2014

When Words Do Things: Perlocutions and Affordances for Social Action

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1 Introduction

When my spouse once asked me "Where's the milk?" I thought that my answer "In the refrigerator" was fine. Turns out, I was less helpful than I thought I was. The intended effect of my utterance turned out to be different from what it actually brought about. This feature of utterances that is especially salient in discussions of perlocutionary acts, which are utterances that cause an effect in others (Austin 1975: 101). On the one hand, an utterance is produced by the speaker and so facts about the speaker's mental life should play an important role in understanding what perlocutions are. On the other, perlocutions are what they are because they bring things about in the world, whether the speaker likes it or not.

Gu (1993) argues that this is but one of a handful of serious problems faced by the *Received Model* (to be discussed in detail below) of Austin's theory of perlocutions. Consequently, Gu argues that Austin's theory of perlocutions requires abandonment. I argue in this paper that Austin's theoretical contributions are sound but require a different interpretation to avoid the problems Gu introduces. The interpretation I argue for — the *Social-Ecological Model* — endorses Austin's central claims about perlocutions but avoids the problems entrenched in the Received Model.

After a brief review of key features of perlocutionary acts, I introduce two key concepts from ecological psychology for fleshing out the Social-Ecological Model: attunements and affordances (Gibson 1979). In section three, I discuss some details of the Social-Ecological Model. In section four, I present Gu's objections to the Received Model and how the Social-Ecological Model handles Gu's objections.

2 Background: Perlocutions and Ecological Psychology

In this section, I'll introduce the relevant background information about Austin's theory of perlocutions and Gibson's ecological psychology for discussing the Social-Ecological Model in section 3.

2.1 Austin's theory of perlocutions

A perlocution is an utterance that produces an effect in the hearer. Austin, in lecture VIII of *How to do Things with Words*, writes:

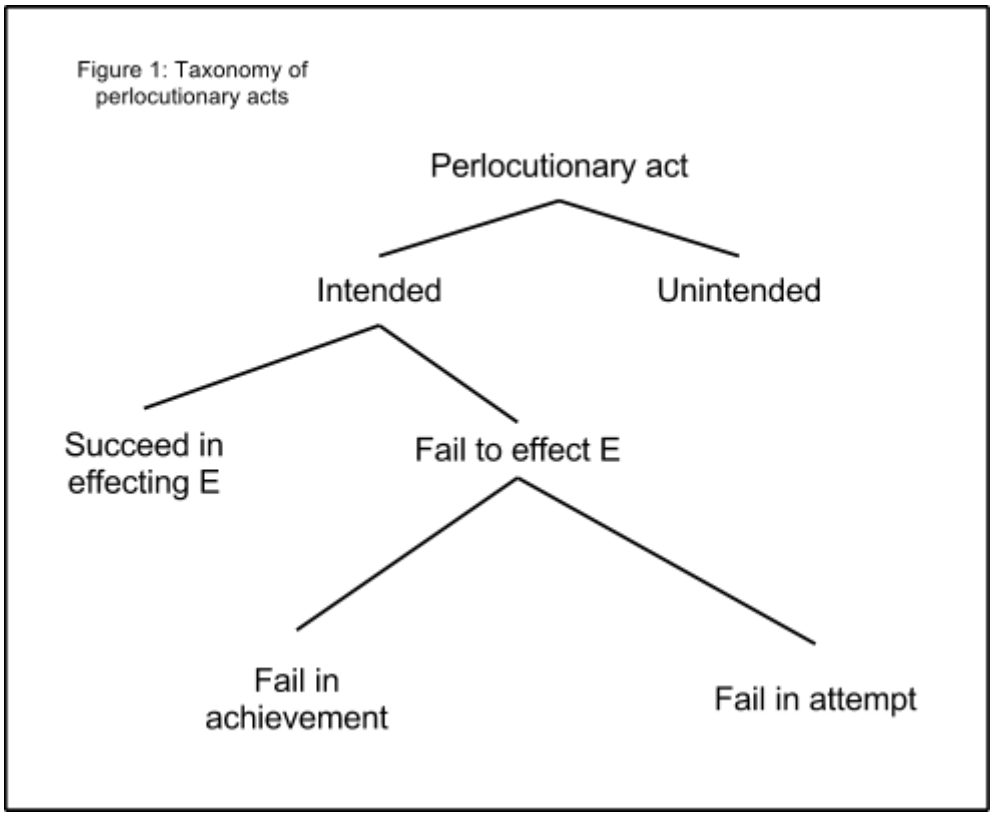
> Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them (1975: 101).

