

SPEECH ACT, CONCEPTUAL INCOMMENSURABILITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL MISJUDGEMENT

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Abstract

This essay examines J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory in which he tries to explicate the pragmatic property of speech by analysing an utterance into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, which correspond to the linguistic property of a statement, the speaker's purpose or intention, and the effect a statement produces on the hearer, respectively. Among locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, however, Austin specially focuses on the importance of illocution and extends his analysis by making a distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in terms of convention. According to Austin, illocutionary acts are conventional because to perform them, the speaker must rely on the socially accepted convention to be able to inspire a social force into his or her utterance. But, perlocutionary acts for him, are not conventional. By insisting on the non-conventionality of perlocutionary acts, Austin's theory undermines the potency of customs, norms and traditions not only on the hearers' understanding and interpretation of illocutions but on their performance of perlocutionary acts. In other words, by categorising perlocutionary acts as not conventional, Austin's theory fails to reckon with the biases and prejudices of distinct conceptual schemes in the performance of acts and is therefore not sufficient for understanding, not only the lived experiences of others, but of discovering the genuineness of their beliefs and the meanings they attribute to their use of words. The essay argues further that Austin's disdain for the role of conventions in the performance of perlocutionary acts is responsible for the infelicities that apparently felicitous utterances in Western cultures encounter in other non-Western societies, and this consequently results in the so-called misfire of utterances which engenders the problem of cross-cultural

misjudgement. The essay however concludes that the challenges of infelicities and misfires and the cross-cultural misjudgements that result therefrom can be overcome through the methodic application of phenomenological epoche, which encourages us to suspend, bracket or set aside our cultural attitudes, biases and judgements, and the principle of charity which requires that we seek to understand the point of view of others from its solidest, most persuasive form, by considering its best, strongest, possible interpretation. This is the only way the investigator can gain rational access into the lived experiences of others and in the process, discover the genuineness of their beliefs and the meanings they attribute to their use of words.

Keywords: Speech act, Conceptual schemes, Cross-cultural misjudgement, Epoche, Charity.

Introduction

Speech act as a linguistic theory is used by its proponents to explicate the pragmatic property of speech or to show how speech can become an act. John Langshaw Austin, a major exponent of this theory, is of the opinion that when we say anything by way of speech, we necessarily do something with it. In other words, the words we speak are for him, means of carrying out certain actions like marrying, banishing, inviting and so on. A speech or an utterance could, according to Austin, be grouped into locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, which correspond to the linguistic property of a statement, the speaker's purpose or intention and the effect of a statement on the hearer, respectively. Among locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, however, Austin (1962) especially focuses on the importance of illocution and extends his analysis by making a distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. According to Austin, to perform an illocutionary act, the speaker must rely on the socially accepted convention, otherwise, the speaker would not be able to inspire a social force into his or her utterance. This is why he says that "illocutionary acts are conventional acts [while] perlocutionary acts are not conventional" (Austin, 1962: 120). A perlocutionary act, according to Austin, is just the effect of the

illocutionary act or of the utterance on the hearer and is therefore not conventional.

For a particular statement to represent an act, however, Austin insists that certain appropriateness or felicity conditions ought to be satisfied. For example, if an individual says to another, 'you may join me at the table', by uttering this statement, Austin believes that the individual has *ipso facto* performed the act of invitation and the statement is considered felicitous, if and only if the utterer has food on his or her table and the certainty condition that he or she actually intends that the invitee joins him or her is satisfied. If these conditions are not met, then such an invitation would be considered a misfire.

Within the African cultural context, however, an invitation may not satisfy these conditions and yet, such an invitation may not be considered a misfire, as the invitation is expected to be considered within the African cultural framework as a mere expression of courtesy. Consequently, an invitee operating within this cultural context may not bother to honour the invitation, having the understanding that to honour such would be infelicitous within the cultural context. But from the perspective of Western culture, to make an invitation when one does not intend the invitee to honour it, would amount to being insincere and infelicitous. This makes it possible, therefore, for a particular speech act to be felicitous in one culture, and yet the same may be infelicitous within the ambiance of another culture. This is for the fact that customs, traditions, norms and conventions which define conceptual schemes are not commensurable across cultures. By insisting that perlocutionary acts are not convention-based, Austin's theory undermines the potency of customs, norms and traditions not only on the hearers' understanding and interpretation of illocutions but on their performance of perlocutionary acts. In other words, by categorising perlocutionary acts as non-conventional, Austin's theory fails to reckon with the biases and prejudices of distinct conceptual schemes in the performance of acts and is, therefore, not sufficient for understanding, not only the lived experiences of others, but of discovering the genuineness of their beliefs and the meanings they attribute to their use of words.

