

Felicitous Speech Acts

Austin's Felicity Conditions

Performative utterances depend on **appropriate circumstances that would help to convey their intended meanings effectively**. These circumstances are called felicity conditions (Austin, 1962).

Pratt (1977: 81) points that:

To perform a speech act correctly, however, it is not enough merely to utter a grammatical sentence. Speech acts, like all behavior, are correctly or felicitously performed only if certain conditions obtain. The illocutionary act of promising, for example, is only felicitously carried out if the speaker is able to fulfill the promise, sincerely intends to do so, and believes that what he is promising to do is something the hearer would like him to do.

Therefore, **uttering the appropriate sentence is not enough to achieve successful communication**. There are **other necessary factors that should be present and appropriate for the situation**. For instance, marriage in western societies is invalid in case a blacksmith is the one who reads the marriage service even if he reads it correctly, because of the inappropriate participant. It is also invalid if it is uttered by the appropriate person using appropriate words in inappropriate circumstances (Malcolm, 1985).

To explain his point of view, Austin (1962) used the **example of marriage in western societies where legal marriages have certain conditions that should be respected**. First, a man and a woman, who are not authoritatively prevented from marriage, should be involved. Then, they should face an official person (minister of religion or registrar) and present themselves in an authoritative location (place of worship or registry place). Moreover, they should choose the appropriate time because marriages can be authorised only in particular days and times. Furthermore, they should have at least two witnesses. Finally, they should say certain words and make certain declarations. Thus, marriage in western societies can be valid only if all these felicity conditions are applied.

In his famous book, Austin (1962: 27- 40) **suggests six rules that serve to get felicitous speech acts**. Felicity conditions are summarised in **conventionality (A)**, **actuality (B)** and **intentionality (C)** (Austin, 1962, pp. 14-15) as follows.

(A.1) There must exist an **accepted conventional procedure, having a certain conventional effect**, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) The particular **persons and circumstances must be appropriate** for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure **must be executed by all participants both correctly and**

(B.2) **completely**.

(C.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 participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(C.2). must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

Rule 01: Appropriate conventional procedures

To clarify this issue, we consider the following situation which is derived from Austin (1962: 28).

At a party (when picking sides), John says “I pick George”, but George replies “I am not playing”. Here we say that this situation is unhappy, because the conventional procedure of picking George is not accepted, or because George is an inappropriate object for the procedure of picking. Hence, we deduce that a felicitous performative utterance should have an accepted conventional procedure, which will also have an appropriate conventional effect on the addressees.

Another situation that illustrates this rule is the following: Ahmed says: “Go and pick up wood!”, but Omar replies: “I do not take orders from you”. In this case, Omar refuses Ahmed’s obligation, because he believes that Ahmed is not entitled to give him instructions. In this case, the act of ‘order’ will not have an accepted conventional effect, since the procedure is not appropriate.

Rule 02: Appropriate participants and circumstances

To perform a speech act correctly means that the participants and the circumstances, in which the actions take place, **should be suitable for the execution of the performative utterance** (Austin,1962).

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Rule 03: Correct execution of the procedure

- Austin (1962: 35) adds that executing the procedure correctly means that we should avoid using implicit formulas, vague sentences and uncertain references.

Rule 04: Complete execution of the procedure

- Austin (1962: 36) suggests to execute the procedure completely requires from both speakers and addressees to joint their efforts to carry out the action totally.

Rule 05 and 06: Appropriate persons have certain thoughts, feelings and intentions

These rules tend to adapt the participants' intentions, feelings and thoughts to the appropriate circumstances,

Infelicitous Speech Acts

Robson and Stockweel (2005: 11) point out: "**Performatives may fail if certain conditions are not met**". Accordingly, Austin (1962: 14) calls these performatives' shortcomings '**infelicities**' or '**unhappy speech acts**'.

There are two main categories of infelicitous speech acts or in short 'infelicities': "**Misfires**" and "**Abuses**". Misfires are infelicitous performatives that are due to **external factors**. Abuses are infelicitous performative utterances that are due to **intentional or internal factors** or circumstances (Austin, 1962).