For example, I can alarm hearers by uttering "look out!" and intimidate hearers by uttering "don't make me call the police on you." Naturally, though, not any utterance can produce any effect. I can't (reasonably) expect to intimidate you by uttering "The moon is in waning gibbous"[1] nor by uttering "You are now intimidated." But we discover

[1] However, we can imagining cases where I mention that the moon is in waning gibbous and this reminds you of a threat you received previously; consequently, you are in fact intimidated as a result of my utterance. I address this point more fully below.

through interactions with social agents the sorts of utterances that do and don't intimidate. And in finding out what kinds of utterances do and don't intimidate (or alarm or whatever) communicative agents discover that perlocutionary utterances can have their effects independently of a speaker's intentions.

Austin provides a taxonomy of perlocutionary acts (see figure 1).[2]



The first division is between *intentional* and *unintentional* perlocutionary acts: When an effect E is intended, then the act is intentional; otherwise, it's unintentional. Under intentional perlocutionary acts, speakers can either *succeed* or *fail* to bring E about. But speakers can fail in two ways. First, speakers can intend to bring about E but fail in the *achievement* to bring about E. A speaker fails in her achievement to bring about E when

[2] 1975: 106.

she does everything right to bring E about but the audience simply was not cooperating at the time. For example, my utterance "Shoot him!" fails to get a hearer to act if the hearer doesn't hear me properly or fails to understand who I mean by "him." Second, speakers can intend to bring about E but fail in the *attempt* to bring about E. A speaker fails in her attempt to bring about E when she fails to do the right sorts of things that are required to bring about E. For example, suppose I intend to frighten you by saying "Health care costs in the United States will continue to balloon over the next hundred years." My utterance may cause you to be worried, but not frightened. You are frightened by all the usual sorts of things; it's just that I was wrong in what constitutes the usual sorts of things that frighten.

Two other features of perlocutions bear mentioning. First, it is characteristic of perlocutions that their effects can be achieved through non-locutionary means. I can intimidate my hearer by uttering a threat; but I can also intimidate my hearer by waving a large stick or revealing a gun tucked into my belt. Second, perlocutionary acts involve the achievement of either a perlocutionary object or a perlocutionary sequel. Perlocutionary objects are the mental states a speaker hopes to token in the audience in virtue of producing that utterance. Perlocutionary sequels are overt responses performed by the audience in virtue of the speaker's perlocutionary act.[3] On this, Austin writes,

> Thus the act of warning may achieve its perlocutionary object of alerting and also have the perlocutionary sequel of alarming…warning may produce the sequel of deterring and saying 'Don't', whose object is to deter, may produce the sequel of altering or even alarming (1975: 118).

[3] Austin, as I will discuss below, might be read to endorse a dispositional account of mental states, so it might be that perlocutionary objects specify the disposition activated in an agent in virtue of the speaker's perlocutionary act.

But the positing of both perlocutionary objects and sequels suggests what was mentioned above: that the effects of perlocutionary acts are discovered through interaction with agents in our social environment.

2.2 Attunements and affordances: basic tools of ecological psychology

Ecological psychology holds that perception, cognition, and action are part of a single trajectory. We do not, according to ecological psychology, collect information about the world, perform internal computations, and perform an action. Rather, perception and action are an engagement of the world by a "living observer," one who has aims and a world to navigate (Gibson 1979, Turvey, et al 1981). As situated and acting organisms, animals explore their environments to learn what the environment can offer them in terms of acting. And part of exploring an environment is exploiting stable patterns in our perceptual experience of the world in order to act. For example, a biotypical agent, when she walks towards a tree, will experience the tree taking up more room in her visual field, while walking away produces the opposite. Turning her head left causes the tree to shift right in the visual field; turning her head to the right causes the tree to shift left.

