Commands and Searle's Directive Illocutionary Acts

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Abstract

In this paper, the concept of directive illocutionary acts, coined by J. R. Searle, is reformed by regarding illocutionary acts of commanding as the most typical form of the concept. The notion of command is ambiguous, and command as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts must be distinguished. Commands as illocutionary acts are the speech acts that impose some obligation on the hearer. According to Searle, directives include advices, challenges, orders, permissions, commands, requests, and questions. However, the notion of directives is empty of illocutionary characterisation, and the aforementioned speech acts are grouped only according to their locutionary and perlocutionary traits. In fact, advises and challenges should be incorporated into assertives, whereas orders should be incorporated into commissives. Finally, commands, prohibitions, requests, questions, and so on should remain in directives.

1. Introduction

Since the "discovery" of speech acts by Austin, many studies on illocutionary acts have been conducted, and a variety of taxonomies of illocutionary acts have been proposed. Among them, the taxonomy given by Searle is the most influential. This paper is a partial revision of Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts, with a particular focus on the notion of directives. Searle classifies every illocutionary act into five classes, namely, assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Directives are illocutionary acts that are attempts by the speaker to make the hearer do something (Searle 1979); commands are included within directives. He argues that the "direction of fit" of directives is *world to words*, and the sincerity condition of directives is *want*. Directions of fit and sincerity conditions, along with the illocutionary points — which will be discussed later in this paper — are the key factors that differentiate the five classes of illocutionary acts. A fit between the world and the words is achieved when assertions are true, when promises are kept, or when commands are obeyed. Direction of fit is the notion that distinguishes which world or words are wrong and what should be corrected when the fit between world and words is unachieved. If an assertion turns out to be false, the words uttered by the speaker are treated as wrong; in contrast, if a command is disobeyed, the world itself is regarded as wrong. The sincerity condition of an

illocutionary act is the psychological state or attitude of the speaker, which is expressed when the speaker performs an illocutionary act. If an illocutionary act is sincerely performed, the speaker will genuinely possess the psychological attitude that he or she has expressed. For instance, the sincerity condition of asserting P is the speaker's belief in P. The sincerity condition of promising P is the speaker's intention for P. In the same way, the sincerity condition of commanding P is the speaker's desire for P. In addition to commands and prohibitions, Searle treats advices, challenges, orders, permissions, requests, questions, and so on as directives.

The argument in this paper is comprised of two steps. In section two, the ambiguity of the notion of command is examined; commands as locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts are distinguished by applying the framework established by Austin. Furthermore, it is maintained that at the core of a command as an illocutionary act is the imposition of some obligation on the hearer. In section three, Searle's notion of directives is critically reviewed, and some reform is undertaken on the basis of what is discussed in the previous section. My contention is that because the notion of directives is characterised not by the level of illocutionary acts but by the level of perlocutionary and locutionary acts, speech acts that Searle classifies into directives are heterogeneous as illocutionary acts. My proposal is to fix commands as the very type of directives and to define its illocutionary point as committing the hearer, in varying degrees, to some future course of action.

2. Commands as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts

Hare has termed issuing an imperative sentence or an issued imperative sentence itself as a command (Hare 1952, p. 6). Austin writes that a command is a kind of decision "that something is to be so, as distinct from a judgment that it is so" (Austin 1955, p. 154). On the other hand, Schiffer emphasises the speaker's intention to make the hearer do something by commanding (Schiffer 1972). All of the above authors make different but correct assertions, which demonstrate that the notion of command is indeed an ambiguous concept. Therefore, before discussing commands, one must articulate the notion of command. For this purpose, the framework first offered by Austin is applied, wherein speech acts are classified into three levels or facets, namely, locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts (Austin 1976). We now briefly consider Austin's trichotomy.

