

## SPEECH ACTS THEORY AND DERIVATION

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**Annotation:** When we speak, we “use” language to communicate, for strategic purposes, to express emotional or other psychological states, to persuade, and even to carry out such peculiar activities as joking or play-acting. This set of things we do when we speak or in the performance of which speech plays a major role has been analysed by philosophers and linguists in the tradition of speech act theory, and primarily by the British philosopher John L. Austin. The following article deals with speech act theory and its similarities with derivation. First, three term 'locution, illocution, and perlocution', according to J. L. Austin's lectures are shortly reflected. Then, opinions of other scientists on the issue will be analyzed through the samples using the words formed with zero derivation and derivation. In conclusion, the influence of Austin's speech act theory will be evaluated.

**Key words:** Locutionary act, illocutionary act, perlocutionary act, phonetic act, phatic act, rhetic act, derivation, illocutionary force

### **Speech acts theory: Locution, illocution and perlocution**

*Locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act* are the names given by John L. Austin to three aspects of what he called “the total speech act in the total speech situation” (Austin, 1975). Austin thinks that any feature of a speech act and of the situation in which it occurs may be relevant to its meaning and to the assessment of the speech act's correctness, which, according to him, can never be reduced to the logician's assessment of truth and falsity (cf. e.g. Austin, 1975).

So, in a way, the speech act as a whole is a single, complex phenomenon or even, as he writes, “the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating” (Austin 1975: 148). But elucidating such a phenomenon involves attaining some level of abstraction. As Austin says in announcing his distinction between locution, illocution and perlocution, *doing something* is a vague expression, and there is a need to reconsider “the senses in which to say something may be to do something, or in saying something we do something (and also perhaps to consider the different case in which *by* saying something we do something) (Austin, 1975).

**The locutionary act** can be identified as the act of saying something<sup>1</sup>, but since *saying something* may have different senses, its analysis has to proceed further, leading to distinguishing the phonetic act, the phatic act and the rhetic act. The phonetic act is the uttering of sounds and is performed whenever we speak (not in the same way, though, when we use language in writing), but is not itself speech. The phatic act is again the uttering of sounds, but “conforming to and as conforming to” a language (Austin, 1975) Its product, that is, are not continuous sounds, but discrete tokens of phonemes, morphemes, and other linguistic structures. Performing phatic acts is already speaking a language, but in a broad sense, including for instance practising a language one does not fully understand. Writing, of course, must comprise a level of linguistic activity equivalent to the phatic act, to be carried out by means other than vocal utterance. The rhetic act is the uttering of words (or production of written words, etc.) endowed with meaning, which may be “sense”, “reference” or both (Austin, 1975)

Austin proposed to distinguish phatic acts from rhetic acts as the acts that are reported in inverted commas (*oratio recta*) as opposed to those that are reported in “indirect speech” introduced by *that* or *to* (*oratio obliqua*). Here are some examples:

- (1) ‘I’ve never seen a cat sit so stiffly.’  
(1a) Phatic report: “I said to him ‘I’ve never seen a cat sit so stiffly.”  
(1b) Rhetic report: “I said to him that I had never seen a cat sit so stiffly.”  
Don't just sit there—do something!  
(1a) Phatic report: “He said to me ‘ Don't just sit there—do something!  
(1b) Rhetic report: “He said to me not to sit there, but to do something.”  
(2)” **Stop** it!”  
(2a) Phatic report: “I said to him: ‘” Stop it!””  
(2b) Rhetic report: “I told him to stop it”  
“Lift the child to the bus stop.”  
(2a) Phatic report: He said: “Lift the child to the bus stop.”  
(2b) Rhetic report: He asked to lift the child to the bus stop.