Just as certain sorts of movements bring about predictable changes in our perceptual field, objects support actions in predictable ways. Chairs are for sitting and occasionally standing on; mugs are for grasping; stairs are for climbing; and so on. Ecological psychologists say that objects in the world *afford* agents certain actions; agents perceive *affordances* in acting in the world (Gibson 1979). And affordances are not things that agents work out via an occult process; I do not first receive visual

information about a nearby chair and then, through various internal information-processing mechanisms, infer that the chair can be sat upon. Rather, I directly see that the chair affords sitting. The chair shows up for me as something that can be sat upon.

Affordances are relational properties holding between an object and an agent: objects afford actions for agents.[4] And for an agent to take advantage of those affordances, she must have the proper sensitivities or *attunements*. When it comes to acting in the physical world, having the right sorts of attunements means having the right sort of body and the right sort of motor programs developed in response to environmental interaction (cf. Gallagher 2005). I don't perceive a fence as climbable, for example, unless I have the right sort of body and motor capabilities to climb over the fence.

Attunements are defined (in part) in terms of affordances; and affordances are defined (in part) in terms of attunements. For an object O to afford an action A, O must afford A to an organism with relevant kinds of attunements. And to say that an organism has the relevant kinds of attunements is to say that it is attuned to the actions afforded by some object. The world shows up for relevantly attuned agents in ways that afford action by those agents, and agents are capable of perceiving those affordances because they are attuned in the relevant ways.

3 Social-Ecological Model

[4] Ecological psychologists and ecologically-minded philosophers diverge on the exact nature of affordances, cf. Chemero (2009), Turvey et al (1981), Greeno (1994), Stoffregen (2003), Jones (2003).

In this section, I briefly discuss the Social-Ecological Model of perlocutions. The Social-Ecological Model holds that a speaker S performs a perlocutionary act P when S performs those actions that afford a response by a relevantly attuned hearer H, a response that accords with the kind of response a sociolinguistically competent agent would produce. For example, my uttering "look out!" to you is a perlocutionary act of alarming when I say and do the kinds of things that afford you, as a properly attuned agent, with the kind of response that we would anticipate a sociolinguistically competent agent to perform. More succinctly, my utterance is an act of alarming when I do and say what reasonable people in my speech community would describe as an act of alarming. In the next sections, I discuss the notions of social affordances and attunements as well as providing examples to flesh out the Social-Ecological Model.

3.1 Social affordances

The social world is a relatively stable domain.[5] We saw in §2.2 that objects afford actions and agents directly perceive those affordances. Similarly, socially salient objects afford social responses, and agents directly perceive those affordances for social response. And just as organisms are attuned to affordances in the physical world, organisms are attuned to affordances in the social world, to *social affordances*.[6] Social affordances point to responses available to an agent in a social environment. Ordinary examples abound: a

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[5] Cf. Noë (2009), H. Clark (1996), Ryle (1949)

[6] 'Social affordances' is, in some ways, an unfaithful use of the term 'affordance.' However, its use is gaining traction in the ecological community (cf. Heft 2001, 2007; McArthur and Baron 1983; Costall 1995; Good 2007). I will use 'social affordance' to highlight the continuity between my social-ecological model and the ecological psychology enterprise, even though the connections between social and physical affordances are still hazy.

$20 note affords exchanging for goods and services, an outstretched hand affords shaking, a Duchenne smile affords approachability, and a greeting affords similarly greeting the speaker.

There are two points to make here about social affordances. The first point is that that they afford *responses* to the social environment, as opposed to affordances in the physical environment affording *actions*. The reason for the shift is that we social agents are complex and may not overtly respond to social stimuli: if a speaker says something to hurt my feelings, I may not take that as an opportunity to tell the speaker that my feelings are hurt.[7] But still I am not senseless or inert in this situation; it's not a though *nothing* happens to me. So to capture the idea that social stimuli can affect us but not move us to act, I say that social affordances afford responses rather than actions.

