



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Speech Act Theory

A Critical Overview

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Loftur Árni Björgvinsson

Mái 2011

Háskóli Íslands
Hugvísindasvið
Enska

Speech Act Theory

A Critical Overview

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs í Ensku

Loftur Árni Björgvinsson
Kt.: 010583-3579

Leiðbeinandi: Matthew James Whelpton
Maí 2011

Abstract

This essay examines J.L. Austin's theory regarding speech acts, or how we do things with words. It starts by reviewing the birth and foundation of speech act theory as it appeared in the 1955 William James Lectures at Harvard before going into what Austin's theory is and how it can be applied to the real world.

The theory is explained and analysed both in regards to its faults and advantages. Proposals for the improvement of the theory are then developed, using the ideas of other scholars and theorists along with the ideas of the author.

The taxonomy in this essay is vast and various concepts and conditions are introduced and applied to the theory in order for it to work. Those conditions range from being conditions of appropriateness through to general principles of communication.

In this essay utterances are examined by their propositional content, the intention of the utterance, and its outcome. By studying how utterances are formed and issued, along with looking into utterance circumstances and sincerity, one can garner a clear glimpse into what constitutes a performative speech act and what does not.

By applying the ideas of multiple thinkers in unison it becomes clear that a) any one single theory does not satisfyingly explain all the intricacies of the theory and b) most utterances which are not in the past tense can be considered to be either performative or as having some performative force.

Table of Contents

General Introduction.....	1
Introducing the Performative.....	1
Proposing Conditions.....	3
Extending the Conditions.....	4
Attempting to Isolate the Performative	5
Regarding Locution.....	8
Evolving Locution.....	10
The Various Modes of Performatives.....	13
Revising the Forces of Illocution.....	14
Indirect Speech Acts.....	17
The Cooperative Principle.....	19
Combining the Theories.....	21
Conclusion.....	23
Works Cited.....	25

General Introduction

“Speech is fundamentally a social act of doing things with words” (McGregor 142)

In my time studying English I have focused mostly on the linguistic and philosophical aspects of language. Before long I was introduced to a small book which contained a transcript from a lecture held in Harvard in 1955; little did I know that this unassuming text would so dramatically change my notions of what language is capable of doing. This text was British philosopher J.L. Austin's book *How to Do Things with Words: the William James Lectures* in which he examined how acts of speech can constitute a change in the world in virtue of having been uttered; the second paragraph reads:

It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a ‘statement’ can only be to ‘describe’ some state of affairs, or to ‘state some fact’, which it must do either truly or falsely (1962:1)

Then the question “can saying make it so?” (1962:7) was posed and Austin set about finding out if and how that would be possible. I found it simply astounding that language could be used as an instrument of performance rather than just a tool to describe reality. In order to gain any understanding on the subject one has to take into account ideas and concepts from various scholars whose fields include philosophy, semantics, pragmatics, and linguistics.

This is my attempt to understand and explain the intricacies of speech act theory and how performing through language is possible. By examining propositional content, intentions, and the outcomes of utterances we will see that there are many ways in which language can be said to perform actions.

Introducing the Performative

There exist many utteranceⁱ types which do not fall into any particular grammatical category other than the category ‘statement’ (Austin 1962). These are utterances that are

void of descriptions and are neither true nor false in virtue of their meaning or definition but still remain understandable and meaningful (Searle 1969:6). These include things like jokes, descriptions, exclamations, indicators of sociality such as ‘hello’ and ‘good night’ and a multitude of other utterances which are not statements but something else all together.

Early in the development of speech act theory Austin proposed that there were only two types of utterances possible. There were ‘performative utterances’ which he defined as utterances which:

[...] do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and [...] the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something
(1962:5)

There were also ‘constative utterances’; uttering a constative is ‘saying something’ that has the property of being either true or false (Austin 2000:351). So the constative includes all descriptive utterances, statements of fact, definitions and so forth: utterances which report, inform and state (Searle 1971:39).

The former category, performatives, is the focus of our investigation as a performative utterance can be viewed as a ‘speech act’ where “the uttering of the words is [...] the leading incident in the performance of an act, [...] the performance of which is also the object of the utterance” (Austin 1962:8). Some examples these types of utterances include:

- a. ‘I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)’ [...]
- b. ‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*’ [...]
- c. ‘I give and bequeath my watch to my brother’ [...]
- d. ‘I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow’

(1962:5)

These rather bland sentences are archetypal examples of performative speech acts as they do not “*describe* my doing what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it” (1962:6). That is to say they serve to indulge in action and not to report upon it.

When looking into speech acts, the question arises whether taking part in a linguistic act is the act of saying something; or is saying something that which causes a linguistic act to occur. This categorization of utterance types does not explain why or how utterances can be said to perform in the world.

Proposing Conditions

Austin contemplated for example that when naming a ship “it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name [the ship]” (1962:7) and that apart from the circumstances being in some way appropriate one must also convey a certain seriousness while performing speech acts for them to be effective.