In this essay, we argue that Austin's disdain for conventions in the performance of perlocutionary acts is responsible for the infelicities that apparently felicitous utterances in Western cultures encounter in other non-Western societies and this consequently results in the so-called misfire of utterances which further engenders the problem of cross-cultural misjudgement.

J. L. Austin and the Pragmatic Property of Speech

The notion of speech act was a reaction to the claims of the logical positivists, who argue that the meaning of a sentence is reducible to its empirical verification, either directly or indirectly, by reference to observable facts or by virtue of the meaning of their terms [Aigbodioh, 1997:115]. This tradition of viewing a statement as a mere description of state or fact, or of verifying statements by virtue of the meaning of their terms, was pursued by a number of philosophers for a long period of time, culminating in the formation of the Vienna Circle in 1922. In 1962 however, J. L. Austin came out with his book entitled *How to Do Things with Words*. In it, Austin contends that most of our utterances do more than simply making statements. According to him, questions and orders are not used to state something, and many declarative sentences do not lend themselves to being analysed in terms of their falsifiability. Instead, they are instruments that allow speakers to change the state of affairs (cited in Chapman & Routledge, 2009: 213). This simply means that we use language mainly as an instrument to do things. As he explains it, "...to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (Austin, 1962: 6). Austin argues that in saying something, one generally intends more than just to communicate; that the main interest of anyone who communicates is to make his or her listeners understand his/her intention and at the same time produce some effects on them. Language, for him, is used, not only to express different kinds of meaning, but also to carry out actions. He made a distinction between utterances that are constative and those that are performative, noting that utterances that perform actions are called performatives while constative utterances express the truthfulness or

falsity of the action an utterance performs. Performative utterances, according to Austin, possess pragmatic properties or the ability to change state of affairs. He emphasised the distinction between the utterance of a speaker, the intention of the speaker in uttering a statement and the effect the utterance has on the hearer. These he categorised as locution, illocution and perlocution. The locutionary act refers to the act of producing a meaningful linguistic expression. Austin sub-divides this into phonetic act, phatic act and rhetic act. The phonetic act refers to the phonological representation of an utterance; the phatic act is the uttering of "certain vocables or words i.e. noises of certain types belonging to or as belonging to certain grammar" (Odebunmi, 2006: 88) and the rhetic act represents the issuing of vocables with definite sense and referents in the outside world. The illocutionary act is the intention of the speaker in uttering a statement. The perlocutionary act is the effect the utterance has on the hearer.

Austin explains that there are grammatical utterances that do not describe or report anything at all, and consequently, that can neither be said to be true nor false, yet, the uttering of such a sentence is a part of the performance of an action. Examples of such utterances would include sentences like: "I do take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife", as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony; 'I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth', as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem; 'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother' as occurring in a will" (Austin, 1962: 5). None of the above utterances could be subjected to empirical verification of either true or false. They are different from statements such as 'it is raining outside' such that, when I go outside, I could verify whether or not the statement is true or false, or that 'I am catching a cold' and anyone who hears my utterance could perhaps see me shiver. Austin refers to such utterances as 'performatives', because for him, the production of such words is equivalent to the performance of an act. For example, the statement, 'I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife' is not merely reporting something, namely that we are marrying; rather, in saying these words, we are doing something, namely, marrying (Austin, 1962: 13). They are utterances which when produced

in a given condition serve as the performance of some conventional social act. In other words, the speaker performs a specific action by uttering such words.

For Austin, however, merely saying or producing an utterance is not enough condition sufficient or equivalent to the performance of an act. There is the need for certain appropriate circumstances or conditions to be in place before an utterance can be said to be equivalent to the performance of an act. For example, for the statement, 'I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife' to count as a performative act or to be recognised as an act of marrying, it must be said in an appropriate context: either it is said in a court before a witness or in the church before a priest. He refers to the inappropriate conditions that can make things go wrong on the occasion of such utterances as 'infelicities'. In order to explain the doctrine of the infelicities, Austin first classifies infelicities into two features. The first category is "misfires." Misfires are infelicitous cases in which an act is purported but it is of no effect. Among misfires, Austin separates "misinvocations" from "misexecutions." In misinvocations, the purported act is not allowed because of the lack of existence of conventions for the performed act. A case of misinvocation is, for instance, the act of christening a penguin, since there is no convention of christening animals. While misinvocations do not possess their conventions, misexecutions do have their conventions.

