Japan Bilingual Publishing Co.

Philosophy and Realistic Reflection

https://ojs.bilpub.com/index.php/prr

ARTICLE

How to Be Things with Words: Speech Acts and the Ontological Symmetry Between Realism and Idealism

Euclides Souza

Department of Philosophy, Federal University of Paraiba, Joao Pessoa 58050-585, Brazil

ABSTRACT

This article challenges the traditional separation between language and ontology by arguing that they are fundamentally co-constitutive. Drawing from Speech Act Theory—particularly in its development by Austin, Searle, and Vanderveken—it demonstrates that language is not merely a vehicle for describing reality, but a generative force that constitutes ontological status through declarative and performative acts. Building on this framework, the paper critiques Quine's early attempt (On What There Is, 1948) to isolate ontological commitment from linguistic practice, showing that even denial presupposes referential invocation. It further examines Word and Object (1960), where Quine acknowledges that reference and meaning are shaped by conceptual schemes, suggesting greater affinity with SAT than his earlier stance implies. Beyond the construction of institutional facts, the article defends a broader claim: that even so-called natural or physical facts are only intelligible through mental-linguistic mediation. Integrating insights from phenomenology, the philosophy of mind (Metzinger, Chalmers, Nagel), and non-Western ontologies (Buddhist pratītyasamutpāda, Ubuntu), the article demonstrates that no access to being is possible without an act of saying. Ontology does not precede language—it emerges with it. By repositioning SAT as a metaphysical framework rather than a linguistic tool, the paper proposes a model in which saying and being are inseparable operations. Language is not posterior to the world—it is what makes the world available to us as world.

Keywords: Ontology; Language; Speech Acts; Performativity; Idealism; Realism; Mind

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Euclides Souza, Department of Philosophy, Federal University of Paraiba, Joao Pessoa 58050-585, Brazil; Email: kidinho_dc@hotmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 10 July 2025 | Revised: 2 September 2025 | Accepted: 10 September 2025 | Published Online: 18 September 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.55121/prr.v2i1.493

CITATION

Souza, E., 2025. How to Be Things with Words: Speech Acts and the Ontological Symmetry Between Realism and Idealism. Philosophy and Realistic Reflection. 2(1): 150–159. DOI: https://doi.org/10.55121/prr.v2i1.493

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2025 by the author(s). Published by Japan Bilingual Publishing Co. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0).

1. Introduction

What does it mean to say that something exists? And how can we know that it does? These are classical ontological questions. *Ontology*, in philosophy, is the discipline that studies the nature of being, existence, and the categories of entities that compose reality. It seeks to answer what there is and what it means for something to be. Traditionally, ontology has been treated as independent of human language — as if the structure of reality could be accessed apart from our linguistic or conceptual frameworks.

However, the philosophy of language, especially since the 20th century, has challenged this assumption. In particular, *language* — understood as a rule-governed system of communication composed of meaningful symbols — is not merely a passive mirror of the world. It is a human faculty through which we describe, categorize, and often even bring into being the objects and facts we consider real.

This idea is central to Speech Act Theory (SAT), developed by J. L. Austin and expanded by John Searle and Daniel Vanderveken. According to SAT, utterances are not only vehicles for stating facts, but also *performative acts*: they can do things — such as promising, ordering, naming, or declaring. This is the notion of *performativity*: that to say something in the right context is to perform an action. For example, when an authorized speaker says "I now pronounce you married," the utterance itself enacts a new social reality.

This article aims to explore the ontological implications of performative language. If speech acts can produce *institutional facts* (e.g., money, laws, contracts), can they also shape more fundamental aspects of reality? Can ontology itself — the discourse of what there is — be seen as a product of linguistic structures and acts? These questions gain urgency when we revisit the work of W.V.O. Quine, especially his 1948 essay *On What There Is*[1], which proposes that existence is what our best theories quantify over. Quine argues that ontological commitment is theory-dependent, but he maintains a distinction between language and ontology that this paper will challenge.

The central thesis of this article is that ontology and language are *co-constitutive* and *interdependent*, and that SAT — despite its original focus on social institutions — offers a theoretical bridge between linguistic practice and ontological commitment. By examining how speech acts construct not only social entities, but also subjective experience and intersubjective reality, we argue for a stronger position than ontological relativity: being itself is mediated through linguistic acts.