Imagine a man who is late for a rendezvous with a woman. He tells the woman, "A traffic accident prevented me from coming in time". The locutionary act in this case is comprised of the totality of acts that include uttering this sentence; using words such as *traffic*, *prevent*, and *me*; and meaning or referring something by these words. The man might convince the woman that he is without fault. The act of convincing is classified as a perlocutionary act. In general, a perlocutionary act is any act

causally drawn from a locutionary act. An illocutionary act is an act that is simultaneously performed *in* performing a locutionary act. In this case, I assume that researchers of speech acts would agree that the man performed an illocutionary act of making an excuse for his lateness. However, serious disagreement still remains about the nature of illocutionary acts. Austin emphasised that the involvement of certain conventions is essential for illocutionary acts. Nevertheless, since he did not disambiguate the kind(s) of conventions that is (are) relevant to illocutionary acts, speech act studies conducted after his research have faced great confusion.

It is obvious that juridical or congressional conventions play decisive roles in performing illocutionary acts such as pronouncing judgments against the accused or declaring the opening of a congressional session. However, it is uncertain what kinds of conventions are involved in the act of reporting or promising in everyday conversation. It is important to note that linguistic conventions that determine what kind of vocalisation is considered as the utterance of a word, what the meaning of the word is, or how the uttered sentence is syntactically structured, and so on are irrelevant. These conventions are surely indispensable for the speaker to perform a locutionary act; however, the relevant question is whether any operation of conventions other than that of linguistic conventions is necessary for the speaker to perform an illocutionary act of any kind.

In his famous paper, "Intention and Convention in Speech Acts", Strawson claims that except for illocutionary acts such as declaring the opening of a meeting or calling out the runner in a baseball game, no additional conventions are needed to perform most illocutionary acts, such as assertions and promises (Strawson 1964). What is essential to the latter illocutionary acts is the speaker's intention, the fulfilment of which consists in its recognition by the hearer, which is later called "illocutionary intention" by Bach and Harnish (Bach & Harnish 1979). As recognised by Strawson, this is an ambitious attempt to bridge Austin's theory of illocutionary acts and Grice's theory of non-natural meaning.

Meanwhile, some others have tried to disambiguate the notion of convention, which was left in obscurity by Austin. For this purpose, the concept of game—in which the operation of conventions is evident—is extended to include illocutionary acts that Strawson has diagnosed as nonconventional. In his "Scorekeeping of Language Game", Lewis outlines such a framework, though he does not explicitly refer to illocutionary acts (Lewis 1979b). Performing an illocutionary act is to be "making a move" in the language game. Therefore, determining what kind of move the situation allows, what kind of behaviours count as that move, and how the "score" of the game is changed by that move is essential for that illocutionary act. Furthermore, the conditions and effects of the illocutionary act are defined by the conventions of the language game.

This view is partially found in Searle's theory of speech acts, though he simultaneously emphasises the importance of intentions in speech acts. Searle assumes that for every illocutionary act, there is a corresponding constitutional rule, and fulfilling the requirements identified by that rule is a necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of that illocutionary act (Searle 1969). For instance, the content of the above utterance by the man who gave an excuse to the woman for his delay must provide the reason for the problematic situation, and the utterance should be addressed such that the woman can hear it[1].

Whereas a change in the natural state of affairs is realised by a perlocutionary act, the change of the "score" brought about by an illocutionary act is a change in the institutional or normative state of affairs. Searle, for instance, stated that the point of what he calls assertives, a class of illocutionary acts to which acts such as assertions, predictions, and reports belong, is "to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition" (Searle 1979, p. 12). He then argues that the point of commissives, another class of illocutionary acts, which includes promises, threats, and vows, is "to commit the speaker (again in varying degrees) to some future course of action" (Ibid., p. 14). It should be emphasised that the concept of "commitment" that Searle employs refers to a social commitment and not a psychological one. A person who tells a lie or makes a false promise lacks psychological commitment. However, he cannot escape from social commitment, insofar as he has successfully made an assertion or a promise, regardless of whether it is sincere. Therefore, the word "commitment" employed by Searle should be paraphrased into "social responsibility", "obligation", or "duty" in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding.