However, some mistakes occur in the process of misexecution, leading to the failure of the execution. "Flaw" is one type of misexecution and it is described as an inappropriate execution in which for example, one utters "my house" when one actually possesses two houses. "Hitches" is another type of misexecution which is an incomplete, rather than inappropriate execution, in which a woman announces her intention not to marry her fiancé during her wedding ceremony. Other examples of utterances that misfire are when an individual says to a prisoner, 'I hereby set you free' and the speaker does not have the authority to do so or 'I bequeath you my watch' and the individual has got no watch to give, or in the case of promising, where a person says 'I promise to be at the meeting' but on a sincere note, he or

she has no intention of attending the meeting. Such acts of misfiring could be expressed by a host to a prospective guest thus; 'you are welcome to my house, but you may exit the same way you entered'. All these do not amount to acts because they are infelicitous. According to Austin, it is "for this reason we call the doctrine of the things that can go wrong on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the infelicities" (Austin, 1962: 14). The other category of the doctrine of the infelicities, according to Austin, is "abuses." Compared to misfires, abuses are concerned with a speaker's feeling, intention, and continuous action. One example is a case in which one says, "I congratulate you," despite feeling unhappy or unpleasant.

By the concept of speech acts and the felicity conditions for performing them, it was shown by Austin that to utter a performative sentence is to be evaluated in terms of what can be referred to as, "conventionality, actuality, and intentionality of uttering the sentence. Uttering a performative sentence is to be described in terms of associated conventions which are valid (without which the purported act is disallowed; a violation of the felicity conditions" (Oishi, 2006: 14). So, "the first rule is then that the convention invoked must exist and be accepted and the second rule also, a very obvious one, is that the circumstances in which we purport to invoke this procedure must be appropriate for its invocation" (Austin, 1979: 235). Otherwise, the sentence would be considered infelicitous.

Language, Felicity and Conceptual Schemes

The possibility of a holistic view of reality is highly contestable since no one ever confronts the world holistically. What we do know about the world are aspects of the world, products of amputations, bits and pieces put together as representation of the actual world. As Richard Rorty (cited in Grippe, 2006) rightly opines,

There is no description of how things are from a God's-eye point of view, no skyhook provided by some contemporary or yet-to-be-developed science, is going to free us from the

contingency of having been acculturated as we were. Our acculturation is what makes certain options live, or momentous, or forced, while leaving others dead, or trivial, or optional.

In past philosophical traditions, reality has been conceived from different culturally privileged perspectives. The empiricist and rationalist schools of thought for instance, have looked at reality from different perspectives; one relying on sense experience and the other going beyond sense experience in the understanding of the same reality. It is for reasons similar to this, that some insist that reality cannot be correctly conceived from some conceptual framework culturally privileged to the observer alone. This is because as J. J Lindberg explains, conceptual schemes are:

points of view from which individuals, cultures or periods survey the passing scene. There may be no translating from one scheme to another, in which case, the beliefs, desires, hopes, and bits of knowledge that characterise one person have no true counterparts for the subscriber to another scheme. Reality itself is relative to a scheme: what counts as real in one system may not in another (Lindberg, 2001: 329).

An individual's conceptual scheme is the network of concepts that form the crude content of his or her experience. Since there are different cultural standpoints and, therefore, different points of view, there would necessarily be the problem of incommensurability between different linguistic schemes. Any attempt at attaining commensurability would lead to loss of meaning either in part or completely.

Language plays a pivotal role in discovering the gamut of an individual's beliefs, world views and lived experiences. This is because every cultural or linguistic group has a world view or belief system whose actual meanings and interpretations are preserved in the way they talk about the world, for instance, in their proverbs, folklores and idioms, which are meaningful only to those initiated into the knowledge of the language. This is an indication that the truth of expressions are relative to

the language scheme in which they are produced. Therefore, to know this truth, one needs to understand the conceptual scheme or framework surrounding the use of the language. Not to understand the conceptual scheme is not to understand the meaning of the language. In every language, therefore, there are unwritten and unspoken felicity or appropriateness conditions at work which can only be understood by those who are well acquainted with the particular language. As Ukwamedua stylishly puts it, "...people who speak the same language share the same abstract philosophical concepts" (Ukwamedua, 2001: 258).

