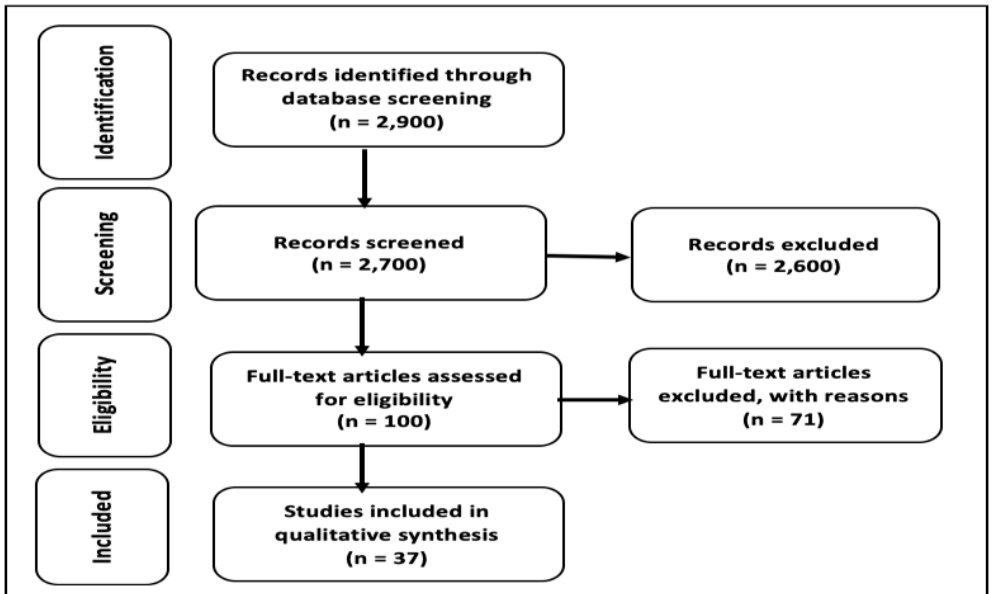


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of the data search

The search strategy was performed, using the Boolean search strings "speech act" OR "illocutionary act" AND "Ghana". The time range for the search was set to 2015-2024. The initial search returned 2,900 results which were fully and vigorously screened for eligibility before inclusion. A total of thirty-seven (37) research article publications were finally included in the qualitative synthesis. The prestige of the journal, the publisher and its impact factor were not considered in selecting studies. The criteria for deciding the eligibility and inclusion of studies are outlined in Table 1.

No.	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
1	Studies that are overtly situated within the context of speech act analysis/theory	Studies that are not placed within the context of speech act analysis (e.g., other pragmatic theories)
2	Studies that included Ghanaian-based data and context in its dataset	Studies that used non-Ghanaian data
3	Studies that are open access in peer reviewed journals/articles	Studies that are paid access

4	Materials that are empirical-based journal articles	Studies that are abstracts, conference proceedings, theses, book reviews, book chapters, technical reports, etc.

Table 1. Guiding criteria for compiling the database

The criteria were set to ensure that we focus only on studies central to the topic and also to keep the database at a manageable size. A manual reading of each item was done to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. The title, abstract, keywords, publication year and other relevant information were read to ensure that each data was related to the search. Unrelated items were removed. Duplicate records and articles that were not Ghanaian-based were removed. The files were downloaded as PDF and stored in a file. Mendeley reference manager was used to organise and annotate all sources. We admit that the database was not exhaustive even though we made efforts to search and retrieve as many publications as possible. It is possible that some key publications are indexed in other databases other than Google Scholar and might not have been included in the present study. Since previous studies on trends of speech act analysis have included publications indexed in WoS Core Collection and Scopus databases, it is possible that other Ghanaian based studies have been included in these previous studies. Hence, using these databases in the present study would be a duplication. To keep our references and database at a reasonable length, we adopted the principle of saturation point, where data collection and analysis end at a point where new categories and patterns are not yielded. Our saturation point was when extra studies did not directly fall within speech act theory or used non-Ghanaian data or context. Many of these studies were excluded from the final dataset (see Figure 1).

Analysis Procedure

The articles included in the final synthesis were extracted using an Excel spreadsheet to capture key information per study. The spreadsheet recorded information on author(s), year of publication, title of articles, theoretical framework(s), methodology, research context, type(s) of speech acts analysed and key findings. This was used to filter and cross-compare the retained articles. Manual coding was further done to identify recurring

themes and patterns. This was done by reviewing each study's abstract, methodology and conclusions. Attention was paid to the theoretical orientation of each study, speech act categories emphasized, institutional or social domains studied and methodological approaches. These served as the major themes that were used to create tags for each study. Excel's sorting and filtering functions were used to group studies by year of publication, contextual domains, theoretical domains and speech act types. This showed the thematic trends across the dataset. A time graph and frequency tables were created to show the publication trends. The final stage of the analysis involved synthesis and interpretation of the dataset. Thematic narratives were presented to structure the findings of the study. The rigour and validity of the analytical process were ensured by maintaining a separate tab in the Excel file for the coding and biodata of the articles. The full text was constantly revisited to settle all uncertainties. The findings of the review are subsequently presented in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussion

Publication Trends of Speech Act Analysis in Ghana (2015-2024)

In total, thirty-seven (37) published research articles about speech act analysis in Ghana were selected based on the above-mentioned criteria. We analyse the trends based on the number of publications, author and institutional contributions, regional/institutional collaborations and publication venues.

Number of Publications

The number of publications published per year is demonstrated in the line plot in Figure 2.