This work makes four contributions:

- It offers a critical reinterpretation of Quine's ontology through the lens of speech act theory.
- It extends the implications of SAT beyond institutional facts, toward subjective and metaphysical realities.
- It introduces non-Western ontologies — such as Buddhist pratītyasamutpāda and African Ubuntu — to show that relational models of being support this interdependence.
- It anticipates and addresses potential objections, particularly the claim that SAT cannot account for mind-independent (natural) entities.

Structure of the article:

Section 2 – Speech Act Theory: This section introduces SAT via Austin, Searle, and Vanderveken. It explains the distinctions between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, the five illocutionary forces, and the idea that speech acts construct social reality. Authors like Cohen, Brandom, Habermas, and Cappelen & Lepore are discussed here, alongside critiques from Travis and the theory of felicity conditions.

Section 3 – Does mention imply existence?: This section examines Quine's argument in On What There Is, his rejection of Meinongian ontology, and his preference for a linguistic strategy to clarify ontological disputes. The article then critiques Quine using SAT, arguing that ontology cannot be cleanly separated from linguistic acts. It also mentions how later works come closer to acknowledging this entanglement.

Section 4 – Is Language Ontology?: This section introduces Rafael Echeverría's idea of language as the condition for recognizing all other domains of existence. It brings in Metzinger, Chalmers, and Nagel to support the argument that qualia and subjectivity further reinforce the idea that ontology arises from the mental-linguistic apparatus. It argues that each mind constructs its own world linguistically, and even other minds are only accessible through declarations.

Section 5 – Critiques and limitations of SAT: The article then introduces Buddhist and African frameworks to support a relational and performative understanding of being. These

views emphasize that no entity exists in isolation, aligning with SAT's idea that being emerges from relational contexts and speech acts. This section also shows Derrida's critique (1972) of Austin and SAT, raising concerns about the instability of meaning and iterability. It also deals with objections that SAT cannot account for natural, mind-independent facts like gravity. The article responds by showing that *even to conceptualize these facts requires language*, reaffirming the thesis that language is ontologically constitutive.

Before turning to Quine's metaphysical proposals, it is essential to understand the theoretical foundation that this article uses to challenge his assumptions: SAT. Emerging in the mid-20th century, SAT offers a pragmatic framework for analyzing language not merely as a vehicle for conveying information, but as a tool for enacting reality. The following section will outline its core concepts—particularly illocutionary and performative acts—and lay the groundwork for how language functions not only descriptively, but constitutively, in shaping our ontology.

2. Speech Act Theory

Inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein, particularly through his posthumous work *Philosophical Investigations*[2], John Langshaw Austin developed the concept of speech acts in *How to Do Things with Words*[3]. Contrary to the previously dominant view that language primarily describes the world, Austin demonstrated that many utterances are performative—they do not merely describe reality, but bring about changes in the world. Such utterances include acts like baptizing a child, declaring war, opening a theme park, or making promises and donations.

Austin contrasted performative utterances with what he termed constative ones—the traditional view of language as descriptive and truth-evaluable. Whereas constatives can be true or false depending on states of affairs, performatives are evaluated in terms of "felicity conditions"—circumstances that determine whether the act succeeds. For example, when someone makes a prediction, even if the predicted event does not occur, the act of prediction still took place and cannot be considered false. Its success is measured by its appropriateness and impact, not its truth-value.

Felicity is crucial in understanding why many speech acts can fail subtly in everyday life. A road sign in Recife (a Brazilian city) showing the distance to Tokyo, or a rapid disclaimer in a TV commercial, are examples of contextually "unhappy" utterances. Promising that a year will have twelve months, or swearing to die if a promise is broken, lack sincerity or practical effect—violating felicity conditions despite grammatical correctness.

Austin categorized performatives into three parts: (1) the locutionary act—the literal production of the utterance; (2) the illocutionary act—the speaker's intended function (e.g., asserting, promising); and (3) the perlocutionary act—the effect produced on the listener. For example, saying "Wow, you're big!" to compliment someone might be interpreted as an offense, depending on prior context. As Cohen[4] observes, identical utterances might generate opposite effects, highlighting the disconnect between speaker intention and listener reception.

