

Lectures in Linguistics 7

Dep. of English language and Linguistics

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Speech Acts

The British Philosopher John Austin mentioned in his book *How to Do Things with Words* that an utterance can be used to perform an act. That is, he was the first to point out that in uttering a sentence, we can do things as well as say things. Thus, each speech act has at least two facets to it: a locutionary act (i.e., the act of saying something) and an illocutionary (i.e., the act of doing something), with the perlocutionary act which denotes the utterance itself as it is uttered by the speaker.

Locutionary Act

This is the act of simply uttering a sentence from a language, it is a description of what the speaker says. Typically, it is the act of using a referring expression (e.g. a noun phrase), and a predicating expression (e.g. the verb phrase) to express a proposition. For instance, if a doctor says to a patient *You must stop smoking*, the referring expression is *you*, and the predicating expression is *stop smoking*.

Illocutionary Act

This is what the speaker does in uttering a sentence. Illocutionary acts includes acts as stating, requesting, promising, apologizing, and appointing. For example in the sentence: *You must stop smoking*, the illocutionary act is of ordering, it is sometimes called the illocutionary force of the sentence.

Classification of Illocutionary Acts

The philosopher John Searle (1976) , is one of Austin's former students, attempted to specify illocutionary acts into the following types.

1. Representative

A representative is an utterance used to describe some state of affairs, for example, I have five toes on my left right foot. This class includes acts of stating, asserting, denying, confessing, admitting, notifying, concluding, predicting.

2. Directive

It is an utterance used to get the hearer to do something , for example, *Shut the door*. This class includes acts of requesting, ordering, forbidding, warning, advising, suggesting, insisting, and recommending.

3. Question

A question is an utterance used to get the hearer to provide information,

For example *Who won the 2000 presidential election?* This class includes acts of asking , inquiring.

4. Commissive

It is an utterance used to commit the speaker to do something, for example, *I'll meet you at the library at 10:00 P.M.* This class includes acts of promising, vowing, volunteering, guaranteeing, pledging, betting.

5. Expressive

It is an utterance used to express the emotional state of the speaker, for example, *I'm sorry for calling you an idiot*. This class includes acts of apologizing, thanking, congratulating, condoling, welcoming, deploring, and objecting.

6. Declaration

It is an utterance used to change the status of some entity, for example, *You're fired*. Said by a manager of the supermarket to an employee. This act class includes acts of appointing, naming, resigning, baptizing, surrendering, excommunicating, and arresting.