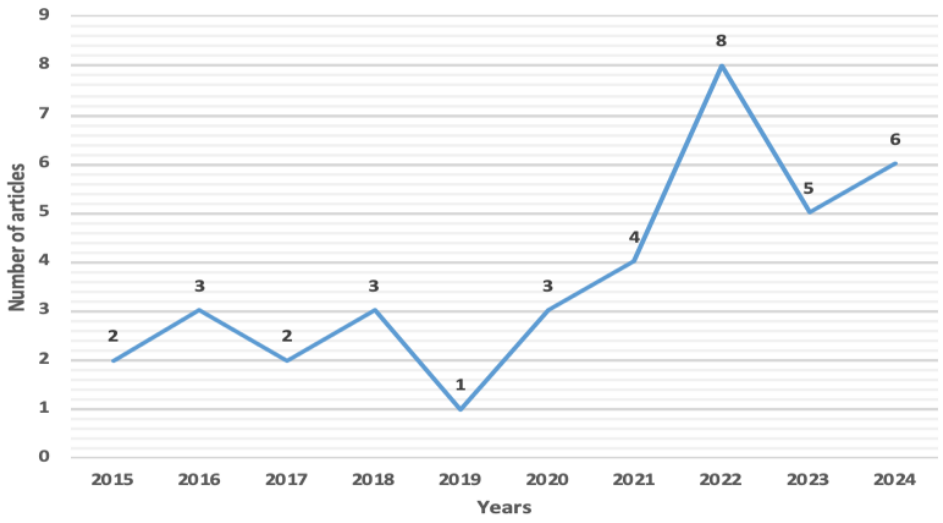


Figure 2. Number of articles published from 2015-2024 (total number = 37)

The number of articles published per year shows a generally upward trajectory in the number of journal articles on speech act analysis in Ghana. The late 2010s (2015-2019) are characterised by a limited publication output with a handful of articles being published on speech act analysis in the Ghanaian context. The period between 2019 and 2021 could be described as a plateau and disruptive period which coincides with the global COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted academic research and publishing globally. Ghanaian researchers were not exempt from these challenges. It is plausible that some speech act research and publication processes were delayed and took longer during this time.

From 2022, there was a resurgence in the publication of speech act analysis in the Ghanaian context reflecting a turning point in the publication trend. The number of publications jumped significantly and reached the first major peak of the decade. The year 2022 saw a substantially higher count of publications than prior years. The surge in publication in that year broke the plateau of 2019-2021 and represented a clear resurgence of research activity in speech act analysis in the Ghanaian context. The sudden jump in the number of publications could firstly be attributed to the backlog of research work that had been delayed during the pandemic. This kind of post-pandemic rebound was observed in the research community as normal operations resumed.

Secondly, academic initiatives and networking fed into this surge. The African Pragmatics Association organised the first African Pragmatics Conference (AfPCon2020) at the University of Ghana in February 2020. It is inferred that this conference, though having taken place before the pandemic lockdown in Ghana, helped forge collaborations and enthusiasm that bore fruit a couple of years later. Ghanaian scholars and their colleagues across Africa may have intensified their research and writing in pragmatics (including speech act topics), following that event. Agyekum (2021), for instance, strongly recommended intensified research and publication of works in pragmatics focused on the African context. There have been calls for a deliberate push to produce more scholarship in pragmatic studies.

The second peak for publication was observed in 2024 which shows that the field had firmly grown in scale compared to its humble mid-2010s beginnings. A possible explanation includes the culmination of projects initiated in the wake of AfPCon2020. This trend analysis is evidence of the fact that academic fields do not develop in isolation but respond to education priorities and real-world events. The trajectory generally points to possible further growth in the coming years.

Author and Institutional Contributions

Further analysis shows that sixty-nine (69) authors have contributed to the study of speech acts in the Ghanaian context in the years under review. These include both main and co-authors. Table 2 presents the most productive authors for speech act studies. Only authors (lead and co-authors) who have appeared in more than one article were included.

Rank	Author	Authorship Status	Number of Articles
1	Israel, Peace Chinwendu	Lead and co-author	5
2	Agyekum, Kofi	Lead author	3
2	Tuffour, David Adu	Lead and co-author	3
3	Brookman-Andoh, Georgina	Lead author	2
3	Gyekye-Ampofo, Martin	Co-author	2
3	Gborsong, Philip Arthur	Lead author	2
3	Duku, Irene Berengar	Lead and co-author	2
3	Broohm, Nii Obed	Co-author	2

3	Rescue, Elvis	Lead and co-author	2
3	Bosiwah, Lawrence	Lead and co-author	2

Table 2. Most productive authors for speech act study (2015-2024)

Table 2 shows that Peace C. Israel, a senior lecturer at the Department of English Education of the University of Education, Winneba has the most publications (5) on speech act analysis in Ghana (2015-2024) (see: Israel, 2022; Israel & Botchwey, 2017; Israel et al., 2023a; 2023b; Ugoala & Israel, 2020). Her research has focused on discourse analysis, pragmatics, ESL, and communication studies. She is followed by Kofi Agyekum, a Professor of linguistics at the University of Ghana, Legon. He is a lead author for three (3) publications on speech act analysis in the year under review (see: Agyekum 2015; 2016; 2021). Professor Kofi Agyekum is a renowned Akan scholar and broadcaster whose areas of interest include pragmatics, discourse analysis, ethnography of communication and anthropological linguistics. David Adu Tuffour of the Department of Ghanaian Languages at Atebubu College of Education has also contributed to speech act analysis in Ghana with 3 publications to his credit (Tuffour, 2022; Brefo et al., 2024; Bosiwah et al., 2021). His research areas also include pragmatics, sociolinguistics and literature in Ghanaian language. These top three scholars have made significant contributions to the study of speech acts in Ghana.

