

# Language Game, Asserting and Speech Acts A New View on Uptake in Speech Acts

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**Abstract.** Hornsby and Langton argued the viewpoint of “illocutionary disablement” in pornography based on Austin’s Speech Act theory. They called this silencing and regarded it as a violation of free speech. Sharma has presented a profound criticism of the former study and issued her own opinions based mainly on the intentionalist point of view, which is inaccurate and not satisfactory enough. To further the discussion, this paper argues that the reason for her defects locates in the intentional fundament. This paper creatively puts speech acts into the framework of Wittgenstein’s Language Game Theory and Brandom’s Asserting Theory, namely, the social view. This paper finally reaches a conclusion that the basic essence of speech acts is conventionality based on language game and the social web created by asserting. The intention is the secondary essence, which is highly related to securing uptake when it comes to further taxonomy. On this new framework, this paper also put forward the questions of the relationships between speech act verbs and speech acts, the further taxonomy of non-conventional speech acts for future discussions.

**Keywords:** Speech Acts, convention, uptake, Wittgenstein, Brandom.

## 1. Introduction

In the discussion of pornographic topics, females tend to choose silence subjectively when they meet the objective conditions to speak. This social phenomenon, in the feminist philosophy research, has appeared a variety of existing research. To defend that the free speech of men silences the free speech of women, claimed by Catharine MacKinnon [1,2]. Jennifer Hornsby and Rae Langton make a viewpoint that illocutionary silencing is an “illocutionary disablement” [3]. As defined by Hornsby/Langton, silencing is uttering words to others objectively but failing to perform the illocutionary acts they intend, according to J.L. Austin’s masterpiece *How to Do Things with Words* [4]. The silenced people are deprived of the potential that perform the illocutions in specific contexts or situations. Therefore, Hornsby/Langton protest that these silenced people’s right of free speech are badly violated.

Scholars such as Daniel Jacobson [5], Ishani Maitra [6], Alexander Bird [7], Mary-Kate McGowan [8] and Ritu Sharma [9] have criticized Hornsby/Langton’s article and reconsidered the issue they uttered. This paper is mainly based on the work of Sharma, and it attempts to resolve three questions: 1) Does the successful performance of a speech act require the immediate audience’s uptake? 2) Are there different categories of speech acts from this perspective? 3) Why might some require uptake and others not?

Sharma has recently renewed this research by criticizing Maitra’s unsuccessful division between illocutions and perlocutions, concentrating on the role the of securing uptake in perlocutionary acts. From her point of view, Maitra made a wrong assumption that if the speaker can secure the uptake, the perlocutions are fulfilled. She put forward that the securing of uptake does not guarantee the fulfillment of perlocutionary acts, especially those perlocution without tangible uptake. In her reading of Austin [4], she argued that perlocutions are consequences that are achieved in the natural course of events. Moreover, the uptake is necessary if and only if on the occasion of it induces conventional illocutionary effects [9]. Furthermore, the perlocutionary acts are anyhow non-conventional, with no need securing of uptake. Therefore, Maitra misunderstood Austin’s theory. Her viewpoints can generally be summarized into: 1) Uptake does not necessarily bring about the intended perlocutionary effect. 2) Perlocutions are natural effects, and there are perlocutions without uptake. 3) Even though there is uptake, it may not lead to the perlocutionary effect. In other words, there is no logical

necessity between uptake and perlocutions, and perlocutions in itself is a natural activity. Her paper offers a relatively straightforward division between illocutions and perlocutions, and this paper will follow her division.

In this paper, Wittgenstein's Language Game [10] and Brandom's Asserting [11] will be taken into consideration for reconsidering the uptake in speech acts. The whole paper will be divided into three main parts. In the first part, a brief introduction to the Language Game concept, Speech Act Theory, and Asserting in Brandom's view will be provided for explicit. A discussion on explaining how can Language Game Theory and Asserting can help this paper to further the understanding of the uptake in speech acts and convention and non-convention division in this section. In the second part, the mainly points of interests will be focus on analyzing three speech acts: warning, protesting, and asserting, which will inspect this paper's analysis. Moreover, the investigations of some actual examples will be included in this part, which is helpful in explaining the framework of part three. The defects of Sharma's viewpoints will be shown in this part. In the third part, this paper will clarify the defects of former study which mentioned in Part2 in this part, and the new explanations will be put forward. Meanwhile, it can be part of the framework to settle further explanations. In conclusion, the author will claim that this study's perspective is more deep-going than former perspectives in considering the problem of conventions and non-conventions in perlocutions, and it can explain the three problems mentioned above. Suggestions about further study will be given at the end. To start research, this paper begins with notions of Austin's Speech Act Theory and relate it to the Language game and Asserting theory.