Thus, one cannot say, "I scare you" or "I convince you," as these depend on the interlocutor's reaction. The perlocutionary dimension illustrates the shared nature of meaning: the completion of the speech act requires both speaker and hearer. That is, while every illocutionary act carries an illocutionary point—the function intended by the speaker, such as asserting, promising, or declaring—this *does not always result* in a matching perlocutionary effect, which is the actual outcome on the hearer. The difficulty in determining which of the two should take *ontological priority*—speaker's intention or hearer's uptake (e.g. when one tries to make a compliment, but the hearer got offended, was the reality composed by a compliment or an offense?—is not a weakness of the theory, but rather a further demonstration that speech acts shape reality in all its dimensions. A single utterance, by engaging both the speaker's projection and the hearer's interpretation, reveals that reality is not a fixed background waiting to be named, but something constituted *dynamically* through linguistic exchange. This perspective aligns with the insights of the linguistic turn (i.e., the 20th-century shift in philosophy that placed language at the center of problems previously addressed in terms of consciousness, reality, or logic), particularly in authors like Frege, who emphasized that meaning and reference are not private, but arise through public, structured forms of expression. Thus, the ontological force of a speech act is not reduced by the divergence between its parts; rather, it is enhanced, as the interplay between illo-

cutionary point and perlocutionary effect itself becomes a site of ontological generation.

Illocutionary acts express different forces depending on intent and form. According to Vanderveken[5], five primary illocutionary forces include: *assertives* (which describe reality), *commissives* (commitments to future action), *directives* (requests or commands), *expressives* (emotions or attitudes), and *declaratives* (which enact states of affairs simply by being uttered). The declarative force best captures the performative essence, since even assertives and promises implicitly declare their own status as acts.

When declarations meet felicity conditions—appropriate authority, context, and form—they *shape ontology itself*, especially in social domains. This is where SAT becomes ontologically significant.

Herman Cappelen and Ernie Lepore, in *Insensitive Semantics*[6], argue against widespread context-sensitivity, claiming that much variation in meaning is overstated and that semantic minimalism can explain more than often assumed. However, can we truly ignore the dynamic influence of context—culture, space, time, gender, religion—on meaning?

In contrast, John Travis, in *The Uses of Sense*[7], embraces contextualism as essential. He argues that successful communication depends on shared expectations, intentions, and background understandings. Yet, Travis's view leads to a paradox: we need minimally stable meanings to negotiate changes, but those very negotiations alter meaning again.

Philosophers like Jürgen Habermas and Robert Brandom broaden SAT's scope. Habermas, in *The Theory of Communicative Action*[8], embeds SAT within a theory of discourse ethics, where rational agreement is mediated by speech acts evaluated through criteria like truth, rightness, and sincerity. Robert Brandom, in *Making It Explicit*[9], extends this to *inferential semantics*: speech acts are moves in a game of giving and asking for reasons. Meaning arises from commitments, entitlements, and norms of dialogue.

These thinkers demonstrate that SAT is not just a linguistic tool, but a conceptual bridge to ethics, pragmatics, and social theory.

Returning to Quine, we now examine why he attempts to maintain a separation between language and ontology—and why this distinction, under the lens of SAT, might be philosophically unsustainable.

3. Does Mention Imply Existence?

Whether or not we should admit the existence of entities such as Pegasus—and whether denying such entities already commits us to their existence—depends, for Quine, on the ontological commitments we assume within a particular theoretical framework. Quine[1] argues that *to be is to be the value of a bound variable*: what exists is what must be assumed for the quantificational logic of a theory to work. Thus, ontological commitment becomes a matter of adopting the right language for scientific explanation, not of uncovering metaphysical truths.