Bach and Harnish distinguish between the utterance act (the act of uttering a linguistic expression addressing it at an audience in a context) and the locutionary act (the act of saying, to an audience in a context, that so and so)(1979: 3), keeping the Austinian label for the latter. Between these two acts there is an intermediate level, which Bach and Harnish describe as the speaker’s meaning something by the linguistic expression she utters. The first step in the inferential path thus outlined leads the hearer from merely hearing the utterance to understanding that the speaker is uttering a certain linguistic expression and corresponds to the hearer’s recognition of the utterance act. The second step leads from the fact that a certain expression is uttered to the recognition of what the speaker means by it, which, in normal cases, is one of the possible meanings that the expression uttered has in the language to which it belongs (Bach and Harnish call this selected meaning “operative meaning” of the linguistic expression; 1979).

**The illocutionary act** is introduced by Austin as the kind of act that we generally *eo ipso* perform in performing a locutionary act (where *illocutionary* is derived from *in+locutionary*), (1975: 98). Illocutionary acts are also taken by him to be ways in which language is “used”, kinds of “use of language”, at least in one of the senses of this expression. Austin emphasizes its being embodied (as it were) in the locutionary act and explains how a number of linguistic devices may be used as indicators of its performance, from mood and sentence type to specialized lexical items, from modal verbs to intonation or punctuation (1975: 73–77). The speaker’s gestures and the circumstances of the utterance may also be of help. The point of these devices is to indicate how the utterance is to be taken, or to make clear its *force*.

Performative formulas such as *I promise you that ...* or *Passengers are warned to ...* (cf. Doerge, this volume) are the most explicit devices for performing illocutionary acts, increasing at the same time the specificity of the performed illocution (Austin 1975: 69–73), while illocutionary acts performed by means of the use of a certain sentence type or of a certain modal verb, and the like, are often negotiable (to borrow a concept from conversation analysis; but cf. Austin 1975: 66, 72). Indeed, an imperative accompanied by *please* may be a command, but also an entreaty or suggestion, and the way it will actually work in the conversation in the course of which it is uttered depends also on the way it will be responded to (let alone the way in which that response will be received by the speaker). But the utterance of a performative formula such as *I order you to ...* either is successful in giving an order, or fails to do so because of some inappropriateness or *infelicity*, e.g. if the speaker has no authority over the addressee as regards the content of the purported order (Austin 1975: 14–18, cf. Doerge, this volume). It should be noted that if illocutionary acts can be explicitly performed by means of performative utterances, the converse must also hold, namely, it must be the case that the acts performed by means of performative utterances are illocutionary acts. The

most decisive turn towards an inference based conception of illocution is due to Kent Bach and Robert M. Harnish, who, in their volume *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (1979), outline an inferential view of linguistic communication. The inspiration for such a view is broadly speaking Gricean, since it focuses on complex intentions of the speaker, called “reflexive” intentions because part of their content is that they be recognized and be recognized partly on the basis that this is intended, and on the hearer’s retrieval of them. As to the illocutionary act, Bach and Harnish follow Strawson and Searle in limiting the content of the core intention of the speaker (in their terms, “illocutionary intent”) to getting her utterance understood (cf. 1979: 154).

*"Is there any salt?" locutionary act*

*"please give me some salt" illocutionary act*

*The perlocutionary act (the actual effect), might be to cause somebody to pass the salt.*

Their inferential analysis of the process of producing and understanding a speech act, dubbed “Speech Act Schema”, starts from the speaker’s utterance of a linguistic expression and leads step by step, by means of inferences, to the locutionary act and to the illocutionary. The premises that are required for the inferential process to go through include the initial remark to the effect that a speaker S is uttering a sentence, the “linguistic presumption” that the hearer shares the speaker’s language and can use his knowledge of it to identify “communicative presumption” that the speaker is saying what she says with some recognizable illocutionary intent (1979: 7), and a set of mutual contextual beliefs. The step from the recognition of the locutionary act to that of the illocutionary act avails itself of the communicative presumption and of the relevant mutual contextual beliefs.

**The perlocutionary act** (where *perlocutionary* is derived from the Latin *per* ‘through’, ‘by means of’+*locutionary*) is introduced by Austin as the kind of act that we may perform by saying something, that is, by performing a locutionary act and therein an illocutionary act (1975: 101, 108). Examples of perlocution are convincing someone that things are so, persuading someone to do something, alerting someone about some impending danger, reassuring someone about not being left alone. Other examples may be surprising someone, or misleading someone, by one’s speech act. Perlocution occurs only when some consequential effect is produced in some receiver of the speech act because of some feature of the speech act itself, so that its speaker can be taken to be responsible for that consequential effect.