J. R Searle shares the foregoing opinion in his critique of Austin's Speech Act Theory. Searle observes, and rightly too, that sometimes, a speaker may even express more than his utterance. According to Searle, to understand what kind of act is performed in this context would require some form of speaker's and hearers' contextual, cultural or common theoretical background, including linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. For example, a teacher may say to the students when he enters a noisy classroom; 'will you keep quiet,' and the same teacher may as well express the sentence 'May I ask your name?' Now, it must be understood that the teacher is not asking whether or not the students could be quiet neither is he trying to get permission to know the name of the person. Rather, he actually orders the students to keep quiet and on the other hand, wishes to know the name of the individual, respectively. This is why it is possible for an individual to sometimes utter a sentence and mean something else, as replete in cases when one speaks metaphorically. This informed Searle's distinction between primary illocutionary act, which is the main intention of the speaker but not spoken literally, and secondary illocutionary act which is literally uttered. It follows, therefore, that metaphorical statements or statements we count as indirect in one culture, may, in fact, be considered as direct in some other cultures, depending not on the speaker's intention but on the conventions that subsist and define the conceptual schemes of such societies. Searle was, however, quick to note that "the existence of conventions of particular languages [is] not a necessary condition for the

performance of speech acts in general" (Searle, 2002: 152). This is for the simple fact that conceptual schemes differ.

Conventions, Conceptual Incommensurability and Cross-Cultural Misjudgements

Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in terms of conventionality raises a major challenge for cross-cultural understanding and judgement of perlocutionary acts. For him, illocutionary acts are conventional while perlocutionary acts are not. A convention is a set of agreed, stipulated, or generally accepted standards, social norms, customs or traditions commonly adhered to in a society. Although most conventions, especially at the international level, are explicitly legislated, in many other cases, however, a convention usually retains the character of an "unwritten law", describing the unwritten norms and customs shared throughout a community. They are socially constructed and they reflect what is acceptable as normal behaviour in any situation among members of a group. Conventions could be linguistic, social, political, moral, ethical, or even religious. Austin, no doubt, is right about illocutionary acts because such acts are created by relying on the existence of particular conventions. As Yoshitake (2004) explains:

- A convention enables one to appoint someone in saying "I will appoint you to be chairman." Unless such a convention existed, his or her statement, "I will appoint you to be chairman," would not function properly (Yoshitake, 2004: 36-37).

However, perlocutionary acts are also convention based, as there is actually not much a speaker can do in terms of determining the acts that preclude his or her utterance. Even the listeners themselves would be guided by convention in reacting to and interpreting the illocution of the speaker. In other words, the existence of conventions of particular languages is a necessary condition for the performance of speech acts within the context of that language. As Yoshitake (2004) further explains:

The concept of convention is inevitable to explicate the mechanism of meaning-making process: When the speaker is conscious of his or her illocutionary act, the speaker certainly utilises a convention in the execution; and, for the listener to interpret the illocution of the speaker, the listener cannot help relying on a certain schema already given to him or her (Yoshitake, 2004: 37).

Such schema describes what constitute convention for the listener. But the Speech Act Theory of Austin has been too speaker-oriented because it emphasises the speaker's influence on the listener. For him, making an utterance to perform an act always involved the speaker's strategies to fulfil his or her intention. Austin thus regards action as something that one engenders. In other words, speeches, for him, are what make interactions in real life situations possible. As Benjamin Whorf elegantly puts it, "language organises experience, classifies and arranges the stream of sensory experience, thereby producing a 'world order' (cited in Hacker, 1996: 289). However, "uttering a speech act requires knowledge not only of the language but also of its appropriate use within a given culture" (Chapman & Routledge, 2009: 212). This is because "observers are not [usually] led by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar or translatable" (Hacker: 289). This implies that there is no universal idea of the meaning and use of language but a culture-dependent one.