Rather than defending a fixed or metaphysically absolute ontology, Quine proposes a pragmatic criterion: we are ontologically committed only to those entities that are indispensable to our best scientific theories. In this framework, if a variable in a scientific theory ranges over a particular type of entity, then that entity earns ontological status within the theory. However, since scientific theories are themselves fallible and subject to revision, these commitments are necessarily provisional, fluid, and relative to the conceptual scheme in use. This position reflects Quine's broader naturalism and empiricism, which subordinates metaphysics to science. While this move offers clarity and avoids *ontological excess*, it also reveals a key limitation: by grounding ontology exclusively in scientific language, Quine reduces the scope of ontological inquiry to empirical theorizing, *leaving aside richer metaphysical and phenomenological dimensions*. In doing so, he sidesteps how ontology might emerge not just from scientific necessity, but from linguistic performativity, subjective experience, and conceptual world-making—dimensions that remain unaccounted for in his empiricist reduction. This, we argue, is where Quine's framework ultimately fails to grasp the full interdependence between language and being.

Quine's point is to avoid what he sees as the *fallacy of Meinongianism*: that merely referring to or even denying an entity presupposes its existence. For him, Pegasus is not a problem, unless one needs Pegasus to be the value of a variable in a theory. But, here emerges a tension: while Quine is trying to save us from *overpopulating* our ontology, he avoids a deeper issue—the fact that even denying something linguistically still invokes it as something.

This is not a trivial point. When one says "Pegasus does not exist," one is *performing an act* that presupposes Pegasus as at least a meaningful referent. Quine's way out is to say

that reference does not entail existence—only quantification does. But, this solution only relocates the problem: it treats the ontological act as a technical function of logic rather than facing the performative paradox that *to say is already to make be*. The act of naming—whether in affirmation or denial—produces a trace of being within discourse.

This is where SAT, developed after Quine's text, fundamentally shifts the terrain. According to J. L. Austin[3], and later expanded by John Searle and Daniel Vanderveken in *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*[10] and *Meaning and Speech Acts*[5], saying something is not merely representing—it is doing. Utterances are acts that bring into existence what they declare, under the proper conditions. The declaration "This is a marriage" does not describe a marriage—it performs one. Even descriptive statements are performative in nature, because they enact the status of description itself.

In this light, Quine's idea that we can "describe McX's statements" metalinguistically, without accepting the existence of McX's entities, becomes philosophically fragile. The very act of describing McX's statements presupposes a shared performative space in which his assertions are treated as meaningful. Quine writes:

> *In debating over what there is, there are still reasons for operating on a semantical plane. One reason is to escape from the predicament noted at the beginning of the paper: the predicament of my not being able to admit that there are things which McX countenances and I do not. So long as I adhere to my ontology, as opposed to McX's, I cannot allow my bound variables to refer to entities which belong to McX's ontology and not to mine. I can, however, consistently describe our disagreement by characterizing the statements which McX affirms. Provided merely that my ontology countenances linguistic forms, or at least concrete inscriptions and utterances, I can talk about McX's sentences.*

Here, Quine seeks a safe linguistic ground—a way to acknowledge McX's discourse without absorbing his ontological baggage. But, what he overlooks is precisely what SAT reveals: that the linguistic act already carries ontological weight. Declaring "McX affirms the existence of X" does not merely report a belief—it performs an ontological operation by reinstating the object X within a *network of meaningfulness*.

Quine's insistence on operating "on a semantic plane" also fails to account for the deeper entanglement of language and being. He argues that seeing Naples is not a linguistic act, even if "I see Naples" is a true sentence. But, from the perspective of SAT, there is no "seeing Naples" apart from a context in which that *perception is declared*, situated, and recognized. The event *does not preexist* its declaration as an object of experience.

The question is: how can a non-linguistic fact be said to exist *if it is not describable* in any way? The realist might answer: it exists anyway. But, this leads to the absurd inflation of entities: all possible things exist—even those no one has ever named or perceived. This violates Quine's own adherence to Ockham's Razor, a principle he elsewhere invokes in defense of ontological austerity.

Thus, SAT reveals that both realism and idealism are incomplete: realism assumes too much without justification; idealism cannot deny the presence of brute constraints. But, both share the same blind spot: they depend on the act of saying to establish their terms. To declare a world—whether real or mind-made—is to constitute its being.

The influence of SAT is rooted, not only in Austin, but also in Wittgenstein[3] and, more remotely, in Gottlob Frege's *The Thought*[11], where the shift from propositional meaning to the act of thinking/speaking begins to emerge. These works contributed to the foundational insight that meaning and reference are inseparable from use and intentionality.