Since lack of appropriate circumstances are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to ways in which a performative speech act can be said to have gone wrong Austin suggested a ‘doctrine of infelicities’ which states the basic conditions that a performative speech act must adhere to they are to succeed in performing:

- A.1. There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect[.] [T]hat procedure [must] include the uttering of certain words by persons in certain circumstances
- A.2. The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked
- B.1. The procedure must be executed by all participants correctly
- B.2. The procedure must be executed completely.

Γ.1. Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participant must intend so to conduct themselves

Γ.2. All participants must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

(1962: 14-5)

If a speech act fulfils all the above stated conditions the act is 'felicitous', or 'happy' as Austin preferred, otherwise the act is rendered 'infelicitous', or 'unhappy'. If a speech act violates the first four conditions, A through B, it is called a *misfire*; violating the last two, Γ, is called an *abuse* (1962:18). The first four conditions may be viewed as social conditions and the last twoⁱⁱ as conditions regarding sincerity of thought and intention.

If an utterance misfires, if something in the procedure goes wrong or astray, such as a wedding administered by an imposter, then the act is left void and without effect. While if a promise, for instance, is made half-heartedly and thusly does not entail that the speaker is going to do what was promised then, through lack of intention, the act of promising was performed but because of the inherent insincerity of the act the promise would be an abuse of the act (1962:9-11). The problems one runs into when relying solely on felicity conditions is that they only take into account an utterance's circumstances, intention, and completeness while disregarding the utterance's propositional content.

J.R. Searle, a one time student of Austin's, proposed that the conditions needed to be extended beyond circumstantial appropriateness and correctness and should focus on the utterance itself and not the circumstances in which the utterance is issued.

Extending the Conditions

Searle added a set of utterance conditions which examine things like propositional content, intention, and sincerity. The point, or object, of these conditions vary depending on

the type of speech act utteredⁱⁱⁱ; in the case of a commissive act, like a promise, the conditions work thusly:

1: 'Propositional content condition'. A performative should only be uttered in the context of a sentence which predicates some future act of the speaker/hearer.

2: 'Preparatory condition'. The utterance is to be uttered only *a*) if it is the case that normally the act proposed would not be done and *b*) if the speaker believes it is the case that the hearer would prefer the speaker doing what is proposed and *c*) if the hearer prefers the speaker doing what is proposed.

3: 'Sincerity condition'. Any performative utterance should only be uttered if the speaker intends to do what is proposed or if the speaker believes in his words.

4: 'Essential condition'. For any utterance to be a performative it is essential for the utterance to count as an obligation to do what is proposed.

(Searle 1969:63)

With Austin's and Searle's conditions implemented in unison, with the former focusing on social context and the act of uttering and the latter focusing on the uttering itself, one can begin to seek out what actually constitutes a performative speech act as propositional content has now been factored into the theory.

Attempting to Isolate the Performative

When looking at an utterance as part of a complete speech act there do arise some startling parallels between the performative and the constative when it comes to felicity conditions and propositional content. It seems that a constative statement can be infelicitous in the same ways as a performative since insincerity, the lack of belief in the truth of one's

propositional content, can renders any act of speech in breach of rules Γ. 1-2. regardless of the utterance type (cf. Austin 2000).

Since uttering a constative is, in a sense, to perform an act of stating, an act of defining, an act of informing, and so on; the constative can be viewed as a subcategory of the performative in certain circumstances. Also because uttering a constative is 'to say something' and uttering a performative cannot be done without saying something first we reach a point where there is something lacking from Austin's classification of utterance types since both classes of utterances can include each other (cf. Searle 1999). They can't be subcategories of each other so does there exist some clear-cut way of recognizing each in any given situation.

Performatives generally have some propositional or descriptive content which is expressed by the form of words chosen. 'James meets Mary' is an appropriate grammatical utterance in English and it could be crudely transcribed as meet(James, Mary), where the simple present tense is a clue that this utterance does not necessarily serve as a constative assertion of facts but rather that it must be used for some kind of act – e.g. a sporting announcer might be declaring which contestants will meet in the next round (Whelpton p.c.).

As an addition one can look at the grammatical form of an utterance and insert a test word in order to garner a glimpse into what the utterance is meant to achieve. The test word is the word 'hereby', or its equivalent, as in 'I hereby declare ...'. One can also look at the tenses of verbs so 'I declare...' is an attempt to perform a declaration while 'I declared' is a description of a past event (Austin 2000:353)

A performative utterance can be made grammatically explicit. Beginning an utterance with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active, such as 'I declare a state of war', and/or using a verb in the second or third person present indicative passive, such as 'all trespassers will be prosecuted' does help to indicate that the speaker is not describing a state of affairs nor reporting upon what will happen to trespassers, the speaker

is asserting about a state of affairs that will exist in the world and the speaker is at the same time committing to bringing about an actual state of affairs. The act performed in uttering a performative does not occur solely in virtue of the explicit use of proper verbs, as one could add these verbs to a constative utterance and thus make it into a performative, as in 'I hereby declare that this cup is too small' which could be interpreted as an act of formally asserting about the world (cf. Austin 1962; cf. Searle 1999).