From this observation, it is clear to us that there is institutional diversity in the production of speech act works in Ghana. Not only scholars affiliated with traditional universities are recorded in the top-three rank of contributors but also a College of Education. Thus, research on speech acts has not been confined to elite academic space but there is a growing inclusiveness and decentralization. Additionally, the diverse interests of the top three contributors corroborate the thematic and methodological depth of their work. Their background and that of other contributors also point to a growing field where SAT is being applied across contexts and disciplines. This gives methodological and practical relevance to the study of speech acts in Ghana.

Regional/Institutional Contributions and Collaborations

The authors who have made significant contributions to the field of speech act analysis are affiliated with various higher institutions of education. It is relevant, therefore, to highlight the productive institutions from where

authors have contributed to speech act analysis in Ghana. We did the ranking based on the number of authors (both lead and co-authors) from each institution who have published peer-reviewed journal articles on speech act analysis. Figure 3 presents the top six productive institutions for speech act analysis in Ghana from 2015 to 2024.

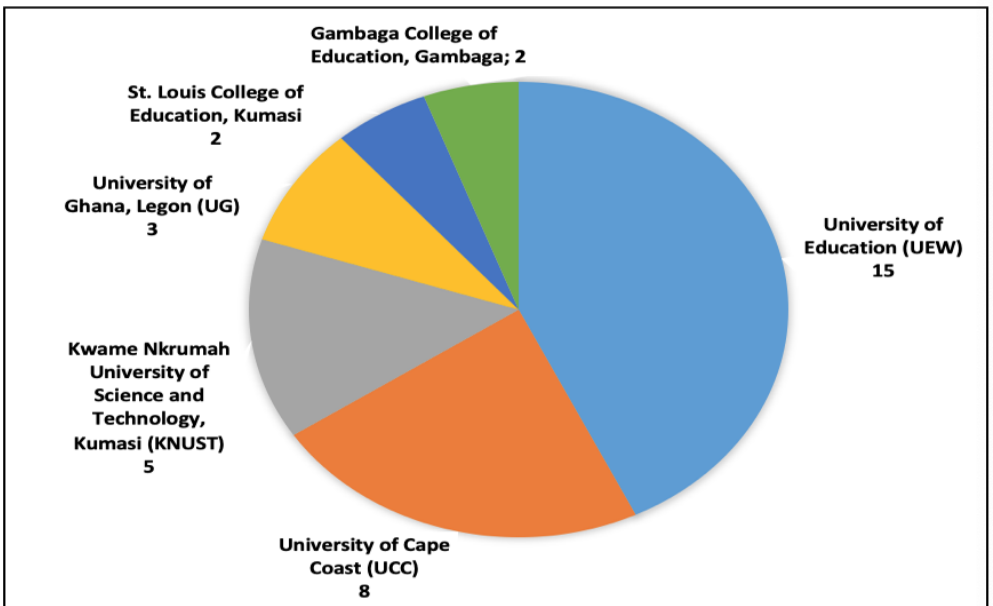


Figure 3. Most productive institutions for speech act study from 2015-2024

It is seen that the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), has the most contributed authors to speech act analysis in Ghana (15 authors). This is followed by the University of Cape Coast (UCC) (8 authors) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (KNUST) (5 authors). Each of these universities has departments and faculties focusing on language, literature, and communication studies, which are likely to encourage pragmatics research. The inclusion of KNUST among the top contributors shows that even a STEM-focused university allocates attention and resources to the study of language use. Other technical universities and Colleges of Education have also made significant contributions to the subfield. The presence of faculty with expertise in pragmatics at these institutions creates a supportive environment for pragmatics research. The fact that Ghana's tertiary institutions lead in this linguistic subfield is noteworthy. It suggests a strong local capacity for advanced linguistic research and a possible institutional emphasis on pragmatics. These findings indicate that Ghana has nurtured skilled linguists and researchers capable of

conducting high-level studies on language use. Contextually, the local leadership means that the findings of the studies are culturally relevant and address Ghana-specific communication patterns and issues. Ghana's contributions also feed into a broader increase in African pragmatics research. The fact that all top contributing institutions are Ghanaian further augments Ghana's role in building African scholarly literature in pragmatics. The country has aimed at developing its human resource and scholarly infrastructure to become producers of knowledge in speech act analysis and largely, pragmatics studies.

It is worth noting that non-Ghanaian institutions have contributed to the study of speech acts in the Ghanaian context. These include authors from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (see Anyanwu & Abana, 2020); Madonna University, Okija (see Anyanwu & Abana, 2020); Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC), Bénin (see Dadjo, 2018); National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos (see Ugoala & Israel, 2020); Sokoto State University, Nigeria (see Emike et al., 2022); University of Perugia, Italy (Vergaro, 2023); The HongKong Polytechnic University, HongKong (Anderson et al., 2024); the Communication University of China, Beijing (see Demuyakor, 2021); Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway (see Beermann, 2024); University of Essex, United Kingdom (see Duku et al., 2024; ResCue et al., 2024); Université de Zinder, République du Niger (see Allagbe et al., 2020); and Université d"Abomey-Calavi (UAC), République duBenin (see Allagbe et al., 2020). Nigerian researchers, like Dr. Esther Anyanwu (Nnamdi Azikiwe University) and Dr. Ifeoma Abana (Madonna University), examined how President Akufo-Addo's speeches used performative and constative acts (e.g. commands, requests, appeals) to mobilize the public during the COVID-19 crisis (Anyanwu & Abana, 2020). The participation of Nigerian academics in analyzing a Ghanaian leader's rhetoric shows a regional academic engagement with Ghana's sociopolitical linguistics. Serrvais Dieu-Donné Yédia Dadjo of the Université d'Abomey-Calavi (UAC) in Bénin also analysed two of Akufo-Addo's high-profile speeches delivered in 2018. The study highlighted the illocutionary acts and pragmatic strategies employed by the Ghanaian president (Dadjo, 2018). This Beninese contribution indicates that Ghana's political discourse is of interest not only to Anglophone neighbours but also to Francophone scholars in the region. This reflects a cross-border curiosity about Ghana's communicative style and its wider African significance. There have also been regional

collaborations between Ghanaian and other African authors (Ugoala & Israel, 2020).