This intentional structure was further developed by Searle in *Intentionality*[12], where he shows that our mental states are *inherently directed*—that is, they are always about something—and only become publicly meaningful through language. For example, to perceive a house or a horse or Pegasus is to conceptualize and declare it as such. Without that declaration—no matter how primitive (even only by our five senses)—*there is no object for us*.

Putnam in *Reason, Truth and History*[13] adopts a realist position where truth corresponds to reality, while Dummett in *Truth and Other Enigmas*[14] defends an anti-realist position, in which truth is tied to verifiability. But, SAT reveals a middle ground: our linguistic acts establish *institutional facts* (such as marriage, money, or naming), whose success

often presupposes—but also constructs—brute facts (like material presence). Thus, language neither floats above reality nor is wholly determined by it. Rather, it mediates our being-in-the-world.

Finally, Achille Varzi in *From Language to Ontology*[15] reaffirms Quine's view by claiming:

> *There is, alas, no way of telling what sorts of things there are given the sorts of things we say. At most one can tell what sort of things we think there are, and one can tell that only if we tell them explicitly. The bridge between our words and the world out there is to be built from below, as it were. Ontology comes first, and depending of what we think there is, we must attach a meaning to what we say. Going the other way around is wishful thinking.*

But, this overlooks the performative insight of SAT. To say "ontology comes first" *is itself a performative act*. The very act of declaring what exists constitutes what is treated as real. If something has a name, a use, and a socially recognized function, it does so because someone declared it to be. Whether through gesture or speech, the act of declaration is the ontological moment.

Let us now see how language and ontology are related according to philosophers of language and mind.

4. Is Language Ontology?

We, thus, find a robust, if not strictly necessary, connection between language and ontology—the philosophical inquiry into the conditions under which things are said to "be" or "exist." For human beings, it is inconceivable to think of something as existing without thought, and thought itself appears to be impossible without some form of language. The very act of conception presupposes symbolic mediation: whenever we think, we assign symbols to objects, events, or states, and these symbols, stabilized by memory, form the basis of our communicative capacities.

In *Ontología del lenguaje*[16] (Ontology of Language) Rafael Echeverría emphasizes that while humans are fundamentally linguistic beings, it would be reductive to treat them only as such. He proposes three "domains" of human existence: *language*, the *body*, and *emotions*. The domain of the body refers to the physiological basis of existence, which includes involuntary phenomena like reflexes, spasms, or vegetative states. The domain of emotions concerns our affective life—states such as love, fear, or anger—that might or might not coincide with reasoned thought. However, as Echeverría stresses, it is only through language that these other two domains become accessible to us as knowable phenomena. Language is not just the condition of communication, but the very mechanism by which we recognize and give meaning to bodily and emotional states. He writes: "Since it is precisely through language that we give meaning to our existence, it is also from it that it is possible to recognize the importance of non-linguistic existential domains". This recognition, according to him, takes place through a process he calls *linguistic reconstruction*.

Importantly, Echeverría also notes that language is not merely descriptive—a realist tool for mapping an "independently existing world"—but also generative: it constitutes entities through the act of naming and conceptualizing them. He argues that human beings do not merely understand themselves through thought; they actively create themselves in and through thought and speech. Citing Nietzsche, he affirms: "Life, on the contrary, is the space in which individuals invent themselves. As Nietzsche told us, in the human being the creature and the creator unite".

This dual role of language—as both referential and creative—has also been emphasized by contemporary philosophers. Amie Thomasson, in *Ontology Made Easy*[17], defends a form of conceptualism in which ontological questions are resolved through reflection on our linguistic and conceptual frameworks. For her, to ask whether chairs, laws, or fictional characters exist is simply to ask whether our accepted concepts and practices include such entities. In this view, ontology is "easy", because it follows directly from how we use terms.

Brian Epstein, in *The Ant Trap*[18], agrees that many social entities depend on collective conceptual practices, but warns that this dependence is often multi-layered and causally complex. Not all social facts arise solely from linguistic conventions or collective intentionality; some involve deeper grounding relations that are not exhausted by the notion of acceptance.

John Searle's later work, particularly *Making the Social World*[19], situates this debate within the framework of SAT. For Searle, institutional facts—money, marriages,

governments—arise from the collective recognition of status functions codified by constitutive rules of the form "X counts as Y in context C." These rules, which are only operable through language, define the ontology of the social world. Language, in this view, is not simply a neutral medium for transmitting information, but the infrastructure through which social reality is enacted and stabilized.