For words to be meaningful, they must conform to the appropriateness or linguistic felicity conditions of the culture from which they originate, for what counts as felicitous in one culture may be infelicitous in another. For instance, in Western culture, when an individual says 'I promise', he or she has *ipso facto* promised and it is binding on him or her to fulfill what is promised. J. L. Austin described this with phrases like 'I am sure that' and 'I know that' in ordinary language. He said: "I know that S is P", 'is not saying I have performed a specially striking feat of cognition ...' Rather, 'when I say 'I know', I

give others my word: I give others my authority for saying that 'S is P' " (Austin, 1979: 99). In other words, when an individual says 'I know', when indeed he or she does not know, his or her utterance is described as infelicitous within the Western linguistic framework. But this is not always the case in all cultures, as there are different conceptual schemes and felicity conditions applicable to different cultures. Perlocutionary acts, therefore, which more appropriately describe the use into which language is put, depend on the conventions operational within a conceptual scheme. And the fact that conventions differ from one society to another implies that conceptual schemes cannot be commensurable across cultures and the incommensurability of conceptual schemes would always result in misfires and cross cultural misjudgements. Let us now pause to consider cases of some apparently infelicitous utterances in Western culture that are nevertheless felicitous within some African linguistic frameworks.

Among the Bini, Esan and the Okurosho people in Edo State, Nigeria, it is impolite to use the words *imahenwe* (Bini), *imarehoria* (Esan) and *imeniseweh* (Okurosho) meaning 'I don't know you' when meeting someone for the first time. 'I don't know you' is an affront and a rejection of the 'personness' of the individual. Within the linguistic frameworks of these people, it is only permissible to use such an expression in the description of objects one really does not know and not for human beings. Every individual person is known and is identified in the society as an important player in the community of beings (forces). So long as the individual has a name, he or she can easily be linked to his or her ancestry. As D. A. Masolo carefully explains, names

...give individual persons their specific positions within the 'community' of forces. By acquiring a name, every person becomes a link in the chain of forces linking the dead and the living genealogies. No one is isolated. Every person makes part of that chain of forces in nature, both active and passive" (Masolo, 1994: 51).

It is therefore infelicitous within the linguistic frameworks of these societies for anyone to say to another, 'I don't know you' even when it is

the case that he actually does not recognise the individual. The proper way to respond will be to ask for the name of the individual and then trace his or her lineage. To say to a person, 'I don't know you' will not only lead to loss of face, it is to deny the individual a place in the community of beings. So, for the Bini, the Esan and the Okurosho people of Edo State, to say to someone 'I don't know you', even when it is the case that you actually do not know him or her, is infelicitous.

Similarly, in the culture of the afore-mentioned people of Edo State, Nigeria, it is common practice to ask the person or persons next to you while eating anything to join you. The size of the food or whether one is actually willing to part with any portion of it does not really matter. What does matter is the fact that others are invited. Where this is done, people necessarily share whatever is available in love. At the same time the individual who shares with others considers it an honour or a practical display of the trust or confidence reposed in him or her by others. In this situation of invitation, however, the discretion of the invitee is very important in understanding when it is appropriate to accept or refuse an offer. It is not infelicitous for a man who has a large family, with very limited food to go round, to at the same time ask people around to join them at meals, when in actual fact, he would rather prefer that they do not honour the invitation. In such circumstances, the discretion of the one who is invited must be guided by the existing norms, standards and conventions that are operational within that conceptual scheme. Contrary to Austin's analysis, to honour the invitation would be a misfire for the invitee and not for the one who invited him with the intention or expectation that he would regard the invitation as a mere fulfilment of cultural obligation.

In the Western cultural context however, the invitation would be considered infelicitous since for them, there is nothing wrong in minding your own business with your food if you are not interested in sharing with anyone. But, for these distinct cultural groups in Nigeria, there is everything wrong with holding back the invitation as it would portend a display of greed and could be interpreted as not having the least concern for the people around.

The point of the foregoing is that there is a felicity condition in place within the conceptual schemes of these distinct groups that would make a sentence that is considered infelicitous in Western culture not to be felicitous when examined against the background of the conceptual schemes operational within these cultures. It will, therefore, be wrong to judge one culture with the rules or felicity conditions of another, indicating that it is only meaningful to speak of reality within the context of a culture's particular way of viewing the world. As Hacker explains it,

Other cultures understand reality in quite different terms from ours....[and that] to understand the thought of alien cultures, we must understand their categories of thought and the quite different forms of explanation and interpretation which they impose upon reality as they conceive it (Hacker, 1996: 289).

This challenge could however be resolved if both cultures bracket their cultural attitudes towards each other, refrain from positing and place their beliefs in inverted commas while they look into the reasons behind why the cultures foreign to them do the things they do. This is the insight brought into our analysis by submissions from the idea of phenomenological epoche and the principle of charity.