## **2. Speech Act Theory: How Can it Related to Language Game and Asserting?**

### **2.1 Speech Act Theory**

In the book *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin abstracted three different acts from one total speech act into locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. In detail, the locutionary act refers to the speaker speaking an utterance that is in accord with ordinary habits and meaningful. Then, the illocutionary act refers to a kind of "illocutionary force" which was endowed to the meaningful utterance in a particular or typical context. And the perlocutionary act refers to some kinds of effects that the locutionary act or illocutionary act perform on the hearer [4].

### **2.2 Language Game**

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein put forward that "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven, a "language game." It could be easy to figure out that a special language game includes the speeches and the activities woven with the speeches. Therefore, the speech act should be a kind of language game. A game, in Wittgenstein's theory, is not necessarily formed with antagonism and victory or failure, and for the game formed with these, the victory is not wholly dependent on the gamer's skills and luck. It is not only made up for recreation. It is not played in a clearly divided and limited space or in a limited and with a definite start and ending. Finally, it is not every game should have fixed and accurate rules. Even if it has, they will not be performed perfectly in all processes of that game. Thus, there is no general concept of a game. Although Wittgenstein originally used language game to describe the original language, in *Philosophical Investigations*, he used this concept in a much broader way. It can be applied to the complex and rich daily speeches and the activities which arise in the process of speeches. The functions of language games are various and different from each other. They can serve the functions such as description, assumption, question, emotion, and so on. Moreover, what people call the language game in itself is not fixed, too. A language game (and the rules of that language) can be essentially different when it happens in a different context. For example, warning, protesting, and asserting these acts can be performed in one language game. When one says "No." in a pornography context, it is easy to imagine that if that man is advancing to rape, "No" can be a warning; it is also not hard to imagine that if that man was actually raping that miserable girl, it became protesting and

if that man is a gentleman, he asked: 'Can I sleep with you?' the girl said: 'No, and according to the law if you do that, I will accuse you.', in which the "No" will be an asserting in Brandom's sense [11]. According to Wittgenstein, a language game cannot be defined, and it can only be explained by exemplification.

In fact, when Wittgenstein explained the rules of the language game, he used a new concept—The form of life. However, this paper will not use this term; instead, this paper will use the term "convention" in Austin's sense. Furthermore, the language game, according to Wittgenstein, is rooted in the form of life, which is highly related to lifestyle, conventions, rules, and law. So the language game is convention based.

### 2.3 Asserting

In his paper Asserting (though he did not use this original term), Brandom accounted for the speech act and distinguished the term assertion as well as asserting [11]. In the final part of his paper, he drastically criticized the Gricean framework, which in short, is the intentionalism about the meaning [12]. Brandom used a social view on the problem of meaning, which to be concluded that the core is asserting. He put forward that assertion includes two things: 1) A commits to vindicate the claim; 2) A endorses others to resort to and infer from the claim. Then, that claim becomes an assertion. In other words, the one who was asserting should undertake the responsibility of commitment and endorsement; that one should defend his claim when it was attacked by someone one can also indirectly defend it, for example, one can say, "it is Tom told me.", which was called "delay." and that one should also be responsible for others' inference and quotation, for example, one can quote Wittgenstein's sentences to defend one's claims, because others all acknowledge Wittgenstein's authority and the correctness of his theory, and it allows further quotation and inference, too. In addition, in Brandom, there is one kind of assertion called "bare assertions." In bare assertions, no defense is offered to a claim, and they solely function as licensing authorizing inferences to further claims. This was called a maxim in common sense. It is worth noticing that a successful assertion on the audience should not depend on belief but on commitment. The speaker's intention is not the matter first. Instead, it is the social convention in practice that will govern. From this perspective, Brandom's point of view highly overlapped with Austin's. They both explained the meaning on the basis of the constitution by public social practice rather than the internal and psychological part of the speaker. For example, If Sue said that John stole the Jewel, which is the language game of accusing and of convincing others, she shows the photo and adds that she heard about that event from James (a man with high authority). In this assertion, it is the social practice that comes first, no matter what its intention of Sue is. She may want to show off her friendship with James, but in social practice, she has asserted that her stealing behaviour toward John is actual. Furthermore, if the assertion in Brandom's sense reoccurs again and again, it forms a social web. That is to say, meaning arises when people have a social practice of undertaking commitments with one another. It is not to say the speaker's intention do not function in speech, but to say even the intention is based both on the social or speech community and someone's psychological ability.