Therefore it seems that a constative can be changed into a performative and still retain its meaning. Let's examine the following:

- a) 'I drink wine'
- b) 'I hereby declare that I drink wine'

As both of the above serve primarily to report upon one person's state in the world, with the only difference between the two being the use of explicit verbs. In Austin's system the former is a constative and the latter a performative declaration; despite both utterances having the same propositional content. The latter could also be thought of as an act of officially asserting something regarding states of affairs in the world, but more on that later (cf. Searle 1999).

This lack of distinction leads to the merit of the performative/constative being compromised as the constative can appear to perform in certain circumstances. This then leads to the idea that the performative nature of utterances should be examined depending on what is achieved with the act of uttering rather than how utterances are phrased since the grammatical structure of an utterance cannot definitively explain whether an utterance is a performative or not; though there are correlations between the grammatical form of an utterance and performative speech acts (cf. Austin 1970; cf. Searle 1999).

The circularity described regarding the performative/constative stems from the constative being equated with propositional or descriptive content, and they are not the same. This, in a sense, anticipates the following.

In order to issue any type of utterance one has to commit an ‘act of saying something’. Austin reviewed his performative/constative categories and rethought the matter and renamed this basic act of communication as a ‘locutionary act’.

“[Locution] includes the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain ‘meaning’ [...] with a certain sense and with a certain reference”

(Austin 1962:94).

Locution was proposed as a parent category which includes all utterances whether constative or performative. Locution was then subdivided into ‘illocutionary acts’ and ‘perlocutionary acts’^{iv}. Locution is when ‘to’ say something is to do something (1962:108). All constative utterances are locutionary by default as ‘to’ say something is ‘to say something’; Illocution is when ‘in’ saying something an act is performed (1962:99), such as ‘in’ ordering someone one is ‘ordering someone’; and perlocution being when ‘by’ saying something an act is performed (1962:108), as in “‘by’ saying *x* I was *y*-ing him’: ‘by saying *stop* I was *warning* him’. Searle explains this as “the X term is a speech act, the performance of that speech act [...] creates the institutional fact named by the Y term” (1999:133). Here one has reached a point in which one can examine utterances based on propositional content, intentions, sincerity, and its effect and possible outcome.

In *How to Do Things with Words* there is a footnote regarding the three kinds of locution which reads “all this is not clear” (1962:103). If the coiner of the taxonomy was not clear on the definitions then we ought to look around for other ideas in order to try and explain the ideas of locutionary act more clearly. The basic explanation regarding the performative modes of locution is that they are intended to produce an effect in a hearer.

Regarding Locution

Locution is “the content of propositional sentences (“*p*”) or of nominalized propositional sentences (“that *p*”)” (Habermas 122). To put it more clearly then locution is the act of uttering a grammatical form of words which is associated with some

propositional content. Locutionary utterances are adherent to truth conditions and locution needs sense and reference in order to be understandable. Reference depends on the knowledge of the speaker at the time of utterance (Austin 1962:143). Locution is simply saying something (1962:108); we convey information, we talk inane, we question, etc. Jerrold Sadock calls locutionary acts “acts that are performed in order to communicate” (1974:8) while Habermas claims that locution is the act of expressing states of affairs (1998:122). But regardless of what view one has on the matter locution is the starting point for any utterance of any kind since ‘to say something’ is to perform a locutionary act.

Illocutionary utterances are utterances in which a speaker performs an act in virtue of having said something (Habermas 122). Illocution is what is accomplished by communicating the intent to accomplish something; “I pronounce the defendant guilty” (Sadock 9) when uttered by a judge is the act of sentencing. “I pronounce...” can neither be said to be true or false if uttered under the right conditions; as the utterance is not describing anything, rather it is proclaiming a state of event that will occur if the utterance is made sincerely and meant in the appropriate circumstances. Therefore illocution is not descriptive and is not subject to truth conditions; it is the “performance of an act *in* saying something” (Austin 1962:99). By using the test word ‘hereby’ one can, under normal conditions, find the point, or force, of a given utterance by noting ‘I hereby *x* that *p*’ where *x* makes explicit whether the utterance is a request, command, promise, etc. (Habermas 122). It is worth noting that regardless of a hearer’s response to an act such as an order, for instance, the fact is that if the act is uttered with the proper intentions then “I have ordered you [...] even if my words do not have the desired effect on you” (Davis 15)

Perlocutionary utterances are utterances that are supposed to have an effect on the hearer. Jokes, warnings, persuading, sarcasm etc. are examples of perlocution as they are generally meant to elicit a response from the hearer. Austin classified such things as achieving to inform, convince, warn, persuade, mislead, etc. as perlocutionary acts (Austin 1962: 108). Perlocutionary effects are often the unsaid by-products of linguistic

communication and their effects may be intentional or unintentional (Sadock 8-9) as it is the hearer who acts upon an effect produced by the speech act (Habermas 122).