Austin classified the different kinds of infelicities by giving them different names. He called **infelicities of types A and B misfires**. Austin explains that when an utterance is a misfire, we say that **the procedure is disallowed or botched, and that the act is void or without effect** (AUSTIN 1962: 17). In the case of an offence against any of the A and B rules (i.e., uttering the words incorrectly, or not being the person appointed for the carrying out of a certain act, or not being in possession of the necessary conditions to perform that act), then the act «is not successfully performed at all, does not come off, is not achieved» (AUSTIN 1962: 16).

Infelicities of **type A receive the name of misinvocations**. Within misinvocations, Austin distinguished two types of infelicity: infelicities of type **A.1, which he called non-plays**; and infelicities of type **A.2, which Austin called either misapplications or misplays**.

- Infelicities of type B are called **misexecutions** or miscarriages. Within these, Austin called infelicities of type **B.1 flaws or misexecutions**; and with specific reference to flaws (i.e., B.1 infelicities), Austin claims that the **procedure is appropriate to persons and circumstances, but it is not executed correctly**. On the other hand, he called infelicities of type **B.2 hitches or non-executions**. In the case of hitches, there is **an attempt to execute the procedure, but the act is not completed**.

Regarding the **infelicities of type c, they receive the name of abuses or disrespects**. With respect to the infringement of the c rules, the act can be 'professed' or 'hollow', i.e., an act which is not implemented or not consummated. There are two kinds of infelicities of type c. those of type c.1, called **insincerities or dissimulations**; and those of type c2, which Austin did not have a name for, but which at some point he called **non-fulfilments, disloyalties, infractions, indisciplines or breaches**.

Infelicities	
Misfires	Abuses
1. Misinvocations	1. Insincerities
a. No plays: no suitable convention	The appropriate intentions are lacking.
b. Misapplications: convention misapplied	
2. Misexecutions:	2. Non fulfillments:
a. Flaws: conventional procedure is partly rejected	The appropriate intentions are not fully carried out.
b. Hitches: conventional procedure is not completed	

Table 02.1: The different classes of infelicities

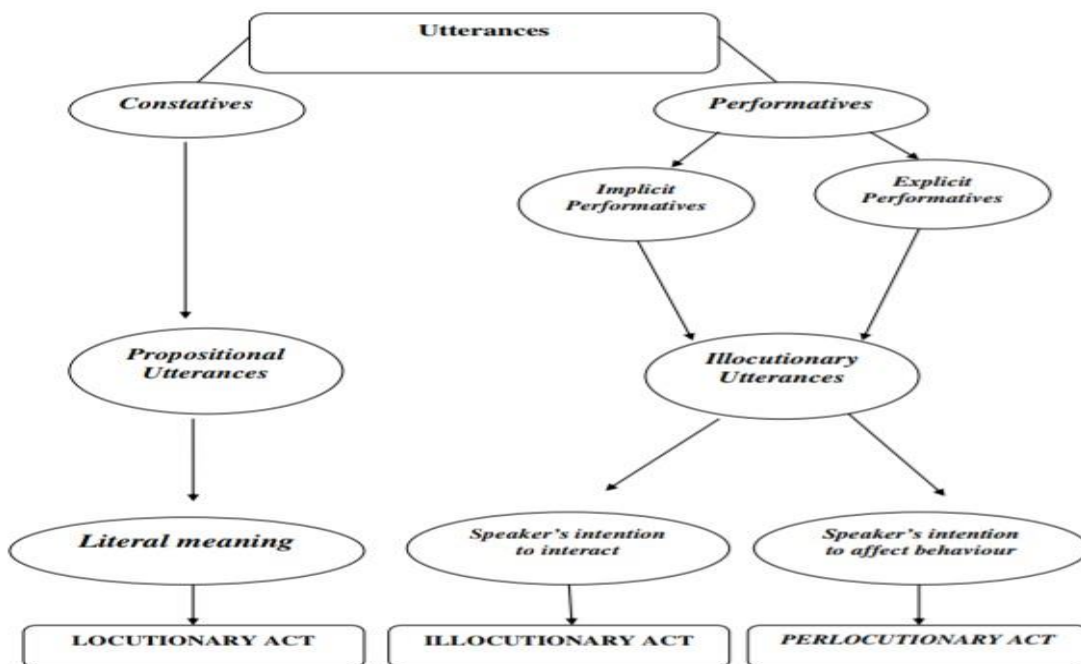


Figure 5: Types of Speech Acts (Based on Austin's (1962) Speech Acts Classification)