### 2.4 Speech Acts in the framework of Language game and Asserting

What is commonly shared by all three great Language Philosophers is that the language and the acts in the process of language (Austin calls it speech acts) are highly related to social practice and function firstly in social practice rather than individual intention. This is very useful when considering the issues of conventionality and uptake in speech acts. The example of Sue saying John stole the Jewel will be continued used here. It is the social practice for the hearer to recognize the meaning of assertion has been proved in the last section. Then, when viewing this process in the framework of language game, whose convention or form of life is constructed by a social web created by assertions, it is apparent that the uptake is not necessary in this case. Sue just wants to show off her good relationship with James, but the hearer does not recognize that Sue is attempting to perform that act (this is called uptake). The hearer consulted the social convention and thought that she was trying to

convince another person that James is a crime by stealing. In Austin's terms. The locutionary act is the utterance of the sentence "John stole the jewels." The illocutionary act shows off her relationship with James by saying that John stole the jewels (uncertain event). The perlocutionary act is Sue convinces the hearer that it is James who stole the jewels by her utterance. It is clear that there is no uptake at all in this process, which is very different from the current common sense that the role of uptake lies in bringing about conventional effects [6]. Therefore, if the research started from the language game and asserting theory, some new ideas would occur through the above communication and discussion.

### 3. Warning, Protesting, Asserting

In the above discussion, Language game, Asserting theory, Speech Acts, and how these terms can relate to further the investigation of speech acts are explained explicitly. In this section, warning, protesting and asserting will be in the dominant position of the discussion follows.

Firstly, the full explanation has been given before, and here it will be put into the framework of the Speech Act. Based on part 1.3, the assertion is a conventional speech act, and it is a special speech act because it can form a social web in different language games for other speech acts. In itself, the locutionary act of assertion is the utterance of the speaker in the process. The Illocutionary act of assertion is the endorsement and commitment of the utterance itself. The perlocutionary act of assertion is by endorsement and commitment. The hearer is convinced and endorsed to further assert. What is required to be noticed is that the whole process is not related to uptake because the assertion does not call for the engagement of the speaker's intention; it is the speaker's utterance and the utterance's meaning in social web counts, rather than what the speaker intended to convey, just like the example of Sue in 1.3 and 1.4,

Warning and protesting will be taken into consideration in the context of pornography for further discussion. To clarify this theory in the context of pornography, the following example will be illustrated and considered:

Mary speaks to her boyfriend, "I don't want to have sex tonight, or I will call the police." With the intention of warning her boyfriend and refusing sexual intercourse with her boyfriend that night. The process above has the whole three kinds of speech acts. Firstly, she performed the locutionary act, for she has very clearly uttered her speech, bringing with a certain meaning, and since the speech is in correspondence with English Grammar, the hearer, namely, her boyfriend, can well understand her meaning in expecting. Secondly, she performed the illocutionary act, which contains the force of warning and refusing, namely, saying, "I don't want to have sex tonight, or I will call the police." Mary performed the illocutionary act warning and refusing. Finally, she performed the perlocutionary act by saying, "I don't want to have sex tonight, or I will call the police." She did something. Why is it something? Because there are various cases. For example, the man can stop and retreat from sex; the man can ignore the warning and perform a rape; the man can also reply, "I know you well; you are too shamed to say yes." It is hard to say what will happen next. However, one question is obvious— which of them is the natural effect in Sharma's view [9]? It seems that the natural effect can be defined only refers to the law or moral standard, but as mentioned above, the rules of a language game are not functioning in every case, so it cannot be a very satisfactory criterion. This problem will be concluded with the convention/non-convention division of speech acts and the uptake in Section 3 of this paper.

Now, the case will be used to further analysis of protesting. Now, supposing that Mary's boyfriend is advancing to rape her (the effect of perlocutionary act of the story before), She repeated, "I don't want to have sex tonight, or I will call the police." Now, with the same locutionary act, there occurs a different illocutionary act (this is well suited to Wittgenstein's language game about the different situations), namely, the protesting. What is the same with the warning is that, in this case, the perlocutionary act is not certain, too. Furthermore, If the effect is that the man stopped and retreated, the uptake occurred; if the effect is that the man did not stop and continue to rape Mary, the uptake

may occur, too, because the man can understand it as consent, or he may think it is a provocation to him and become even more furious. What is worse is that in pornography, the worse occasion in everyday moral practice and law is more natural than the better one.