A performative speech act must then be either an illocutionary or a perlocutionary utterance in order to be considered to perform. That is to say an utterance must either be uttered with intention or it must secure some kind of uptake in a hearer in order for the speech act to be a performative.

Evolving Locution

There still does not seem to be that great a distinction between the locutionary act and what was formerly the constative; since it is still the case that in order to perform any type of speech act one must issue a locution first. But there is one distinction that is evident. Consider these examples:

1. I congratulate you
2. I am painting a wall
3. I admire you

(cf. Davis 1976)

These three sentences show the difference between the former categorization of constative/performative and the latter three-folded locutionary category.

The first example is an illocution, or a performative, as one can only congratulate someone by uttering these words, since if they are uttered in the appropriate circumstances they constitute a 'congratulation'; while if the utterance would be left unsaid then no one would be congratulated (cf. Davis 1976).

The second example is a locution, or constative, as one cannot paint a wall by stating that one is doing so, one can only paint a wall by physically indulging in the act of painting. The utterance is therefore not a pure performative since an action is not performed

in virtue of the utterance having been uttered. Although it is worth noting that even though the words themselves do not perform the act described an act of informing is accomplished as in saying these words the hearer is informed (cf. Davis 1976).

The third example would be constative in the constative/performative system but it would not be a locution in the latter. It is a constative since “we can admire someone [...] by sitting quietly in a corner” (Davis 16) without actually performing any act whether physical or verbal. This third example could be considered to be a perlocutionary act in the sense that ‘by saying ‘I admire you’ I was commending you’. So in this example the previous classification of constative/performative does not provide for any deeper level of understanding. It does not allow for a hearer to decide what is meant with an utterance (cf. Searle 1971; cf. Davis 1976).

This lack of clarity in regards to locutionary utterances, whether an utterance is locutionary, illocutionary, or perlocutionary, troubled Philosopher J.R. Searle who in turn proposed his own ideas regarding how the category of locutionary utterances could be made clearer. The following exemplifies his idea:

1. Sam smokes habitually.
2. Does Sam smoke habitually?
3. Sam, smoke habitually!
4. Would that Sam smoked habitually.

(Searle 1969:22)

5. Mr Samuel Martin is a regular smoker of tobacco

(1969:24)

These utterances all hold the same reference, Sam, and they all have the same basic propositional content. All five examples, according to Searle, “predicate the expression “smokes habitually” (or one of its inflections) of the object referred to” (1969:23) and yet

the illocutionary aspect of each example is different; 1) is an assertion, 2) is a question, 3) is an order, 4) is a type of wishful request, and 5) is a statement of fact. The reference and the predication appear in different places in each utterance and in each utterance a different speech act is attempted. This points to the fact that the notion of reference and predication can be detached from the mix and put into a category of its own (1969:23).

Searle then scrapped the idea of a locutionary category and instead opted for 'utterance acts' and 'propositional acts'. The former being uttering words or morphemes and the latter being referring and predicating (1969:24). These two categories applied in unison distinguish between utterances and their associated propositional content. Searle does not deny that in order to accomplish a propositional act or an illocutionary act an utterance act has to be performed first. But he does make a distinction between example 1 and example 5 in that they both attest the same propositional act and both have the illocutionary point of asserting, or stating; but they do not include the same words and are therefore different utterance acts. So in performing various utterance acts a speaker may be performing the same illocutionary act; and when performing the same utterance act a speaker may be performing different propositional, illocutionary or perlocutionary acts (1969:22-25).

Both Austin and Searle agree that there are illocutions and perlocutions, and they also agree that in order to utter a performative speech act an act of speech has to be issued first, regardless of it being called a 'constative', 'locutionary act' or 'utterance/propositional act'. Austin's definition of locution is too broad for comfort; so from here on Searle's taxonomy will be used when referring to non-performative utterances, acts of speech, and Austin's taxonomy when referring to performative utterances, speech acts. The reason for this being the lack of clarity regarding non-performative utterances in Austin's system; by using utterance act or propositional act it is clear that one is not referring to a performative illocutionary or perlocutionary speech act and vice versa. One is referring to the uttering itself when using the ideas of Searle and one is referring to circumstances and completeness when using the ideas of Austin.

The Various Modes of Performatives

Austin distinguished between five classes by which all performative speech acts could be classified according to what it is that the act of uttering is meant to achieve. So, in essence, Austin set limitations as to the number of possible performative utterance types.

These utterance types were Verdictives, Exercitives, Commissive, Behabitives, and Expositives. Austin suggested these classes with the forewarning that some fresh classification could be implemented in the future since his definitions were troublesome and prone to overlap (Austin 1962:151). But in order to understand and appreciate the classification of later thinkers one must know why later modifications were deemed necessary.