Thus, across authors and traditions, we see reaffirmed the core claim of this article: that ontology is always already mediated by language, not just descriptively, but ontogenetically—that is, in the genesis of being itself. Even if one grants the existence of non-linguistic phenomena, it is only through linguistic acts that they are rendered meaningful, nameable, and shareable.

While theorists like Searle, Epstein, and Thomasson have demonstrated how social ontology emerges from collective practices and linguistic structures, the thesis advanced in this article goes a step further: it claims that the very condition for any ontology—social or otherwise—is the interplay between mind and language. The linguistic mind does not merely generate institutions or classifications; it constitutes the conditions of existence themselves, by *declaring the world as existing before it*, through subjective intentionality. This amounts to a form of linguistic idealism, in which the world gains ontological status only in and through the declarative force of a speaking subject. The object is not merely there; it is declared to be there—by someone, somewhere, within a horizon of experience.

Recent work in the philosophy of mind reinforces this view by foregrounding the *irreducibility of qualia*, or the subjective feel of experience. Thomas Metzinger, in *The Ego Tunnel*[20], argues that our experience of the world is not of "the world as it is", but of a phenomenal model constructed by the brain and linguistically framed. The house I see is not the house you see—not only because our angles and perceptual histories differ, but because our minds construct *distinct* ontological entities. Moreover, my recognition of your perception of a house is itself a mental-linguistic construction: I attribute to you a perspective and affirm the existence of your subjectivity, based on my own. In this way, the world does not precede us—it is always already shaped by our declarative acts, by the language that emerges from consciousness and points toward being. Ontology, therefore, is not discovered—it is performed into existence.

This argument gains further support from Thomas Nagel's classic essay *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*[21], where he contends that no objective, third-person description can fully capture the subjective character of experience—what it is like to be a conscious being. According to Nagel, even the most complete physical account of a bat's neural system would leave out the qualitative aspect of its world. This irreducibility points to the fundamental role of first-person consciousness in constituting reality as it is known and experienced. Along similar lines, David Chalmers, in *The Conscious Mind*[22], formulates what he calls the "hard problem of consciousness": the challenge of explaining why and how qualia arise from physical processes. For Chalmers, subjective experience is not a mere epiphenomenon of matter—it is an ontologically significant layer of reality that cannot be collapsed into physical descriptions. From the standpoint of this article, these insights suggest that being itself is inseparable from the felt experience of being, and that such experience—however pre-linguistic in its raw form—becomes ontologically functional only when it is recognized, declared, and situated through linguistic acts. Thus, when one says "I see a house," the utterance does not merely report a state of affairs; it constitutes that experience as a public, nameable reality. And when one says, "you also see it," one performs an even deeper ontological gesture: the recognition of another mind as a co-declarant of the world.

It is now time to consider what shortcomings or conceptual gaps might emerge when SAT is scrutinized from the perspective of the ontological claims discussed thus far.

5. Critiques and Limitations of SAT

Derrida[23] famously critiques Austin for excluding so-called "infelicitous" speech acts—such as those found in fiction, irony, or theatrical performances. According to Derrida, any utterance can be decontextualized and repeated in new contexts, rendering intention and context unstable as foundations for meaning. While proponents of SAT respond by insisting on the importance of context-sensitive felicity conditions, Derrida's central point remains: language is inherently *iterable*—repeatable beyond its original context—and meaning is never fully self-contained.

SAT also faces challenges when applied to ontological domains beyond the social. For instance, one might argue

that physical facts, such as gravity, exist independently of any linguistic or mental declaration. However, this quickly returns us to the realism–idealism debate: how are we to recognize or conceptualize gravity—its vectoral nature, its acceleration of 9.8 m/s²—without a rational, language-based apparatus? If not rationally, then through what form of perception, and can such perception be articulated without recourse to language? In other words, even so-called "mind-independent" facts appear *epistemically and ontologically dependent on language for their very identification*. We cannot even begin to speak of existence without first invoking linguistic structure.