In this paper, I adopt a conventionalist rather than an intentionalist view of illocutionary acts, because it is uncertain whether Austin's project is reducible to Grice's work and the conventionalist line is more closely related to Austin's original intent. With the aid of the trichotomy of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary levels of speech acts, the ambiguity in the notion of command may now be identified. First, the utterances of imperative sentences are sometimes called commands. They are commands as locutionary acts. Utterances such as "never mind", "catch me if you can", "hands up!" (said by a bank robber to a victim), and "help them if they are embarrassed" are all classified into this category. In addition, speech acts that make the hearer behave in a certain way owing to some level of force being applied are also commands, and they are commands as perlocutionary acts. This meaning of command includes cases where a teacher advises a student to undertake some preparation for the next day's lesson, where a gangster makes a victim submit by making threats, and where a child challenges another child to a race, and so on. What have actually been attracting major attention are speech acts accompanied by the intention of making the hearer

behave in a certain way, namely, perlocutionary intention, rather than perlocutionary acts per se. Nonetheless, they are also concerned with commands as perlocutionary acts.

It is evident that to issue a command as an illocutionary act is to impose some new obligation on the hearer. In this context, commands greatly resemble promises. The only difference between a command and a promise is that a promise binds the speaker him/herself, whereas a command binds the hearer.

Restricting the liberty of others, commands are not the kind of illocutionary act that everyone may successfully issue to anybody. The speaker must have authority over the hearer to issue a command successfully. In medieval times, the authority was derived from the born difference in status between the addresser and the addressee of commands. However, this is not how authority is obtained in present-day democratic societies, where a shift has taken place "from status to contract." In modern democracies, for a person to impose some obligation on another person, the latter person's consent is required because they are equals.

To command illocutionarily is, as it were, to promise in the name of another person. Thus, issuing a command much resembles an agent making a contract on behalf of the principal: When the agent of a principal enters into a certain contract with a third person, the person who decides to make the contract is the agent, whereas the person who is bound by the contract is the principal.

As a contract of agency between the principal and the agent precedes successful agent's acts, the consent for obedience is shown before commands are successfully issued, when a servant is employed by a millionaire, or when soldiers join the army. They, of their own will, enter into a contract that requires them to obey the orders of their superior, in order to earn their salary. Yet, there are also the cases where the consent is demonstrated *after* the issuance of command, which will be discussed in the nest section.

Although speech acts with imperative sentences (commands as locutionary acts) and speech acts that make the hearer behave in a certain way owing to the use of some level of force (commands as perlocutionary acts) are included in the concept of command, the command as an illocutionary act will be chiefly discussed in the following. It is important to note that the extensions of these three concepts of command overlap each other: Typical commands are performed with imperative sentences, with the intention to make the hearer do something with some force, and result in the imposition of certain obligations on the hearer. Nevertheless, commands that bind the hearer are not necessarily accompanied by imperative sentences or by any intention of making the hearer do something. Such commands are sometimes issued using future tense declarative sentences (e.g., "you will leave this house"), and they are sometimes issued with the intention of being breached[2].

3. Commands and Searle's directives

In this section, the taxonomy of illocutionary acts proposed by Searle, especially the notion of directives, is critically reviewed. As mentioned in section one, Searle defines directives as the illocutionary acts that are attempts by the speaker to make the hearer do something. From this definition, it is derived that the direction of fit of directives is *world to words* and the sincerity condition of directives is *want.* According to Searle, commands, prohibitions, advices, challenges, orders, permissions, requests, questions, and so on are included within directives. Though a variety of authors have criticised Searle's taxonomy [3], it is generally accepted that illocutionary acts characterised by Searle as directives comprise a relatively homogenous group. This paper rejects this assumed homogeneity. My contention is that advises and challenges should be classified as assertives and orders as commissives. Moreover, it would be better to create a new class of illocutionary acts to accommodate permissions and other similar illocutionary acts. The following is an examination of each illocutionary act.