Epoche and Charity as Basis for Cross-Cultural Reconciliation

Phenomenology is a method of knowing or a description of the immediate experience that begins with the things themselves, free of our perceptions, preconceptions, interpretations and interference. In other words, it is the act of trying to experience the total reality of the consciousness of someone who experiences his or her world in a certain place and time, free of our preconceptions and interferences. The word epoché translates as 'suspension'. In its philosophical usage, it describes the theoretical moment where all judgments about the existence of the external world, and consequently all actions in the world, is suspended. Considering that our cultural filter systems may not always allow us get a clear reception of actual experience, phenomenological epoche involves blocking, bracketing, suspending or setting aside our biases, everyday understandings, theories, habitual modes of thought, judgments and

various assumptions and beliefs about a phenomenon, in order to explain the phenomenon in terms of its own inherent system of meaning or in terms of how it presents itself in the world of the participant. This is with the view that the more one pursues the nature of something, the more one is taken away from one's preconceptions and prejudices and the more also one is able to minimise interpretations of the given phenomenon.

On the other hand, 'the principle of charity', referred to by Davidson as 'the principle of rational accommodation', requires seeking to understand a point of view from its strongest, most persuasive form and, in the case of an argument, considering its best, strongest possible interpretation. In its narrowest sense, the goal of this methodological principle is to avoid attributing irrationality, logical fallacies or falsehoods to others' statements, when a coherent, rational interpretation of the statements is available. This way, the principle constrains the interpreter to maximise the truth or rationality in others' points of view.

To address the challenges of cross-cultural misjudgements occasioned by the infelicitous conditions of utterances when adjudged within the parameters of alien conceptual schemes, there will be the need to draw insights from the theoretical methods of the phenomenological epoche and the principle of charity. As a methodology, phenomenological epoche would constrain an investigator into bracketing or setting aside his or her cultural attitudes, biases, judgements and assumptions and refrain him or her from positing and imposing his or her conceptual categories upon others (Earshaw, 2006: 59). This bracketing and suspension of cultural attitude is needed, as it frees the investigator from all biases, prejudices and misconceptions against foreign cultures. But, as Linberg rightly opines, "to understand others, we must, whether we like it or not, be ready to count them right in most matters" (Lindberg, 2001: 336). The point here, as Davidson later explains it, is that charity "prompts the interpreter to maximise the intelligibility of the speaker [by taking into account]... probable errors due to bad positioning, deficient sensory apparatus, and differences in background knowledge" (Davidson, 2001: xix). Since, according to Davidson, we derive "the meanings of the sentences of a language in that

very language" (cited in Devitt & Hanley, 2006: 3), then the truth value of utterances can only be verifiable within the context of the language from which it originates, or by reference to the circumstances that produced it. It will, therefore, be irrational to believe others are irrational since they operate within a different conceptual framework. When, therefore, the methodology suggested by phenomenological epoche is complemented with the principle of charity, the investigator would then be able to interpret the lived experiences of others in the same way they would love their lived experiences to be interpreted. It is only through a combination of these methods that one is able to gain access to the very reason why people do the things they do and hold the beliefs they hold. When, therefore, we take cognisance of the fact that conceptual schemes differ, by bracketing our cultural attitudes, and of the fact that whatever claims a culture holds, is held with sufficient reasons, then we are on the threshold of resolving the problem of cross-cultural misunderstanding and of the misjudgements it engenders.

Conclusion

So far in this essay, we have examined J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory and the distinction he made between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts on the basis of convention. We argued that Austin's insistence that perlocutionary acts are not conventional, undermines the potency of customs, norms and traditions within a conceptual scheme, not only on the hearers' understanding and interpretation of illocutions but on their performance of perlocutionary acts, and is therefore not sufficient for understanding, not only the lived experiences of others, but of discovering the genuineness of their beliefs and the meanings they attribute to their use of words. Austin's disdain for the role of conventions in the performance of perlocutionary acts is responsible for the infelicities that apparently felicitous utterances in Western cultures encounter in other non-Western societies and this consequently results in the so-called misfire of utterances which further engenders the problem of cross-cultural misjudgement. The essay, however, concludes that the challenges of infelicities and misfires and the cross-cultural misjudgements that result therefrom can be overcome through the

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methodic application of phenomenological epoche, which encourages us to suspend, bracket or set aside our cultural attitudes, biases and judgements, and the principle of charity which requires that we seek to understand the point of view of others from its solidest, most persuasive form, by considering its best, strongest, possible interpretation. This is the only way the investigator can gain rational access into the lived experiences of others and in the process, discover the genuineness of their beliefs and the meanings they attribute to their use of words.

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