Beyond Africa, institutions in Europe and Asia have contributed to Ghanaian speech act analysis. This has signalled global scholarly interest in Ghana's linguistics. In some cases, international researchers conduct independent studies on Ghanaian language use (see Allagbe et al., 2020; Dadjo, 2018; Demuyakor, 2021; Vergaro, 2023; Beermann, 2024). In others, Ghanaian scholars in diaspora or cross-national teams drive the research (Anderson et al., 2024; ResCue et al., 2024; Duku et al., 2024). European linguists have thus found Ghana's language and English variety as fertile for pragmatics research. Vergaro (2023) from the University of Perugia, Italy, examined how commissive speech-act nouns (terms that encapsulate commitments or promises) behave in Ghanaian English. The study which uses corpus data from the Global Web-based English corpus, found the usage patterns of these illocutionary nouns in Ghanaian English and how they reflect local norms. The study contributed to scholarly knowledge of Ghana's variety of English. That a researcher in Italy chose Ghanaian English for this speech act analysis highlights the academic visibility of Ghana's linguistic features in global contexts. Ghana serves as a case study to refine theories of pragmatics in World Englishes. Similarly, collaborations with researchers from Norway (Beerman, 2024), the United Kingdom (Duku et al., 2024; ResCue et al., 2024) and Asia (Anderson et al., 2024) show the global relevance of Ghana's speech act phenomena. In 2024 for instance, scholars, Jemima Anderson (University of Ghana), Ebenezer Agbaglo (affiliated with PolyU), and Rachel Thompson (University of Ghana) co-authored a study on Ghanaian English interjections such as "ei," "ehe," "eh," and "eish" in online communication (Anderson et al., 2024) . Their analysis showed how these indigenous exclamations are borrowed into Ghana's English usage to convey emotions such as surprise, pain, or excitement in social media contexts. The fact that a Hong Kong-based researcher was part of this project indicates a genuine international collaboration. This collaboration brings into the study Ghanaian expertise and global analytical perspectives. This confirms the interest of Asia in African pragmatics and situates Ghana within the broader of the evolution of English in different cultural milieus. The inclusion of these non-Ghanaian institutions and scholars (from Nigeria, Niger, Benin, Asia, the UK, Italy and Norway) in speech act studies in a Ghanaian context suggests

the attention Ghana has to cross-linguistic variation studies and intercultural pragmatics curricula.

Publication Journals

The dataset showed that several journals have been cited for the publication of speech act analysis in Ghana. Table 3 demonstrates this observation.

S/N	Journal	S/N	Journal
1	Legon Journal of the Humanities	19	Advances in Journalism and Communication
2	British Journal of English Linguistics	20	Pragmatics & Cognition
3	Lettres, Sciences Humaines et Sociales	21	Global Journal of Human-Social Science: G Linguistics & Education
4	Word: Journal of the International Linguistic Association	22	International Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics
5	International Journal of Research in Education Humanities and Commerce	23	South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities
6	Universal Journal of Literature and Linguistics	24	Research Journal in African Languages
7	Ghana Journal of Linguistics	25	Corpus Pragmatics
8	Pragmatics	26	ADRRI Journal of Arts and Social Sciences
9	South-South Journal of Humanities and International Studies	27	Open Journal of Social Sciences
10	Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal	28	Studies in African Linguistics
11	Open Journal of Modern Linguistics	29	Journal of Language and Linguistics
12	NG Journal of Social Development	30	Literature and Linguistics Journal
13	International Journal of	31	African Journal of Applied

	Research and Innovation in Social Science		Research
14	International Journal of Culture and Religious studies	32	Shanlax International Journal of English
15	European Journal of literature, Language and Linguistics studies	33	International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies
16	Contemporary Journal of African Studies	34	Global Journal of Research in Humanities & Cultural Studies
17	International Journal of Culture and History	35	European Journal of Language Studies
18	International Journal of Language and Linguistics		

Table 3. Publication venues for speech act analysis in Ghana (2015-2024)

Apart from the Legon Journal of the Humanities (LJH) which has three (3) articles appearing, all other journals had only one article published. ResCue et al. (2024), Duku et al. (2024) and Agyekum (2015) had their works in LJH. The publishing of works in Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian-based journals suggests a dualistic trend in how Ghana-based research is disseminated. The dominance of LJH suggests the important role of a domestic journal in Ghana's speech act research. Founded in 1974, LJH is an interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal published by the University of Ghana's College of Humanities. The focus of the journal, to advance scholarly research with a focus on African contexts and perspectives, makes it a natural home for studies on speech acts in Ghana. The fact that the journal recorded the highest number of articles shows that Ghanaian researchers find it a valuable platform that understands regional linguistic priorities and contexts. It is, however, telling that only LJH has three articles, with other domestic/African journals such as the Ghana Journal of Linguistics, Research Journal in African Languages and the African Journal of Applied Research having only one article each. We attribute this possibly to the fact that there is a limited number of Ghanaian and African-based journals with a particular focus on pragmatics studies. International journals then become the venue for most scholars to publish their research.