In discussing these three speech acts, it is found that the uptake is not logically and virtually related to the perlocutionary acts right. However, the division between conventional and non-conventional based on natural or not is unsatisfactory.

#### **4. Resolving of Problems of Conventionality and the Role of Uptake in speech acts**

The sections above have investigated the speech acts in the frameworks of Wittgenstein and Brandom, and the defects of the former researcher's studies have appeared too. First, clarification of the role of uptake will be given. The uptake is not necessary for speech acts, and the speech acts will first be a conventional social act, which is the primary essence. Then secondly, the performance of speech acts will come in a non-conventional way, namely, the intention, which is the secondary essence. Therefore, the security of uptake is in the second essence. The conditions for a speech act to be performed is that there is some ritual, conventional, habitual, and moral conditions for it. Then, the speech acts can be further divided into pure conventional, and non-conventional speech acts, and this division is based on the securing of uptake. With the whole framework of the language game and asserting, what is convention can easily be judged. The intention without being based on any assertions before or rules of language games is not a convention, namely, spontaneity. For example, the crying of a baby for food is that kind of intention. This speech act is highly dependent on the uptake of the hearer because if the hearer does not understand what the crying is intended to do, they will not give the baby food. But the uptake is not a sufficient condition for the perlocutionary act intended, too, because the hearer may think that the baby feels lonely, too. Moreover, it is the same for the case of warning and protesting. The intention of being unwilling to do what she is forced to do is not dependent on conventions. Although the uptake is not sufficient for the man to stop, it will be a necessary condition. If someone disagrees with the example, just as the man will stop because he had a stomach ache or he suddenly feels the girl is not beautiful, it is not enough to refute the theory mentioned above because it falls out of the language which is currently playing.

As discussed above, the concentration is on the perlocutionary act. When it turns to the illocutionary act, the securing of uptake is not deal with the performance of illocutions too, but it is related to the success of that illocutionary act. Securing uptake can only ensure the illocutions be understood by the hearer. Only the uptake occurs can the illocutionary force take effects in the language game to cause some non-conventional effects in perlocutionary acts (this paper has abandoned the natural and unnatural division), which was called non-conventional speech acts above. This may have corresponded with Austin's point of view that the illocutionary act "takes effect" in specific ways, bringing about changes in a natural way in the state of affairs [4].

Note that this paper does not deny the whole work of Sharma. It is attempting to do the framework for the current study in this field and try to resolve some pendent problems. Sharma's paper is profound, and this paper remains some problems. For example, if the context and conventions matter, then the speech act verb is not equal to the speech act itself. Searle J R may give some ideas [13], and they will not be discussed here. This paper's view is highly based on the social view, and the intentionalism view can refer to Strawson P F.'s paper [14].

#### **5. Conclusion**

This paper has tried to reconsider Sharma's account and critique that she put forward Speech Act Theory. The author further accounts for the theory, especially the questions about conventionality and uptake, by putting them into the framework of the Language Game and Asserting Theory. Arguing that Sharma did not produce a satisfactory result because she concentrated her view on

intention rather than the social view, this paper provides a new perspective on this problem. This paper put forward that speech acts are more or less conventional, and conventionality is the primary essence of speech acts; the intention is the secondary essence, which is highly related to the securing of uptake. Moreover, by uptake, it will be able to further divide the speech acts into pure conventional and non-conventional. Thus, there are no such objective things called “natural effects” which are not based on any social condition. It must be emphasized here that the researchers should not focus on intention first when studying speech acts. Otherwise, they will fall into endless discussions on the uptake, which will waste unserviceable efforts.

This paper helps future researchers advance in studying the speech acts, especially the perlocutionary acts, and the distinctions between perlocutions and illocutions in a very new pattern, namely, the language game and asserting with the social web. To the three questions mentioned in the introduction, the answers will be: 1) Only some of them. 2) Yes, and this paper has made a primary taxonomy. 3) Because some of the speech acts are not pure conventional.

Indeed, there remain many blanks in this paper. Firstly, the speech act verbs do not wholly serve as speech acts themselves. In a further study, social web and language game have been taken into consideration, and researchers can reconsider the relation between speech act verbs and speech acts. Secondly, for the basis of social view has been built, the intentionalist can further study the division in a secondary essence. Finally, this paper merely plays a beginning in social view. There are still many immature points, especially the taxonomy of the speech acts in this framework.

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