Setting this aside momentarily, some critics argue that SAT operates most effectively within social ontologies, where institutional facts depend on collective agreement. To counter this limitation, integrating non-Western ontological models offers a broader, relational approach to speech and being. For example, Buddhist philosophy—especially through the doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination)—emphasizes that all phenomena arise in dependence upon conditions, and that nothing exists in complete isolation (Garfield[24]). This view resonates with the SAT insight that meaning and being are co-constituted; no utterance or entity exists outside a web of contextual and pragmatic conditions. However, unlike SAT's often hierarchical and agent-centered framework, Buddhist philosophy decentralizes the agent and privileges dynamic processes over fixed identities.

Similarly, African Ubuntu philosophy (Ramose[25]; Wiredu[26]) offers an ontological model rooted in relationality, summarized by the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* ("a person is a person through other persons"). In this view, existence is not affirmed solely through declarative acts, but through one's participation in a communal, intersubjective world. Speech acts, accordingly, are not isolated performances by autonomous agents, but expressions of relational agency, where ethical and ontological significance emerges from shared life and mutual recognition rather than institutional authority or propositional accuracy.

Integrating these perspectives highlights the implicit assumptions embedded within SAT—particularly its focus on individualism, stable meaning, and the linear transmission of intent. In contrast, both Derridean deconstruction and non-Western ontologies emphasize the fluidity, interdependence, and processual nature of being and meaning. Language is never fully "present" in any utterance; meaning unfolds through repetition, difference, and relation. Expanding SAT in dialogue with these pluralistic models not only illuminates its conceptual limits, but also invites a more dynamic and intercultural theory of language and existence.

What these non-Western ontologies compellingly demonstrate is that language and being are not discrete or hierarchically ordered domains, but co-emergent processes. In both Buddhist and Ubuntu frameworks, reality does not preexist linguistic engagement—it is constituted through it, in the form of mutual recognition, dependent causality, or shared intersubjectivity. There is no fixed world waiting to be labeled, nor isolated subject issuing linguistic acts onto a passive reality. Instead, language is woven into the very fabric of ontological formation, not as an overlay but as a condition of becoming. From this perspective, to speak is not merely to refer to something that already exists, but to participate in the ongoing constitution of what can be said to exist. Such a view affirms the core claim of this article: that ontology is not an external field mapped by language, but a structure of intelligibility born from the same operations that give language its meaning—subjectivity, intentionality, and relational embeddedness. These traditions reveal that the boundaries between saying and being, sign and substance, are always already blurred, and that it is in this interdependence that reality itself finds coherence.

Finally, a possible alternative to SAT in this context can be found in Quine's own later work. It is worth noting that, although Quine's *On What There Is* strongly defends the separation between ontology and language—arguing that ontological commitment is a matter of logical form rather than linguistic usage—his later work *Word and Object*[27] marks a *significant shift*. There, Quine acknowledges that reference, meaning, and even ontology are inextricably linked to linguistic behavior and conceptual schemes. He famously asserts that "meaning is what translation preserves", a statement that highlights the instability of reference and the dependence of meaning on intersubjective linguistic frameworks. This move toward semantic holism—in which no word has meaning in isolation and reference is theory-laden—suggests a more flexible and relational understanding of how language and ontology intertwine. While Quine still resists the idea that language creates being, *Word and Object* concedes that what counts as real depends on the network of sentences,

beliefs, and practices within a language community. This is precisely the spirit in which this article extends the debate: not by misreading Quine, but by showing that even within his own evolution, the rigid distinction between ontology and language becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

6. Conclusions

Thanks to the philosophical advances introduced by SAT, the traditional separation between language and ontology has been increasingly destabilized. Far beyond merely describing preexisting reality, language—through the structured use of speech acts—constitutes the very fabric of what we recognize as being. This article has argued that SAT, particularly in its most developed formulations by Searle and Vanderveken reveals a deep interdependence between linguistic acts and ontological status. Quine's attempt to separate ontological commitment from linguistic structure was shown to be inconsistent, especially once one acknowledges that to speak is already to perform an ontological operation. The act of declaring that something exists is not parasitic on prior being—it is part of what brings that being into our shared world.