The other side of the observation shows that Ghanaian-based studies on speech act analysis have been broadly dispersed across international

journals. Ghanaian scholars have strategically placed their works to ensure they reach a global audience. International journals typically have a broader distribution and are indexed in major databases. The widespread presence demonstrates strong international academic engagement by Ghana's researchers. It could be said that Ghana's speech act research is being shared on the world stage and has enhanced the country's scholarly profile. The imbalance in the publication venue for Ghanaian research is also attributable to institutional policies. Chatio et al. (2024) share that many African institutions including those in Ghana have greatly emphasized publishing in reputable indexed international journals over domestic ones. This institutional attitude explains why most journals that have disseminated studies in the dataset were international. There has also been the issue of promotion and tenure requirements, perception of quality and institutional support (Chatio et al., 2024). Most institutions emphasize the need to balance global prestige with local relevance. The fact that each international journal had only one Ghanaian study implies that these studies were published in many different journals rather than clustering in a few. However, though these studies are internationally present, they form a small portion of many journal's content. This is to say that Ghanaian pragmatics have not been given international focus. These studies have little chance of forming a concentrated body of literature. This buttresses Agyekum's (2021) advocacy for the establishment of a Journal of African Pragmatics to intensify research works in African pragmatics.

Areas Discussed in Speech Act Analysis in Ghana (2015-2024)

Theoretical Orientations

Most Ghanaian speech act studies have grounded their analyses in classical speech act theory. In particular, the frameworks of Austin (locution/illocution/perlocution) and Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts are widely applied as foundational theories. Anyanwu and Abana (2020) explicitly stated in their abstract their use of classical SAT to analyse presidential speeches. Israel and Botchwey (2017), Demuyakor (2021) and Rosemary et al.'s (2022) studies were rooted in Austin and Searle's five classes of illocutionary speech acts. Similarly, Bosiwah et al. (2021) studied the names of some deities in Ghana's Bono towns through the lens of SAT. They employed Austin's three taxonomy of speech act to analyse the names,

likewise Gborsong et al. (2022) who studied impolite behaviours among health workers. Brefo et al. (2024) likewise employed the classical SAT to explore the significance of proverbs in Akan Twi culture. Like Brefo et al.'s (2024) study, Brookman-Andoh et al. (2022) also explored Akan proverbs based on SAT. Tuffour (2022) also adopted the classical SAT in his study of appellations of chieftaincies in Akan towns. The dominance of classical theory indicates a strong adherence to traditional speech act models in Ghanaian research, ensuring a common terminology (assertives, directives, etc.) and a focus on illocutionary force.

While Austin and Searle's classical SAT remain foundational in Ghanaian speech act studies, there is a broadening of theoretical perspectives in this research field to capture context-sensitive meaning beyond Searle's categories. Ugoala and Israel (2020) adopted Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory (PAT) to analyse the speeches of presidents Nana Akufo-Addo and Muhammadu Buhari. The authors adopted PAT to extend the theoretical considerations of speech act analysis studies. They also noted that PAT complements the inadequacies of Austin's SAT such as the exclusion of context in the analysis of utterances. Israel (2022) also adopts Habermas' universal pragmatics (1979), a communicative theory, to explore presidential speeches. Habermas' theory focuses not on categorizing speech acts (as Searle does) but on the conditions required for communicative competence and mutual understanding in any interaction. Israel (2022) adopted Habermas' universal pragmatics to extend the identification of acts to evaluate the quality and success of communication. Emike et al. (2022) also employed Bach and Harnish's (1979) SAT to explore speech acts in Ayi Kwei Armah's The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. The theoretical considerations in Ghanaian speech act research are shifting from classical categorization (SAT) toward more context-sensitive, interaction-oriented, and holistic models of communication. This shift, seen in the adoption of Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT), Habermas' Universal Pragmatics (UP) and Bach and Harnish's SAT, demonstrates a maturing field that seeks to more accurately reflect the socio-political, cultural, and dialogic nature of language use in Ghanaian society.

Aside from adopting related yet distinct pragmatic theories, some scholars blend SAT with discourse-analytic or sociocultural theories. Agyekum (2015), examining political apologies, combined speech act analysis of apologies with political discourse analysis, emphasizing both the illocutionary

force (expressive and commissives) and the discourse strategies for face restoration. Dadjo (2018) similarly combined SAT and discourse approaches to the study of presidential discourses. Agyekum's (2019) ethnopragmatic approach to Akan advice merges classical speech act elements with cultural scripts and persuasion theory. Agyekum adopted persuasion, speech acts of directives and expressives, and Akan proverbs to discuss advice with insight from Akan culture. Duku et al. (2024) also merged SAT and modality theory under systematic functional linguistics theory to explore commencement speeches. Other theories that have been merged with SAT are convergence theory in gender (Gborsong, 2016), semiotic models (Israel et al., 2023a), politeness theory (Adjei & Bosiwah, 2015; Allagbe et al., 2020; Ampadu, 2021; Lomotey & Sam, 2023; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2016), lexico-pragmatic theory (Israel et al., 2023b), relevance theory (Mensah, 2016; Otoo, 2018), metadiscourse interactionist theory (Mesu et al., 2022), compliance gaining theory (Naaikurr & Akapule, 2024), cultural transmission theory (Brefo et al., 2024), evolutionary theory and the theory of lexical morphology (Yakple et al., 2023), humour theory (Brookman-Andoh et al., 2022) and evaluative language model (Bisilki & Bisilki, 2017). Such integrative orientations show a trend toward theoretical pluralism in recent works. While classical speech act theory underpins the majority of Ghanaian studies, there is a notable trend of theoretical expansion where pragmatic act theory has been incorporated or SAT blended with other discourse perspectives to better account for context, ideology, and cultural distinctions in communication.