Advice. Imagine a case where someone says to another person, "I advise you to submit the report by tomorrow". If the deadline is not really tomorrow but a week later, improving the quality of the report over the weekend may be better than submitting a hastily written low-quality report tomorrow. If that is the case, the adviser will be blamed later for giving the wrong advice. In addition, what will be regarded as wrong are the words he uttered rather than the world. Advice may be false, just as assertions may be. Furthermore, the sincerity condition of advice is not *want*. Indeed, if the speaker advises the hearer to do something because he or she *wants* the hearer to do so, then the adviser is extremely *insincere* as an adviser, for an adviser must not offer advice that advances his/her own interests.

The sincerity condition of advice is *belief.* Therefore, if a person advises someone to do P, even though the person does not believe that doing P is the best choice, the person's advice is considered insincere. With these findings in mind, one may conclude that advice is a member of the assertives. In addition, advice is distinctive among the assertives for the characteristic restriction on its propositional contents. The propositional content of advice is confined to some axiological or deontological facts such as what is better for the hearer or what the hearer should do. Contrast this with reports and predictions. Reporting implies employing a kind of assertive, the propositional content of which is confined to past events. Predicting is a kind of assertive in which the propositional content is confined to future events. The same argument can also be applied to

suggestions and recommendations, all of which are members of the assertives.

Just as Kant considered morals as a categorical imperative, similarities between morals and commands have been widely recognised. As with the statement "do not litter on the sidewalk; pick the cigarette butt up!", moral statements are often issued with imperative sentences and with the intention of making the hearer behave in a certain way. These facts are beyond dispute. In the level of illocutionary acts, however, moral statements are closer to advices, and they are not directives but assertives. Moral statements do not create a new obligation. They only remind the hearer of already existing moral obligations[4]. Let us reconsider the example mentioned above. The person who is told "do not litter on the sidewalk!" does not become obliged not to litter on the sidewalk by that statement. He/she is obliged not to litter on the sidewalk from the outset. Hare correctly points out that an element of commendation, such as what the hearer should do or what is good for the hearer, is contained in moral statements. However, it does not follow from this that a moral statement is a kind of command. Commendations (or recommendations) are closer to assertions than to commands, although "commend" and "command" have the same etymology.

Challenge. Similar to "catch me if you can", a challenge is an attempt to make the hearer behave in a certain way by the utterance of an imperative sentence. However, the hearer does not respond to the challenge because challenges are a form of command. The speaker who said "catch me if you can" is predicting that the hearer cannot catch the speaker. The hearer responds to this prediction so as to falsify it. Therefore, a challenge, even if it is performed with an imperative sentence, belongs to the category of assertives. Likewise, rhetorical questions are also assertives, even though they are asked with an interrogative sentence. The same may be said for "defy" and "dare".

Order. Searle distinguishes between commands and orders and regards the former as having the hearer do something by institutional authority and the latter by some power that is not necessarily institutionally authorised (Searle and Vanderveken 1985, p. 201). Differentiating commands from orders in this way is particular to Searle, and it is not generally accepted. However, for reasons of convenience, I would like to maintain the distinction, and for the purpose of this paper, orders will be regarded as making the hearer do something *in virtue of some unauthorised force*. A typical example of an order is when a bank robber shouts "hands up!" while sticking a gun into the victim's back. Orders impose no obligation or responsibility on the hearer. The victim does not become obliged to hold his hands up, although it is inevitable that he/she will do so. Following Bohnert's classic analysis, I regard the utterance above as the abbreviation of the threat "hands up, or something bad

will happen to you" (Bohnert 1945). Agreeing with Searle, I believe that threats are a form of commissives—the kindred of promises.

Grant called a threat an "unwelcome promise" (Grant 1949, p. 362). Threats differ from promises in that by issuing a threat, the speaker becomes committed to some future state of affairs that is unfavourable, rather than favourable, to the hearer. However, in other aspects, threats do not differ from conditional promises. Nevertheless, someone may doubt that a threat binds the speaker. Is the bank robber obliged to do something bad to the victim if the victim has disobeyed? Certainly not. However, this is not because threats are not members of the commissives but because the contents of the commitment of a threat offend morality in most cases. A speech act cannot create obligations that offend morality. In law, a contract of murder is considered invalid for the same reason.