Verdictives: An utterance that gives a finding 'as to something'. An archetypal example would be that of a jury passing sentence or a boxing referee pronouncing a fight to be over. The propositional content of a verdict can be viewed as being either true or false; but the verdict in and of itself can only be viewed as being felicitous or infelicitous after it has been pronounced regardless of external truths (Austin 1962:150-2)

Exercitives: The illocutionary act of exercising power or influence. Good examples of which would be ordering, appointing, and such. An exercitive is a pronouncement that something is to be so or "giving of a decision in favour of or against a certain course of action" (Austin 1962:154).

Commissives: These are utterances which commit the speaker to a certain undertaking or action; utterance which asserts an obligation on part of the speaker. Promises and other declarations of intent are prime examples of commissives. (Austin 1962:156-7)

Behabitives: This class includes aspects of social behaviour like congratulating, apologizing, insulting, and greetings. This class was in Austin's view very miscellaneous

group because it mostly expresses attitudes of sociality and is therefore very open to all kinds of infelicities regarding proper conditions and sincerity (Austin 1962:159)

Expositives: These are performatives where the performative verb is made explicit in order to make plain how a particular utterance should be understood. They are “enormously numerous and important, and seem both to be included in the other classes and at the same time to be unique” (Austin 1962:151).

As stated earlier, one can find many faults with these five classes of utterances that mostly have to do with the overlapping of concepts and intermingling of classes. To begin with then any given utterance which makes explicit its performative aspect would be partly expositive. This begs the question of whether an expositive with a commissive, ‘I vow that...’, is an expositive commissive or just a commissive; or whether a declaration of war, if uttered ‘We hereby declare war on ...’, is a commissive, exercitive, or an expositive of either or both. Without clear cut definitions regarding the classes themselves the distinction between what type of performative utterance one issues is left unclear.

Revising the Forces of Illocution

Searle noted that because of the limitations set by conditions of satisfaction there seemed to be “a restricted number of things we can do by way of performing illocutionary acts” (1999:148). Austin’s classification of performative utterance types were prone to overlap, so Searle re-examined the modes of illocution and proposed a classification where overlapping categories were a part of the equation. Searle suggested that one ought to look at what the point, or force, of an utterance is rather than what type of utterance is produced^v. Though Searle noted first that before attempting to ascertain what classification was possible for performative speech acts one had to look at what ‘direction of fit’ utterances and acts have to the world around us.

There are three ways in which an utterance can be said to relate to reality. Those ways are 1) ‘Word to World’ whereby propositional content is said to express reality, such as making a list of the books one has; 2) ‘World to Word’ where reality is changed in order

to fit the propositional content of an utterance, as in creating a list of books one does not have and then going shopping in order to fulfil the lists content; and finally there is 3) 'null direction of fit' which is when propositional content is taken for granted, common when using emotional language where it is assumed that the emotions are there and that they are sincere (Searle 1999:100-103).

To understand why the direction of fit is important to Searle in his revision of speech act theory one must look at how he clarified and transformed Austin's categories of illocutionary points. Searle did this by making it explicit what the force of an act is regardless of what utterance or propositional act is issued without regard to the utterance being locutionary, illocutionary, or perlocutionary. Searle stated that "[t]here are five and only five different types of illocutionary points" (1999:148).

1. Assertive force: These are acts that commit a hearer to a proposition; "it is to present the proposition as representing a state of affairs in the world" (1999:148) and thereby they have a 'word to world' fit. Assertive speech acts are definitions, descriptions, assertions, statements, and so on; and because of their fit to the world they can be true or false. Despite truth conditions Assertive speech acts do not depend on the sincerity of the speaker as it is the belief of the hearer that is the marker of whether the act is taken as true or false regardless of actual truth.
2. Directive force: "The illocutionary point of directives is to try to get the hearer to behave in such a way as to make his behavior match the propositional content of the directive" (1999:148-9). This category houses such things as orders, demands, instructions, and so forth. Directives have a 'world to word' fit as directives are issued with the desire that the hearer should do what is proposed; should change the world according to the uttered propositional content. "Directives such as orders and requests cannot

be true or false, but they can be obeyed, disobeyed, complied with, granted, denied, and so on” (1999:149).

3. Commissive force: A performative has a commissive force when a speaker's utterance commits the speaker to undertake a course of action proposed in the utterances propositional content. Promises, vows, pledges, verbal contracts, and the like are good examples of the kinds of utterances which have a commissive force. The direction of fit with commissives is a world to world fit since the act commits one to act as the utterance suggests. Any commissive utterance is essentially “an expression of an intention to do something” (1999:149). Like directives a commissive is not subject to truth conditions; since a commitment is neither true nor false, rather it is kept, broken, or carried out.
4. Expressive force: These are utterances whose point is to “express the sincerity condition of the speech act” (1999:149). Expressive speech acts are things like condoling, thanking, apologizing, congratulating, and do in; acts that can only be performed through expressing ones inner feelings. When uttering an expressive “the propositional content typically has the null direction of fit, because the truth of the propositional content is simply taken for granted [...] [as we] assume or presuppose a match between propositional content and reality” (1999:149). Therefore an apology hinges on the speaker being sorry, condoling hinges on the speaker empathizing with the hearer, and so on; as a result expressives are subject to abuse if uttered insincerely, though conditions of sincerity vary depending on the expressive expressed.
5. Declarations: The illocutionary point, or force, of a declaration is “to bring about a change in the world by representing it as having been changed” (1999:150). This means that in virtue of having successfully declared