Speech Act Categories Discussed

Across the studies, researchers commonly analysed all five of Searle's illocutionary categories (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations) but often highlighted certain categories as predominant in particular contexts. A recurring finding is that assertives and directives tend to dominate many forms of discourse, whereas declaratives are the least frequent overall. For example, in Ghanaian presidential inaugural speeches, assertives were by far the most frequent (around 61% of all acts), followed by commissives (21%), expressives (12%), and directives (7%), with no declaratives used (Israel & Botchwey, 2017). Israel et al. (2023a) also identified informing as the dominant practs (47.06%), akin to assertives in SAT, in crisis communication. The dominance of assertive acts in inaugurals and crisis communication aligns with the need to make statements of policy,

ideology, or vision, while directives and commissives (promises) appear in more limited roles to call for action or pledge commitments (Israel & Botchwey, 2017). Anyanwu and Abana (2020) also identified that presidents informed, explained, and updated their citizens, all of which are assertive acts (constatives in Austin's terms). These acts are common in public addresses, where leaders state facts, describe situations, or explain policies. At the same time, the presidents also commanded, requested, urged, and directed; all of which fall under directives in Searle's taxonomy. These acts aim to get the audience to do something (e.g., follow lockdown protocols, wear masks, cooperate with health guidelines) (Anyanwu & Abana, 2020). Dadjo (2018) also discussed assertives used to communicate political convictions.

Again, Agyekum (2019) draws on ethnopragmatics to study how cultural norms and values shape speech acts. He uses data from ceremonial contexts like arbitrations, naming ceremonies, and marriage events, as well as literary sources, to demonstrate how Akan advice functions pragmatically as a directive, often made palatable through expressives and cultural tools like proverbs. Brefo et al. (2024) also discuss assertive and directive speech acts, as performed through Asante Twi proverbs. In the study, proverbs are treated as culturally embedded communicative acts used to assert shared truths and indirectly instruct or advise. The study highlighted the pragmatic functions of proverbs in preserving and communicating cultural values. Israel et al. (2023b) also discussed directives as the dominant practs in the Ghanaian national anthem. Gborsong (2016) also studied pragmatic gender differences in the structure and politeness strategies of requests (directive pract). The focus was on sentence type, formality, and politeness across gendered communication. In advertising discourse, Mensah (2016) similarly discussed how advertisements primarily used directives to persuade customers. These acts were discussed to influence customers' future behaviour. She also discussed advertising discourse as commissives (promising), expressives (emotional toning), and assertives (claims).

Expressives also surface strongly in context-specific domains. Gborsong (2022) examined insults/invectives which function primarily as expressive acts. This act reveals the speaker's emotions. This act plays a vital role in interpersonal and culturally situated contexts. For instance, Mesu et al. (2022) reiterated that interpersonal contexts like delivering concession speeches are primarily realized through expressives. Agyekum (2015)

analyses apologies as a speech act. He focuses primarily on expressives and is supported by commissives. The act of apologizing is positioned as a socially binding practice in Ghana's communalistic political culture. Expressive acts also surface strongly in the study by Anane (2022). The speech act explored in the study is apology, classified under expressives, with varied realization patterns among Akan (Twi) speakers. The study examined how apology strategies vary based on social context. Brookman-Andoh et al. (2022) also looked at gendered Asante proverbs as expressive and (indirect) assertive acts. The study explained Asante proverbs as reflecting cultural attitudes and judgments, often humorously or insultingly, about women and functions both as commentary (assertives) and vehicles of emotional expression (expressives). Brookman-Andoh et al. (2018) previously discussed the polyvalent nature of Akan proverbs. They showed the contextual nature of Akan proverbs and concluded that the proverbs had assertive, directive and expressive acts.

Commissives (promises, pledges) are also observed, though often as the least frequent category. Inaugural addresses contained promises (commissives) but at a moderate rate (20%) (Israel & Botchwey, 2017). Duku et al. (2024) also discussed commissives through the use of modal auxiliaries in commencement speeches. The study, among other things, examined how modal-driven utterances function as promises in ceremonial discourses.

The trend shows that assertives and directives are the most frequently discussed and dominant speech act categories, particularly in political, ceremonial, and institutional discourse. Assertives are discussed as commonly used for informing, stating beliefs, and expressing ideologies, while directives are discussed as used to request, instruct, and influence behaviour. Expressives feature prominently in interpersonal and face-sensitive contexts such as apologies, insults, and concession speeches. Commissives, though less frequent, appear in political promises and ceremonial speeches. Declaratives are the least represented. The studies highlight the contextual and culturally embedded nature of speech acts, often integrating proverbs and traditional norms.