Similar to threats, acts that make the hearer do something by implying that if the hearer disobeys, the speaker will bring about something bad for the hearer are called negative sanctions. Negative sanctions are generally announced with sentences of the form "P or Q". The opposite are called positive sanctions: acts that make the hearer do something by implying that if the hearer obeys, the speaker will bring about something good for the hearer. Typically, a positive sanction takes the form "P and Q". A mother telling her child, "go and buy the items on this list at the shop, and I will give you a dollar", is a good example of a positive sanction. Positive sanctions are clearly conditional promises. Furthermore, I emphasise that if positive sanctions are commissives, then so are negative sanctions.

An order issued by a customer to a clerk of a restaurant or a shop is another example of a positive sanction. "A hamburger, please" can be interpreted as an abbreviation of "please give me a hamburger, and I will pay for it". Generally, a contract is formed when one's offer is accepted by the other. From the perspective of speech acts, an offer can be analysed as the combination of a request and a promise that is activated only after the request has been accepted.

Permission. It is often said that permission is the opposite of prohibition. In *Meaning and Expression*, Searle analyses permission as the illocutionary negation of prohibition. If we represent a command with the propositional content P as !(P), and if we regard "~" as the sign of negation, the logical form of the permission of P is written as ~!(~P) (Searle 1979, p. 22). Now, what exactly is illocutionary negation? !(~P) denotes the prohibition of P. Thus far, this presents no problem; however, does the illocutionary negation of it then state that the performed illocutionary act is not the prohibition of P? Certainly, permission is not prohibition. However, permissions are also illocutionary acts with some positive significance. What kinds of changes do permissions exert on the normative facts?

The following observation will be helpful in understanding the complexities presented above. If a person prohibits someone from doing P at one time and later permits the same person to do P, the normative state is unchanged before and after the sequence of those two illocutionary acts. The latter cancels the effect of the former. Permission is the opposite of prohibition, not in the sense that negation is the opposite of affirmation, but in the sense that subtraction is the opposite of addition. In other words, whereas prohibitions create new obligations that did not exist before, permissions remove prior existing obligations[5]. In fact, Searle correctly describes this contrast[6]. However, he made a serious mistake when formalising his analysis. This mistake derives from his confusing the relation between the state of being forbidden and the state of being permitted with the relation between the act of forbidding and the act of permitting. If we understand permissions in this way, we find that some other illocutionary acts also resemble permissions. For example, pardoning is the illocutionary act of getting rid of the hearer's obligation to compensate for his/her fault[7]. Exemptions remove the hearer's official duty such as military duty or tax obligation; these examples have already been pointed out by Bach and Harnish (Bach and Harnish 1979, pp. 54f). I will add to this list the illocutionary act of withdrawing. The illocutionary point of withdrawing is to cancel obligations or responsibilities that were generated by some preceding assertions or promises the speaker had made. In this way, permitting, pardoning, exempting, and withdrawing can all be characterised as illocutionary acts that, if successfully performed, remove pre-existing obligations or responsibilities. Advising, questioning, requesting, ordering, commanding, and challenging are, in standard cases, all attempts to engender certain changes in the hearer's behaviour; however, they display the characteristics of perlocutionary acts, rather than those of illocutionary acts. Searle also approves of this (Searle 1969, p. 71). He also asserts that the explicit performative sentences of directive illocutionary acts have a common deep structure. It is assumed that the common deep structure is transformed into a sentence of the form "I [verb] you to…", in the surface structure (e.g., "I order you to…", "I advise you to…", "I dare you to…", "I permit you to…", etc.). Searle insists that this explicit performative form of illocutionary acts is important evidence for them to be considered as directives. However, remembering the discussion in section two, we find that the form of sentences is the characteristic of locutionary acts. The fundamental defect in Searle's notion of directives is that it lacks characterisation at the illocutionary level. In this regard, illocutionary acts that are more similar to promises or assertions than to commands are grouped into directives. I wish to propose that commands are the most typical form of directives, and directives are characterised as illocutionary acts that commit the hearer, in varying degrees, to some future course of action.