something, then one has created a state of affairs by simply declaring that one has created said state of affairs. Declarations have the unique position of having a dual direction of fit between the world and the words used because “we change the world and thus achieve a world-to-word direction of fit by representing it as having been changed, and thus achieve a word-to-world direction of fit” (1999:150). In essence, a declaration uttered under all proper conditions creates a state of affairs in the world that did not exist before and thus it is the declarative aspect of illocutionary utterances that allow for such things as a marriage to be a formal declaration of wedlock.

In these classes of force it is expected that any given speech act can fit into one or more categories; which was not the case with Austin's categorization. An order can be a directive if uttered ‘close the door’ but if uttered ‘I order you to close the door’ then one is first issuing a declaration whereby one makes explicit ones intent to issue an order, secondly one is issuing a directive and at the same time one is asserting that the utterance is an order. This makes it the case that a single utterance can be examined through various categories depending on the force of the utterance.

These forces also allow for utterances to be examined in light of the speaker's intent and the hearer's uptake. This is different from Austin's way of having to typify each utterance into one single category; which will certainly ignore other aspects in which the utterance can be examined (cf. Searle 1999).

Indirect Speech Acts

Most illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are issued in an explicit way. When explicit the point, or force, of the utterance is made clear in the uttering itself. There are also numerous ways in which a speech act can be performed implicitly, without any discernible markers of performance.

For instance, when one is playing poker, one can announce that one is withdrawing from a round of playing by pushing ones cards away; one can announce a bid at an auction

by raising a hand; one can greet with a nod of the head. Indirect speech acts do not necessarily have to be non-verbal as one can issue a request by uttering ‘can you pass the salt’ instead of ‘I request you pass the salt to me’; and yet the former is generally understood as a request and not a question regarding one's salt passing abilities (Saeed 231). These are examples of cases in which an utterance's literal meaning does not express intended speaker meaning (Searle 1999:150). Since this essay is primarily about the verbal use of language in communication then non-verbal communication will not be discussed further as they go beyond the scope of formal linguistics.

The problems regarding indirect performatives is how we recognize an indirect act as what it is intended to be. Let us examine what is generally considered to be an archetypal example which was mentioned in the paragraph above:

1. Can you pass the salt?
2. I request you pass the salt to me.

Both examples can be regarded as perlocutionary speech acts with a directive force where 1) is uttered indirectly and 2) is uttered explicitly. There is no grammatical reason why utterance 1) should be viewed as a request on par with utterance 2) but yet the former is understood as meaning the same as the latter. If a hearer takes 1) as a literal interrogative propositional act then the answer would be either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ depending on whether the hearer can in fact pass the salt; yet that is not the case. Saeed, in his book *Semantics*, suggests a solution derived from Searle regarding how we extract non-literal meaning from an indirect speech act. The idea is that since linguistic communication relies on felicity and utterance conditions then one needs to look at which conditions are made explicit in an indirect utterance (Saeed 229-30). When one is performing a literal request there is a preparatory condition that assumes that the hearer is able to perform the act requested. This preparatory condition is made explicit in utterance 1) as the hearer’s ability to perform an action is questioned. “[I]ndirect speech acts work because they are systematically related to the structure of the associated direct act: they are tied to one or another of the act's felicity

[and utterance] conditions” (Saeed 232). As an added example Saeed points out that in an utterance like ‘I wish you wouldn't do that’, where the point of the utterance is to request that the hearer ceases whatever action he is doing, there is a sincerity condition which holds in both indirect and direct request which is that the speaker wants the hearer to act in a certain way. By making the condition explicit the hearer can infer what the speaker implied (Saeed 232).

To reiterate: when, for instance, sitting in a café one can utter to the appropriate person ‘this cup is too small’ and that person will understand that the speaker is not commenting on the size of the cup but in fact complaining and asking if said cup could be replaced with a larger cup (cf. Saeed 2003). These kinds of indirect speech acts are not only accomplished through sufficient fulfilment of Searle's utterance conditions but also because of what is called the ‘cooperative principle’; which is a kind of tacit agreement between listeners and speakers to cooperate in linguistic communication (Saeed 204). It is the cooperative principle which allows all speech acts, whether direct or not, to be achieved.

The Cooperative Principle

In order for a speech act to be effective then there must be some level on which both speaker and hearer agree to understand each other and accept the power of each others utterances. A speaker's intended meaning with a given utterance usually fits with the hearer's inferred meaning whether indirect or direct; or to put it a bit more clearly then “[s]peakers and hearers generally communicate successfully” (McGregor 145). Even though everyday linguistic life is filled with a plethora of misunderstanding and miscommunication somehow we are able to interpret how things are meant.