Domains Studied

Research on speech acts in Ghana spans a diverse array of social and institutional domains, reflecting the multifaceted use of language in the country's public and cultural life. A significant concentration of studies is in sociocultural domains (Agyekum, 2019, 2015; Anane, 2022; Beermann, 2024; Bosiwah et al., 2021; Brefo et al., 2024; Brookman-Andoh et al., 2022; Brookman-Andoh et al., 2018; Otoo, 2018; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2016; Tuffour, 2022; Yakple et al., 2023). Language use in culturally significant practices has been a focus of ethnopragmatic studies. This includes the use of language for greetings, naming, proverbial communication and traditional ceremonies. Tuffour (2022) analysed "appellations of chiefs and queen mothers in [the] Akan perspective". The study shed light on how honorific praise names encapsulate acts of asserting social values and invoke cultural ideals. Such appellations, often delivered in ceremonial contexts, function as expressive and assertive acts that reinforce social hierarchy and respect (Tuffour, 2022). Agyekum and Sekyi-Baidoo's works on Akan apology rituals demonstrate how an everyday social act (apologizing) reveals deep cultural priorities. In their work, apology is treated as a crucial expressive act tied to face and communal harmony (Agyekum, 2015; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2016). Anane (2022) added that the apology speech act in Akan is situation-dependent. Agyekum (2019) also studied advice-giving in Akan society, drawing data from settings like marriage and naming ceremonies. He found that elders' advice performs complex directives softened with proverbs and empathy. These cultural domain analyses highlight that speech act usage in Ghana is deeply intertwined with societal values (e.g. respect for authority, communalism), and researchers often take an ethnographic lens to interpret the sociocultural context in which these acts occur.

The domain of political discourse has also been fairly represented in speech act studies in Ghana. Under this domain, scholars have analysed various political genres such as concession speeches (Mesu et al., 2022), campaign speeches (Naaikuur & Akapule, 2024), ceremonial speeches (Dadjo, 2018), formal speeches (Israel et al., 2023a), crisis communication (Anyanwu & Abana, 2020; Israel, 2022; Ugoala & Israel, 2020) and inaugural speeches (Demuyakor, 2021; Israel & Botchwey, 2017). These works examined how leaders use language to perform acts of governance such as asserting ideologies, directing the populace, committing to policies, and managing face. For example, analyses of presidential inaugural speeches have compared

country-specific administrations to reveal how each leader employs speech acts to inspire confidence and signal an agenda (Anyanwu & Abana, 2020). Mesu et al. (2022) likewise appraised Ghanaian and leaders' interactional linguistic resources in concession speeches. These comparative studies reveal cross-cultural pragmatic patterns and the universality of practs in political discourse. The studies on political discourse show how leaders use language to state their beliefs, inform and express their ideologies. Dadjo (2018) found that assertives, as found in ceremonial speeches, reveal the ideological standpoint and beliefs of political leaders. Israel et al. (2023a) collaborate on this idea by stating that presidents mainly use their speeches to inform. These pragmatic acts help citizens to understand their leaders. Mesu et al. (2022) have also reiterated that concession speeches and other political genres, which reflect interpersonal situations, are realized through expressives. Politicians adopt language to establish a bond between them and their supporters (interlocuters). Dadjo (2018) claims that expressives are used by politicians to show gratitude and build a positive rapport with their audience. Commissives, through promising, have also been discussed as a key pract in campaign speeches (Naaikuur & Akapule, 2024). Generally, Naaikur and Akapule (2024) find illocutionary acts as mostly rhetorical strategies in political communication. Together, these studies reveal the array of political-related pragmatic acts.

In addition to sociocultural and political domains, research in speech act analysis has also been explored in academic contexts (Adjei & Bosiwah, 2015; Basilki & Basilki, 2017; Duku et al., 2024; Lomotey & Sam, 2023), sociopragmatic domains (Gborsong, 2016), institutional discourses (Israel et al., 2023b), religious domains (Rosemary et al., 2022), health discourse (Gborsong et al., 2022), digital-mediated discourse (Agyekum, 2015), advertising discourse (Mensah, 2016), literature and literary criticism (Allagbe et al., 2020; Emike et al., 2022) and agribusiness discourse (Ampadu, 2021). These varied studies have modelled the pervasive nature of pragmatic acts for informing (Duku et al., 2024), directing (Mensah, 2016; Rosemary et al., 2022), promising, expressing emotion (Agyekum, 2015; Gborsong et al., 2022; Lomotey & Sam, 2023), and advising (Gborsong et al., 2022). These diverse domains reflect meaning construction, negotiation and reception in the Ghanaian context.

Methodological Approaches

Ghanaian speech act studies are characterized by qualitative, discourse-analytic methodologies. Agyekum (2015), for instance, adopts a political discourse analysis approach in his study of political apologies. He adopts the qualitative analytical approach to unpack meaning in communicative practices that cannot be captured numerically. Anyanwu and Abana (2020) likewise employed a discourse analytical approach in their study. Some studies have also employed the ethnopragmatic (qualitative) (Agyekum, 2019; Bosiwah et al., 2021; Brefo et al., 2024; Brookman-Andoh et al., 2022, 2018; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2016; Tuffour, 2022; Yekple et al., 2023), explorative (Adjei & Bosiwah, 2015; Ampadu, 2021; Gbrosong, 2016; Gborsong et al., 2022; Israel & Botchwey, 2017), descriptive (Allagbe et al., 2020; Bisilki & Bisilki, 2017; Demuyakor, 2021; Emike et al., 2022; Israel, 2022; Israel et al., 2023a; Israel et al., 2023b; Lomotey & Sam, 2023; Mensah, 2016; Naaikuur & Akapule, 2024; Rosemary et al., 2022) and conversational analysis approach (Otoo, 2018). Generally, most of the studies aligned with the qualitative approach. This aligns with the nature of speech act research, which requires understanding context-specific cues and speaker intentions that are best revealed through careful qualitative scrutiny. Beermann (2024) introduces a different methodological perspective into the study of speech acts in Ghana. She employed an inductive approach through corpus linguistic methods. This method stands different from previous methodological approaches used in the study of speech acts in Ghana.

A few of the studies were, however, supplemented by basic quantitative counts (Anane, 2022; Dadjo, 2018; Duku et al., 2024; Gborsong, 2016; Ugoala & Israel, 2020). These studies employed descriptive statistics to report the occurrence of pragmatic acts and other relevant linguistic variables. The prevailing approach is to collect a sample of relevant texts or transcripts and perform contextual content analysis. The researchers identify and classify speech acts according to a theoretical scheme, and then interpret their pragmatic functions. Additionally, they provide a frequency count of the pragmatic acts for ease of discussion.