Here are some tentative examples of perlocution belonging to this kind:

(a) I know you like to do what I forbid you from doing. So I say, “Do not do that”. You immediately do it. Getting you to do that is not the perlocutionary object of my act of forbidding (rather, it would be the perlocutionary object of a command, request, suggestion or recommendation, but I did not perform any one of these). But it is the effect my act of forbidding has on you in these circumstances, and is actually an intended effect, given what I know about your psychological inclinations. So, it is an intended perlocutionary sequel of my act of forbidding.

(b) You are extremely afraid of dogs. On entering the garden of your new friend’s house, you see a notice reading: “Dangerous dog”. It is a warning, having the perlocutionary object of alerting its readers about the presence of our friend’s dog and keeping them from approaching the animal. But you are not merely alerted, you feel alarmed and start panicking. The warning produced in you an unintended perlocutionary sequel.

(c) You know that Ron has quarreled with his friend Jon, and does not want even to hear his name. You are drinking a coffee with Ron and talking to him of whatever comes to mind. At a certain point Ron tells you that Jon has a new job. Of course, you are surprised. This effect is not triggered by the illocutionary force of Ron’s utterance, so it is beyond question that it is not the achievement of a perlocutionary object. What triggers the effect is, rather, the content of the assertion and, more precisely, the fact that it explicitly refers to Jon. So, your surprise is a perlocutionary sequel of Ron’s speech act, triggered specifically by Ron’s making reference to him by mentioning his name.

(d) Tom is a very kind, shy person who never imposes on others. One day he takes part in a treasure hunt with some friends. Faced with the various puzzles they have to solve and tasks they have to perform, he proves to be extremely competent and starts playing a leader like role in the group. When he first issues a command, his friends are surprised. Commands bear no regular connection with surprise, so this effect cannot be the achievement of a perlocutionary object. Maybe Tom's command achieves also its perlocutionary object of making his partners do something: but nothing stops a speech act from having more than one perlocutionary effect. Though triggered by the illocutionary force of the speech act, the surprise effect is a perlocutionary sequel.

### Speech acts and Derivation

Derivation and Compounding are important components in the process of second language learning; even "word formation mechanisms and rules appear at least as important and necessary for non-native speakers as for native speakers" [2011, 26]. Through them we create new words, thus, this way we enlarge our vocabulary by creating new words which derive from the existing words we know.

Now in this paper the usage of suffix "-er" in different contexts will be analyzed.

A: Teacher said to her students: "Make fewer mistakes in your tests!" (Locution)

B: Teacher asked students to make fewer mistakes in their tests. (Illocution)

C: Students were persuaded make fewer mistakes in their tests (perlocution)

In this sentence noun formative suffix "-er" used to form the comparative form of adjectives and adverbs of one syllable

A: Miners said: "The government did not fulfill their promises." (Locution)

B: Miners have complained bitterly that the government did not fulfill their promises. (Illocution)

C: Government takes further actions towards the situation (perlocution)

However, differing from the first sentence, the suffix implies the meaning of person having a particular job/ person or thing belonging to or associated with something

A: Team told: "The New Yorker, let us reproduce the cartoon"

B: They asked the New Yorker for permission to reproduce the cartoon.

native of : resident of some city or country

A: The court decided to deny access over a common to business premises by double-decker busses. From the Hansard archive

thing that has

A: The band's lead guitar player was offered to play the instrument.

B: Show me a pencil sharpener.

person or thing that does or performs a specified action

In this vein, let me conclude by suggesting that, under the definition of illocution as bringing about conventional effects that can be traced back to Austin, the notion of illocution (within the locution illocution perlocution distinction) can provide a starting point or perhaps a unifying background to reflections and hypotheses about how discourse structures interpersonal and social relationships, how conversational turns relate to one another, and how language participates in or contributes to the life of a culture.

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