

## Searle and the Challenge of Literal Meaning

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### Abstract

According to popular treatment, the literal meaning of a sentence is independent of any context, and so John Searle seeks to challenge this treatment of notion of the literal meaning. Searle argues that notion of literal meaning of a sentence applies only to a set of background or contextual assumptions; Background assumptions are self-evident and are not explicitly stated in the sentence itself; Each expression has an indefinite number of these background assumptions, and we cannot specify these assumptions in the sentence itself unless we bring in other background assumptions, and therefore the truth conditions of unambiguous sentences will change with manipulating in background assumptions. Also, according to Searle, Principle of Expressibility - that is, whatever can be intended, can be said - always finds the gap between the meaning of the sentence and the meaning of the speaker to be bridged, and therefore the consequence of this principle from Searle's point of view is that cases where the speaker does not say exactly what he means, are not theoretically essential to linguistic communication. The notion of the literal meaning of a sentence, from Searle's point of view, is the notion of intentionality, and this is what makes the sentence understandable to everyone. Searle ultimately considers literal meaning relative and states that there is nothing in the theory of relativity of literal meaning that is inconsistent with Principle of Expressibility. Thus, the study, analysis and critique of Searle's view in the literal meaning of the words and sentences is the basis of this research.

**Keywords:** John Searle; Literal Meaning; Background Assumptions; Principle of Expressibility; Relativity of Literal Meaning.

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