While theorists such as Searle, Thomasson, and Epstein have already demonstrated how language creates institutional facts—marriages, currencies, universities—this article has gone further by defending a more radical thesis: that all ontology, including so-called "natural" or "physical" facts, is intelligible and experiencable only through linguistic-mind mediation. Drawing from insights in phenomenology, philosophy of mind, especially through Metzinger, Nagel, and Chalmers, and non-Western ontologies such as Buddhist dependent origination and Ubuntu's relational metaphysics, we showed that there is no access to being without an act of saying. A rock or a gravitational field is not merely there; it is there-for-us, declared and stabilized within a subjective-linguistic horizon.

In this light, SAT does not merely revolutionize linguistic philosophy—it fundamentally reshapes metaphysics. Being is no longer the silent background against which language operates, but a dynamic process co-emergent with linguistic declaration. The apparent opposition between realism and idealism collapses when we recognize that both require a speaker to articulate their positions. SAT thus serves not just as a theory of communication, but as a metaphysical framework: being and saying are not two acts—they are one.

Future research should continue to explore hybrid models that bring SAT into dialogue with ontological pluralism, consciousness studies, and intercultural metaphysics. The question is no longer whether language and ontology are distinct domains, but how deeply their fusion defines the conditions of existence itself.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Quine, W.V., 1950. On what there is. The review of metaphysics (New Haven), vol. 2 no. 5 (1948), pp. 21–38. Journal of Symbolic Logic. 15(2), 152–153. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2267012

[2] Wittgenstein, L., 1984. Investigações filosóficas. Trad. José Carlos Bruni. 3. ed. Abril Cultural: São Paulo, Brazil. (in Portuguese)

[3] Austin, J.L., 1990. Quando dizer é fazer. Trad. de Danilo Marcondes de Souza Filho. Artes Médicas: Porto Alegre, Brazil. (in Portuguese)

[4] Cohen, L.J., 1964. Do illocutionary forces exist? Philosophical Quarterly. 14(55), 118–137. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2955549

[5] Vanderveken, D., 1990. Meaning and speech acts: volume I. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, USA.

[6] Cappelen, H., Lepore, E., 2005. Insensitive semantics. Blackwell: Hoboken, NJ, USA.

[7] Travis, C., 2002. The uses of sense: Wittgenstein's

philosophy of language. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
[8] Habermas, J., 1984. The theory of communicative action. Beacon Press: Boston, MA, USA.
[9] Brandom, R., 1994. Making it explicit. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA.
[10] Searle, J., Vanderveken, D., 1985. Foundations of illocutionary logic. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, USA.
[11] Frege, G., 1956. The thought: a logical inquiry. In: Geach, P., Black, M. (eds.). Translations from the philosophical writings of Gottlob Frege. Basil Blackwell: Oxford, UK. pp. 289–311.
[12] Searle, J., 1983. Intentionality. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, USA.
[13] Putnam, H., 1981. Reason, truth and history. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, USA.
[14] Dummett, M., 1978. Truth and other enigmas. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA.
[15] Varzi, A.C., 2007. From language to ontology: beware of the traps. In: Aurnague, M. (eds.). The Oxford handbook of metaphysics. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
[16] Echeverria, R., 2003. Ontologia del lenguaje. 7th ed. J. C. Sáez: Santiago, Chile.
[17] Thomasson, A.L., 2015. Ontology made easy. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
[18] Epstein, B., 2015. The ant trap: rebuilding the foundations of the social sciences. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
[19] Searle, J.R., 2010. Making the social world: the structure of human civilization. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
[20] Metzinger, T., 2009. The ego tunnel: the science of the mind and the myth of the self. Basic Books: New York, NY, USA.
[21] Nagel, T., 1974. What is it like to be a bat? The Philosophical Review. 83(4), 435–450.
[22] Chalmers, D.J., 1996. The conscious mind: in search of a fundamental theory. Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA.
[23] Derrida, J., 1988. Signature event context. Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL, USA. pp. 1–25.
[24] Garfield, J.L., 1995. The fundamental wisdom of the middle way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.
[25] Ramose, M.B., 1999. African philosophy through Ubuntu. Mond Books: Harare, Zimbabwe.
[26] Wiredu, K., 1980. Philosophy and an African culture. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, USA.
[27] Quine, W.V.O., 1960. Word and object. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, USA.