Concerning data collection techniques, Ghanaian speech act studies have largely been naturalistic and document-based. In Tuffour's (2022) cultural study, data came from field interviews and observation of traditional events to capture authentic use of appellations. Bosiwah et al.'s (2021) ethnographic study also involved participant observation, interview and documentation in

studying deity names. Brookman-Andoh et al. (2022) likewise used interviews in their study of Asante proverbs. In addition to observations and interviews, focus group discussions (Brefo et al., 2024), library research approach (Brookman-Andoh, 2018) and discourse completion tasks (interview and role play) (Anane, 2022; Gborsong, 2016) have been used. A combination of ethnopragmatic approaches (participant observation and text analysis) has also been used (Agyekum, 2019; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2016). This combined approach enriched qualitative data with multiple sources. It is clear from the foregoing the willingness to incorporate ethnographic methods when dealing with oral traditions or less-documented speech contexts. As noted earlier, document-based (textual) data has largely been used in Ghanaian speech act analysis studies (Agyekum, 2015; Anyanwu & Abana, 2020; Dadjo, 2018; Duku et al., 2024; Israel, 2022; Israel & Botchwey, 2017; Israel et al., 2023a; Israel et al., 2023b; Mensah, 2016; Mesu et al., 2022; Naaikur & Akapule, 2024). Beermann (2024) brings a fresh methodological perspective to the study of speech act analysis in Ghana. Her source of data was the corpora. She analysed an Interlinear Glossed Corpus for Akan. She thus incorporates corpus linguistics methods into the study of speech acts in Ghana.

Manual transcription and coding of the collected data have largely been used to identify speech acts in the text. Bosiwah et al. (2021) manually transcribed deity names gathered from their participant observation likewise Brefo et al. (2024), who manually transcribed interviews from their focus group discussions. Anyanwu and Abana (2020) also manually coded presidential crisis speech in their study. That notwithstanding, computer-mediated methods have been used in analysing speech acts in the Ghanaian context (Beermann, 2024; Duku et al., 2024). Context and co-text have also been used to infer illocutionary intentions in the discourses/text. Anane (2022) resorted to the context of his data to provide an in-depth perspective and interpretations of the occurrence of speech acts reported in his study. Brookman-Andoh et al. (2022) and Brookman-Andoh et al. (2018) stated that social context was critical in their analysis of Asante proverbs.

The analysis phase typically involves categorization and content analysis using the chosen theoretical framework. Many studies explicitly mention that they categorized utterances using Searle's taxonomy (Dadjo, 2018; Duku et al., 2024; Israel & Botchwey, 2017), Mey's PAT (Ugoala & Israel, 2020) or a similar coding system. Agyekum (2015), for instance, analysed his data using

the lexical, semantic and pragmatic features of the utterances of apology. Often, there is a count of the occurrence rate of each pragmatic act which is later discussed (see: Anane, 2022; Dadjo, 2018; Israel & Botchwey, 2017; Mesu et al., 2022). While there are quantitative tallies, the significance of the analysis lies in the qualitative insights. Generally, analysis has been largely thematised based on speech act patterns and categories.

The use of comparative and cross-sectional approaches in some studies is worth mentioning. Anyanwu and Abana (2022), for instance, compare practs in the public speeches of three African presidents. Duku et al. (2024) likewise adopt a comparative approach in their study of commencement speeches. Botchwey (2017), Mesu et al. (2022), Ugoala and Israel (2020) and Naaikuur and Akapule (2024) also adopt a comparative model in their respective studies. This comparative element strengthens the analysis by highlighting contrasts in speech act patterns under different conditions or roles.

Conclusion and Implications

The number of articles published per year shows a generally upward trajectory in the number of journal articles on speech act analysis in Ghana. This trend analysis is evidence of the fact that academic fields do not develop in isolation, but respond to institutional priorities and real-world events. There has been diversity and inclusivity in the production of speech act research showing thematic and practical relevance in this subfield. The relevance of the subfield in the Ghanaian academic context is also evident in the amount of work being done by various faculties and departments across home-based and international tertiary institutions. STEM-focused institutions such as KNUST are featured in the top three institutional contributors to the subfield. Ghana's linguistic context is visible as it has attracted global interest. There is also a dualistic trend in the dissemination of these studies, though, unfortunately, there is clear evidence that few domestic journals publish Ghanaian-related pragmatics studies. Institutional policies, perception of quality and tenure requirements have fed into the imbalance in the dissemination of studies in the subfield. Theoretical engagement remains grounded in Classical SAT, yet there is a discernible shift toward more context-sensitive frameworks such as Pragmatic Act Theory, ethnopragmatics, and discourse-analytic models. Across contexts, the preponderance of assertive and directive acts has been discussed in the

Ghanaian context. A significant concentration of studies is in sociocultural domains and political discourse. Other domains such as academic contexts, socio-pragmatic domains, institutional, health, agribusiness, literary criticism, digital-mediated and advertising discourses have received some attention as well. Qualitative and discourse-analytic methodologies have dominantly been employed in the subfield.

This study stresses the need for continued research that explores underrepresented domains and speech act categories within Ghana's sociolinguistic landscape. Theoretically, it supports the integration of classical and context-sensitive models to better capture the dynamic nature of communication in culturally grounded settings. For practice, the findings encourage educators, communicators, and policymakers to consider pragmatic competence and cultural context in discourse, curriculum design, and public engagement.

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