This position is not far from that of Alston's. He emphasises the fact that illocutionary acts "change

one's 'normative status' in a certain way" (Alston 1991, p. 66). The normative status he stresses is the speaker's taking responsibility for something's being the case. He also criticises Searle for his characterisation of directives by its perlocutionary intention. Alston instead asserts that the necessary and sufficient condition for the occurrence of a directive illocutionary act is formalised as follows (Alston 2000, p. 102f):

U [the utterer] D'd in uttering S (where "D" is a term for some directive illocutionary act type, purporting to be producing a certain kind of obligation on H [the hearer] to do D) iff in uttering S, U R'd [took the responsibility for its being the case] that:

1. Conceptually necessary conditions for the existence of the obligation are satisfied. (This includes such things as that it is possible for H to do D, that D has not already been done, etc.)

2. Circumstances of the utterance of S are appropriate for the production of the obligation in question. (This includes the appropriate authority for orders, the right kind of interpersonal relationship for requests, etc.)

3. By uttering S, U lays on H a (stronger or weaker) obligation to do D.

4. U utters S in order to get H to do D.

Alston initiated a far-reaching project on inducing sentence meanings from this notion of responsibility. However, this project is not discussed in this paper. Instead, I will point out a shortcoming in the above analysis. It is true, as Alston insists, that when an utterer issues a command, he/she accepts the responsibilities as Alston describes. Nonetheless, such responsibilities cannot easily be regarded as the very essence of commands. Rather, are those responsibilities not by-products of the fact that commands are illocutionary acts that bind the hearer? Alston's analysis of commands is reflective of the fact that he takes into consideration the observation that we often regard an utterer as commanded when he/she purported to obligate the hearer to do something, even if he/she lacked appropriate authority and, in reality, did not create any obligation on the part of the hearer. Alston uses an example where an army lieutenant commands a private to "shine his shoes" (Ibid. p. 98). Because army regulations give a lieutenant no authority to issue such a command, the lieutenant might be later reproached for his/her inappropriate command. Alston emphasises that this reproach presupposes that a command has been issued. To be sure, the notion of command has such usage; however, there is another usage in which it is impossible to issue a command without appropriate authority. The latter type of usage figures in statements such as "the inferior cannot

command the superior". As I have pointed out in section two, the notion of command has multiple meanings, and my contention is that a command as a locutionary or perlocutionary act is relevant to the former case, whereas a command as an illocutionary act is found in the latter case.

To conclude this paper, let us review the types of illocutionary acts that remain as directives. Prohibitions are without dispute directives. The difference between commands and prohibitions is in their restrictions on the propositional contents: In the case of a command, the hearer is obligated to do something, whereas in the case of prohibition, the hearer is obligated not to do something.

Requests are the speech acts nearest to commands. It is sometimes assumed that the difference between requests and commands is that the hearer has the right to refuse a request, but he/she cannot refuse a command. Requests are therefore "refusable" commands. To describe it from an opposite point of view, requests are commands that become valid only after the hearer's consent. The requested hearer's affirmative reply "all right" is just such a consent. From that perspective, the difference between commands and requests resides in whether the hearer's assent to take on the obligation precedes or succeeds the speech act. Asking, praying, pleading, entreating, and inviting are similar to requesting, although they are slightly different from each other. I completely agree with Searle that questions are a kind of request: To question is to request the hearer to state what the speaker wants to know.

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[1] For more details, see Searle (1969), pp. 54-71.

[2] This point is stressed by Alston. See Alston (2000), p. 102.

[3] Of all others, Bach & Harnish (1979) and Alston (2000) are the most important.

[4] This perlocutionary effect of moral statements is called the "activation of commitments" by T. Parsons. See Parsons (1969), pp. 360-369.

[5] D. Lewis characterises permissions in the same way. See Lewis (1979a), pp. 163-175.

[6] "[G]iving permission is not strictly speaking trying to get someone to do something, rather it consists in removing antecedently existing restrictions on his doing it." (Searle 1979, p. 22).

[7] Interestingly, to permit something and to pardon something are both called "yurusu" in Japanese.

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