The idea regarding there being a cooperative principle comes from the philosopher H. Paul Grice and is a part of his theory regarding conversational implicatures. He postulated that there must be some way in which we are able to exploit the fact that many utterances are full of implications, rather than literal statements. In those cases we must infer meaning and uphold the cooperative principle in order to continue communicating

successfully (Saeed 204). Most of what one says has meaning beyond the literal content of actual words and Grice claims we are able to infer this rich set of implications by making assumptions about the speaker's communicative intentions. That both speaker and hearer are actively trying to make conversation work by co-operating with each other in how they formulate utterances (cf. Grice 1989).

Grice suggested that when communicating there were certain maxims, or general principles, that exist between speaker and hearer which help us understand not only indirect speech acts but speech in general. These maxims are the 'maxim of quality', 'quantity', 'relevance', and 'manner'; and they are defined thusly:

1. Maxim of Quality: Stipulates that one's communicative contributions be what one believes to be true and one should not utter what one lacks evidence for
2. Maxim of Quantity: One's contributions should be as informative as needed but not more informative than required.
3. Maxim of Relevance: States that one's communicative contributions should be as relevant as possible.
4. Maxim of Manner: Be clear and concise, avoid ambiguity, and obscurity.

(Grice 26-8)

What these maxims suggest is that when communicating the speaker tries to have his propositional content as clear and understandable as possible; if that fails in some way then, because of the cooperative principle, the hearer adds meaning according to whatever maxim is apparently being violated. As people usually violate maxims for a reason. That is to say communication is often deliberately over informative, vague, or otherwise centred around implications or inference (cf. Grice 1989; cf. Saeed 2003).

Grice's theory also suggests that performance through language is achievable because of some kind of social agreement rather than language itself as it is linguistic cooperation which allows for a promise to be a promise rather than just words with propositional content. That is to say that the propositional content of a performative speech act rests on not only the utterance uttered but also on speakers and hearers understanding the utterance as being an act instead of a description (cf. Searle 1971; cf. Grice 1989).

Combining the Theories

It is hard to explain speech act theory as a purely linguistic phenomenon, nor can it be viewed as a pure social act. Speech acts are possible because of a combination of language used in cooperation with agreed upon social norms. Therefore one is forced to analyse the theory from various different perspectives which take into account both language itself and language as it is used between speakers.

If an utterance is examined using Austin's felicity conditions, Grice's maxims of communication, Searle's utterance conditions and forces of illocution then one notices that speech acts are not possible and achievable exclusively because of what is uttered but also because of how, and under what conditions, an utterance is issued.

Austin noted several social conditions regarding appropriateness and correctness of procedure which must be fulfilled in order for an act to be accomplished. Austin also posed sincerity conditions whereby an act is achieved but left void of meaning if uttered insincerely. So a performative speech act does not work unless it is complete, sincere, and in compliance with socially accepted procedures. Only then does it gain its illocutionary force (cf. Austin 1962).

Language does not manage to perform only in virtue of having been uttered. We saw through the cooperative principle that there does exist some institutionalised, or social, contract whereby the speakers have tacitly agreed that when such and such is uttered in the appropriate circumstances it constitutes something other than it would have if uttered in a different social context. Even though this makes it sound as if the tacit social agreement

concerns pairings of utterances and situations – which of course could not be conceivably right given the infinite range of pairings available. Rather the agreement is that when a pairing occurs in which the correspondence does not appear to correspond to a maxim then we should ‘read something into the mismatch’ – i.e. assume a communicative intention (Whelpton p.c.).

By applying the Gricean maxims of communication to any given utterance act we are able to distinguish speaker meaning from utterance meaning and therefore we are not bound by the utterance's literal meaning necessarily having to correspond to implied meaning. If an act is infelicitous in the sense that it is not complete, such as an indirect speech act, then by observing conversational maxims and the cooperative principle it can be understood as a complete act and therefore not infelicitous even though on the surface it appears to be so (cf. Grice 1989).

Because of Austin's vagueness regarding performatives and non-performatives Searle's notion of examining the force of an utterance rather than its grammatical content one is no longer bound by a two-fold view of there only being utterances which perform and utterances which do not. Using his ideas of force then one can examine statements of fact and assertions of personal belief as having a certain illocutionary force on par with explicit illocutionary acts like declaratives and directives (cf. Searle 1969).

Also it needs mention that indirect and implicit speech acts are understandable through a combination of Grice's maxims and Searle's utterance conditions. That is to say in the sense that one notices exaggerated and/or a lacking of utterance content which makes explicit what is expected. So in a cold room one can simply state a declarative such as ‘it sure is cold in here’ and if the hearer notices that the preparatory condition of it being cold is in fact true, and the maxim of relation fits it being cold, the hearer might stand up and close a window. Therefore a declaration of personal belief has been successfully issued as a perlocutionary utterance, if it provoked an action in a hearer.

