



## Mechanisms of illocutionary games



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### ABSTRACT

The paper develops a score-keeping model of *illocutionary games* and uses it to account for mechanisms responsible for creating institutional facts construed as rights and commitments of participants in a dialogue. After introducing the idea of Austinian games—understood as abstract entities representing different levels of the functioning of discourse—the paper defines the main categories of the proposed model: *interactional negotiation*, *illocutionary score*, *appropriateness rules* and *kinematics rules*. Finally, it discusses the phenomenon of accommodation as it occurs in illocutionary games and argues that the proposed model presupposes an externalist account of illocutionary practice.

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## 1. Introduction

My aim in this paper is to motivate the category of Austinian games and use it to develop a score-keeping model of illocutionary interaction. I define Austinian games as abstract objects representing different levels of the functioning of discourse. Drawing on Austin's theory of speech acts (Austin, 1975), I distinguish between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary games. The function or purpose of any move made in a locutionary game ("function" in the teleological sense) is to produce a *locution* construed as a linguistic representation of an actual or possible state of the world, whereas the job of any move made in a perlocutionary game is to affect mental states, attitudes, and behaviour of interacting agents. The function of any contribution to an illocutionary game, in turn, is to modify the domain of deontic facts or 'institutional states of affairs such as attributions of rights, obligations, entitlements, commitments' (Sbisà, 2002, p. 434) and so on. In other words, what motivates the introduction of the illocutionary level of analysis—i.e., what justifies representing a certain dialogue as an illocutionary game—is the need to account for the institution-creating function of language and speech (Searle, 2010). It should be stressed from the outset, however, that Austinian games are mere abstractions and neither of them, taken alone, provides a complete picture of the dynamics of discourse. To arrive at such a picture, it seems, one might have to integrate the three perspectives into a holistic framework and examine how locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary factors interact in determining the dynamics of discourse.

Following Gerald Gazdar (1981, p. 68), I assume that speech act types can be represented as functions from contexts to contexts or, as David Lewis (1979) would put it, as functions from conversational scores to conversational scores (this time, the term "function" is used in the mathematical sense). The conversational score at a given stage of an Austinian game is a sequence of abstract entities standing for contextual factors relative to which any move made at this stage is to be interpreted and evaluated. For example, at any stage in a locutionary game the score can involve representations of presupposed propositions, standards of precision, rankings of comparative salience, reference points for interpreting anaphoric

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expressions, as well as other factors relative to which new locutions should be interpreted and evaluated; the score at a certain stage in an illocutionary game, in turn, contains representations of contextual factors conditioning the felicity of any illocutionary act that can be made at this stage. In general, any move  $m$  made in an Austinian game can be represented as an ordered pair  $\langle s_1, s_2 \rangle$ , where  $s_1$  is the score representing the context relative to which the move is to be interpreted and evaluated (let us call it the *source score* of move  $m$ ) and  $s_2$  is a score representing the context that results from making the move (let us call it the *target score* of move  $m$ ).

Following Lewis (1979), I assume that any language game is governed by two types of rules: the rules of appropriateness and the rules of kinematics. The rules of the former kind determine, for any stage of the game, what would count as a correct move at this stage; in other words, they define the appropriateness of the moves made in the game in terms of their source scores. The kinematics rules, in turn, govern the dynamics of conversational score; roughly speaking, they determine how the performance of a given speech act affects the context of its production. It should be stressed, however, that there are two types of kinematics rules: the *rules of direct kinematics* and the *rules of accommodation*. The rules of direct kinematics—or, for short, the *direct rules*—determine, for any move that can be appropriately made in the game, what would count as its *target score*; the rules of accommodation, in turn, govern a process whereby the context of a move is adjusted to make the move appropriate. In short, any direct rule can be seen as defining a function from source scores to target scores; accommodation rules, by contrast, define functions from source scores to source scores or, more specifically, from *non-accommodated* to *accommodated* source scores. At first sight, the differentiation between direct rules and accommodation rules might seem to be artificial and unmotivated. It is worth drawing, however, because it allows us formulate the main hypothesis of this paper, according to which there are two types of mechanisms—direct and indirect—that are responsible for bringing about institutional facts construed as commitments and rights of the participants in social life.

The main focus of this paper, then, is on the mechanisms of illocutionary games. Section 2 introduces the idea of Austinian games: it presents elements of Austin's theory of speech acts (Subsection 2.1), introduces the notion of Austinian games (Subsection 2.2), and motivates the category of illocutionary games by discussing the process of interactional negotiation (Subsection 2.3). Section 3 develops a score-keeping model of illocutionary interaction: it defines the category of illocutionary score (Subsection 3.1), draws a distinction between appropriateness rules and kinematics rules (Subsection 3.2), and discusses the phenomenon of accommodation as it occurs in illocutionary games (Subsection 3.3). Section 4 considers the role that the proposed model can play in our theorising about linguistic practice (Subsection 4.1), and argues that it presupposes externalism about illocutionary agency and externalism about uptake (Subsection 4.2).

## 2. Austinian games

### 2.1. Austin on speech acts

The main idea behind Austin's theorising about linguistic practice is that speech acts are 'context-changing social actions' (Sbisà, 2002, p. 421); in other words, to make a speech act is to bring about a series of changes in the context of its production. Austin (1975) distinguished between three types of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. To make a locutionary act is to produce a locution construed of as a linguistic representation of an actual or possible state of the world; normally, it is also to perform an illocutionary act that amounts to taking a normative attitude towards the representation thereby produced, e.g., the speaker's attitude of responsibility for its truth (then the locution under consideration constitutes a statement), the speaker's undertaking the commitment to see to it that it will be true (then the locution is a promise), or the speaker's being entitled to expect the addressee to see to it that it will be true (then the locution constitutes a command); usually, it is also to perform a perlocutionary act which amounts to bringing about—intentionally or not—certain changes in the sphere of the thoughts, actions or feelings of the participants in a dialogue. In short, the function ("function" in the teleological sense) of a locutionary act is to produce linguistic representations of actual or possible states of affairs, the proper purpose of illocutionary acts is to create or modify institutional or deontic facts—such as commitments, obligations, rights and entitlements—and the job of perlocutionary acts is to affect behaviour, attitudes and thoughts of the interacting agents. It should be stressed, however, that locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are not real entities, but abstract aspects of the 'total speech-act in the total speech-situation' (Austin, 1975, p. 148). In other words, they are abstract objects that are posited by the comparative analysis of individual speech acts (for a discussion of this idea, see Witek, 2015b, pp.18–25).

Let us focus on the locutionary and illocutionary aspects of verbal activity and consider John who, while talking to Tom, utters the following sentence:

(1) I will come to your seminar.

Uttering (1), John says that he will come to Tom's seminar, or, in other words, he represents John's coming to Tom's seminar as a future event. Let us assume that in saying this John makes a binding promise, i.e., he commits himself to come to Tom's seminar (to assume this is to take it for granted that the context of the utterance in question satisfies certain conditions of felicity; see Austin, 1975, pp. 21–23). In other words, it is the speaker of (1), not the hearer, who is responsible for seeing to it that the locution under discussion will be true. Consider, by analogy, Tom who is talking to John and utters sentence (2) in a commanding tone:

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