

# Class Five: *How to Do Things with Words*, Lectures 10-12

Doing Things with Words - Ryan Simonelli

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## 1 Quick Recap

- **Three Dimensions of a Speech Act:** We articulated a speech act as consisting in three dimensions:
  - **Locution:** The saying of something, for instance, saying “Pet him,” meaning *pet* by “pet” and referring to Sparky the dog (the contextually salient *him*) by “him.”
  - **Illocution:** What is done *in* saying, for instance, urging you to pet the dog.
  - **Perlocution:** What is done *by* saying, for instance, convincing you to pet the dog or getting you to actually pet the dog.

## 2 Precising the Illocution/Perlocution Distinction

- **Some Trouble with the In/By Distinction:** It seemed like speaking of what is done *in* saying something vs. what is done *by* saying something was a clean way of drawing the distinction between illocution and perlocution, but it’s not as clean-cut as it might seem. The “in saying” locution applies not only to *illocutionary* acts, but, as we’ve already seen, *locutionary* as well as other acts that don’t fit into the categorization of acts.
  - “In saying I detested Catholics, I was referring to *Roman Catholics*.”
  - “In saying *x*, I was breaking the law.” (Breaking the law is not any of the sort of acts we’re considering).

In order to maintain that illocutionary act is that which is done *in* saying, we need to be clear about just the sense of “in” saying that we are speaking of here.

- **Two Uses of “In”:**
  - **The Procedural Use of the “In” Locution:** Sometimes, we use the “in” locution to express something we do in the process of doing something else.
    - \* **Example:** In making the omelet, I was breaking some eggs.  
Here, the making of the omelet *involves* the breaking of eggs.
  - **The Constitutive Use of the “In” Locution:** We also might use this locution to express that my doing one thing *constituted* my doing of another. Austin’s example:
    - \* **Example:** In buzzing, I was pretending to be a bee.  
Here, the buzzing *constitutes* the pretending to be a bee. There is one act here, describable in two ways.
- **Two Uses of “By”:**
  - **The Instrumental Use of the “By” Locution:** We do something by way of doing something else as a means to that end.
    - \* **Example:** By hitting the nail on the head, I drove it into the wall.
  - **The Criterial Use of the “By” Locution:**

\* **Example:** By distinguishing between different uses of “in” and “by,” I was doing ordinary language philosophy.

This use, Austin notes, is very close to a use of “in” (the “In saying *x*, I was breaking the law” case) and, in most cases, you can use “in” here rather than “by” (though “by” does sound O.K.).

- **The Distinction Precisely Formulated:** Illocutionary acts are things done *in* saying things—in the constitutive sense of “in”—and perlocutionary acts are things done *by* saying—in the instrumental sense of “by.”
  - **Constitution vs. Cosequences:** This is, once again, one of the way I put the distinction last class: uttering a certain sentence in a certain context will *constitute* the performance of the illocutionary act, whereas this act will have, as *consequences*, certain perlocutionary effects.

### 3 The Constitution of Illocutionary Acts

- **The Role of Convention:** Another way of drawing the distinction is to note that illocutionary acts are *conventional* whereas perlocutionary acts are not conventional.
  - **Example:** It is a matter of convention that saying certain words in a certain context constitutes a warning, but it’s not matter of convention (but, rather, a matter of rational psychology) that someone who is warned will take caution.
- **Question:** Exactly what are the notions of “convention” and “context” here in virtue of which uttering certain sentences in certain contexts conventionally constitutes certain illocutionary acts?
  - How are we to make sense of illocutionary success (failure)? Is thinking you’ve done it enough to do it? Is success or failure going to be relative to different people assessing the act? Or is it objective?
- **Searle’s Intention-Based Analysis of Promising:** Here’s how Searle (1969) analyzes the illocutionary act of promising, where a speaker—me, say—utters a sentence *S* (e.g. “I promise to do the dishes”) in the presence of a hearer—you, say—and, in doing so, sincerely and non-defectively promises that *p* (e.g. that I will do the dishes).
  - **Propositional Component:** I express the proposition that *p* in the utterance of *T*, where in expressing that *p*, I predicate a future act *A* of myself.
  - **Preparatory Condition 1:** You would prefer my doing *A* to my not doing *A* and I believe that you would prefer my doing *A* to my not doing *A*.
  - **Preparatory Condition 2:** It is not obvious to both me and you that I will do *A* in the normal course of events.
  - I intend to do *A*.
  - **Essential Condition:** I intend that the utterance of *S* will place me under an obligation to do *A*.
    - \* **Means of Achieving the Essential Condition:** I have an intention *I* to produce in you the knowledge *K* that the utterance of *S* is to count as placing me under an obligation to do *A*, I intend to produce *K* by means of your recognition of *I*, and I intend that you recognize *I* in virtue of your knowledge of the meaning of *S*.
  - **Conventionality Fact:** The semantic rules of the dialect we speak are such that *S* is correctly and sincerely uttered if the above conditions obtain, and, if the above conditions obtain, *S* is correctly and sincerely uttered.