Conclusion

Speech acts are a complex thing to explain, especially when one cannot use one single theory in order to make things clear.

There are two things regarding speech act that this I think are important to mention. The first is that speech acts would be rendered useless if not for either the cooperative principle or Austin's felicity conditions as speech acts are dependent on the hearers accepting them as what they are; that is to say, the hearer both gives power to a performative utterance and makes the speaker beholden to his words.

The second thing is that eventually any, and every, utterance can be considered to be performative in the sense that an utterance act, or a propositional act, can be examined as having some sort of performative force. I say that because J.L. Austin based speech act theory around the fact that statements do more things than describe or state; which in this writer's view is undoubtedly true.

The fact remains that utterances which do not appear to be performative at all can be viewed as being performative regardless of them being mere descriptions or statements. One person's descriptions can be viewed as assertions regarding that person's view on the world, the same is true for statements of fact; statements of fact can be considered assertions regarding personal belief in states of affairs in the world. Assertions can be factually true or false and can be uttered sincerely or not. That does not change the fact that if a person believes in the truth of their words and utters them in sincerity then, regardless of external truth, there is an inherent assertive force behind the words. Even if the person does not believe in their own words then all that is required for the utterance to be a performative is for a hearer to approve utterances intention.

There is still a marked difference between utterances being illocutionary forceful and utterances being illocutionary or perlocutionary. The difference between being illocutionary and being illocutionary forceful lies in explicitness. Utterances which are forceful are utterances which can be viewed as being performative; such as assertions

regarding states of affairs, or if the utterance is implicit or indirect. As indirect or implicit speech acts rely on the uptake of the hearer rather than the utterance itself. On the other hand utterances which are explicitly illocutionary, or perlocutionary, have their force included in the utterance itself because of either propositional content or because of the speakers reflected intentions. So an order uttered like 'Go away!' is explicitly directive and forceful while 'I suggest you remove yourself from these premises' is not explicit directive though it is explicitly assertive. The latter is therefore illocutionary forceful as it can be viewed as having assertive force since the utterances grammatical form asserts its implied directive force.

Speech acts are, in a sense, what make language work; without speech acts language describes truth and falsity and such but with speech acts language allow us to regulate and modify our reality based on the power of words. Speech act theory allows one to look at language not only as a device for communication but also as an instrument of action.

As a final thought, and as an example regarding how an explicit speech act can radically affect reality, then imagine a police officer chasing a suspect. If the police officer shouts 'you are under arrest' then, in virtue of his social position, the hearer is void of his freedom regardless of the police officer having physically caught him or not. Let us suppose that the hearer obeys the officer's declaration and surrenders, then the officer's illocutionary utterance has had a perlocutionary effect on the hearer. If, after surrendering, the hearer finds out that the police officer is only a man in a costume, and not a police officer, the hearer is no longer under arrest; and in fact was never under arrest. The act has misfired and is rendered void and its illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects were never actually present.

This example is useful in showing how language can be used not only to order, declare, or promise; this example is also useful in showing how language can be used to set boundaries regarding ones reality, impose will, remove freedoms, pronounce emotions, excite feelings and other things of that nature.

Works Cited

- Austin, J.L., *How to do things with words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Ed. J.O. Urmson. London: Oxford University Press, 1962. Print.
- . "How to Talk – Some Simple Ways" *Philosophical Papers*. 2nd ed., Ed. J.O. Urmson & G.J. Warnock. London: Oxford University Press, 1970. Print.
- . "Performative-Constatative" *Contemporary Analytic and Linguistic Philosophies*. Ed. E.D. Klemke. New York: Prometheus Books, 2000. Print.
- Davis, Steven, *Philosophy and Language*. Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1976. Print.
- Grice, H. Paul., *Studies in the Ways of Words*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989. Print.
- Habermas, Jürgen, "Social Action, Purposive Activity, and Communication (1981)" *On the Pragmatics of Communication*. Ed. Maeve Cooke. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1998. 105-182. Print.
- McGregor, William B., *Linguistics: An Introduction*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009. Print.
- Sadock, Jerrold M., *Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press, 1974. Print.
- Saeed, John I., *Semantics*. 2nd ed. Malaysia: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. Print.
- Searle, J.R., *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World*. Phoenix: Guernsey Press Co., 1999. Print
- . *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1969. Print.
- . Ed. *The Philosophy of Language*. Frome & London: Oxford University Press, 1971. Print.
- Whelpton, Matthew J., Personal Communication. April 2011.

- i By 'utterance' I mean any grammatical communication whether verbal or written as a sentence.
- ii Austin used the Greek lettering in order to emphasise the distinction between the two.
- iii For a complete list of how utterance conditions apply to various speech acts see Searle 1970 pg.66-7
- iv Illocution and perlocution are two different aspects of performatives.
- v That is to say forces that are present regardless of the grammatical form or propositional content.