The meeting of the essential condition is what’s required for the act to be one of promising, whereas the meeting of the preparatory conditions and sincerity condition is required for the act to be fully happy.

- **In Issue:** This account entails that if one *intends* to perform a certain illocutionary act, then one does perform that act (though perhaps unhappily), and, conversely, if one *doesn't intend* to perform a certain illocutionary act, then one doesn't perform that act. Consider a case in which someone says, to someone with a disability, "Wow, it's so inspiring that you're able to work a normal job," intending this as a compliment. On Searle's account, this still counts as a compliment (albeit, one that is probably unhappy), but this seems wrong. Conversely, we might regard this as an (illocutionary) act of subordination, even though the speaker might not intend it to be such.

## 4 Returning to Merely Stating

- **Stating as an Illocutionary Act:** "Surely to state is every bit as much to perform an illocutionary act as, say, to warn or to pronounce [...] 'Stating' seems to meet all the criteria we had for distinguishing the illocutionary act," (134).
- **The Sameness of the Performative and the Constative:** "If someone says 'I state that he did not do it,' we investigate the truth of his statement in just the same way as if he had said 'He did not do it' *simpliciter*, when we took that to be, as we naturally often should, a statement. That is to say 'I state that he did not' is to make the very same statement as to say 'He did not': it is not to make a different statement about what 'I' state (except in exceptional cases: the historical and habitual present, &c)."
  - **A Question:** What, exactly, does Austin mean when he says that it is the *same* statement? Does he mean that it literally means the same exact thing? Consider the following two sentences:
    - \* I state that he did not do it, but he did do it.
    - \* He did not do it, but he did do it.
Neither can be felicitously asserted, but only the latter, it seems, is a straight up *contradiction*. It seems that the former, though it cannot be felicitously asserted, can nevertheless be true. What would Austin say about this sort of case?
- **Other "Constative Performatives":** Austin says that "I state that," "I maintain that," "I inform you that," "I testify that," don't differ in any essential way.
  - **Question:** Do we think there is any essential difference between these expressions?
- **Infelicities of Statements:** In Lecture 4, we considered ways in which statements can be "void" if, for instance, there is a presupposition failure (e.g. saying "All of John's children are bald" when John has no children). But Austin points out that there's another way in which a statement can lack felicity, if one is taken to lack the authority to make that statement—for instance, when one says something that could only be a guess.
  - Philosophers like Langton and Kukla are going to argue that, in some cases, the attempted statements of speakers in disprivileged positions will lack the illocutionary force of a statement: it might be the case that the speech act lacks illocutionary force entirely (what Langton calls "illocutionary silencing") or that the speech act gets taken up as a different speech than the speaker intended, for instance, as a proposal rather than a statement.
- **On What It Is for a Statement to "Take Effect:** "[I]f I have stated something, then that commits me to other statements: other statements made by me will be in order or out of order. Also some statements or remarks made by you will be henceforward contradicting me or not contradicting me, rebutting me or not rebutting me, and so forth," (139).
  - Brandom is going to develop this idea in great detail, giving an account of what it is to perform a *locutionary* act, uttering certain sentence with a certain meaning, in terms of the *illocutionary* force of assertorically uttering that sentence—what making that assertion commits one to, precludes one from being entitled to do, entitles others to do (make it themselves), and so on.

- **True and False as Success Conditions:** Truth and falsity aren't as clear-cut as they might initially seem, and "stating truly" should not be construed as categorically different than "arguing soundly," "advising well," "blaming justifiably," and so forth.

## 5 Further Questions

- **Question:** What are we to make of Austin's fivefold categorization of different types of speech acts: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabatives, and expositives? Are they supposed to be exhaustive of all speech acts? Are they supposed to be distinct?
- **Question:** Have if Austin's categories been widely adopted, and if so, have they been modified in any way?