The second point is that social affordances show up for us as social.[8] The social world is not inferred from the perception of socially-neutered things but is directly perceived by the relevantly attuned agents. For example when we engage others in conversation, we pick up on and respond to the things that they say and the way they say it—your saying "Hello," "Watch where you're stepping!" or "Can I buy you a drink?" is what I perceive and respond to. Obviously in communication, what agents say and how they say it requires the expulsion of air from the lungs that's shaped by the vocal folds. But these biological details are irrelevant to us most of the time. I'm not interested in how the lungs compress to force air from your mouth; I am interested in your greeting, annoyed mutter, or offer for a drink. So while the uttering of noises may be the

[7] A related problem discussed in the literature is why agents take advantage of some affordances for action and not others, see Gibson (1979).
[8] Cf. Heft (2007)

product of the movements of vocal organs, the uttering of a word is *not* the consequence of the uttering of a noise (cf. Austin 1975; Strawson 1985). We do not merely utter noises at one another in our social worlds; we tell jokes, request information, utter commands, give instruction, use pick-up lines, demand apologies, greet, tell stories, and so on—acting, gesticulating, and modulating the pitch and volume of our voices all the while. These are the kinds of things that show up in our social worlds, and these are the kinds of things that afford social action.

Social affordances, then, identify those features of the social world that offer responses to social agents. They show up for us as constituting the social world. But not just anyone can pick up on any social affordances, agents have to have develope the right sorts of attunements to pick up on the relevant social affordances. It is to attunements to social affordances that we now turn.

3.2 Attunements to social affordances

Agents' capacities to pick up on social affordances—our capacity to pick up on social cues for social action—depends on phylogenetic dispositions shaped during ontogeny. We are disposed towards sensitivity to social information[9] and our sensitivities are shaped throughout our lifetime.

Ontogenetically, we are inducted into various social practices and learn how to socially interact with others and objects. Ontogenetic development of attunements is directed by members of the developing agent's social community in a process called

[9] For a sampling of the vast literature on infant studies of social cognition, see: Tomasello and Carpenter (2007), Tomasello (1999, 2008), Tomasello, Carpenter, Lizkowski (2007), Seemann (2012) and Trevarthen (1979).

guided attunement (Heft 2007). For example, when I hand a toy to a baby, I not only draw the baby's attention to the object; I draw attention to how it is engaged. I shake the rattle, bang the drum, or squeeze the rubber ducky. And it is through guided attunement that children are taught ways of interacting with their environments.

Children are, of course, taught ways of communicatively interacting with their environments. For example, when Uncle Joe gives little Suzette a birthday present, Suzette's parents prompt Suzette to say "thank you." And if Suzette wants Uncle Joe to pass her the salt during dinner, Suzette is reminded to say "please" when performing her request. These ways of interacting with children in a social environment is a way of guiding them to say the appropriate things at the appropriate times.[10] And these are but two small examples of guided attunement in communicative interaction: children are taught through engagement with others in their social environment how to respond to social stimuli. That is to say: children develop attunements to social affordances. And when children have developed the attunements that are accepted by their community, they are *sociolinguistically competent* members of their communities.

Because different sociolinguistic communities adhere to different norms, individuals develop different attunements in virtue of being members of different sociolinguistic communities. I may take myself to be speaking ironically and believe myself to convey that through my tone of voice. You, however, may miss my cues of ironic intent and take me to be speaking sincerely. So I might utter, "That was a smart idea" anticipating that you will pick up on my ironic tone of voice. If you are not attuned

[10] Of course, not all language learning is of this explicit sort. Children frequently pick up on social and linguistic norm without being explicitly taught (Aitchison 2008).

to the cues by which I intend for you to pick up on my sarcastic intent, you may take me to be speaking sincerely. What I take to be clearly rolling my eyes in exasperation, you may take to be an unimportant eye-movements. My hyperbole you read as only slight overstatement.

3.3 Examples illustrating the Social-Ecological Model

I've said in §§3.1 and 3.2 that social affordances point to ways in which we can interact with the social environment, and that agents can pick up on social affordances in virtue of having the right sorts of attunements. And recall how the Social-Ecological Model defines perlocutions: a speaker S performs a perlocutionary act P when S performs those actions that afford a response by a relevantly attuned hearer H, a response that accords with the kind of response a sociolinguistically competent agent would produce. We are now in a position to see how the Social-Ecological Model describes an instance of warning a hearer.

If I am to perform a perlocutionary act of warning, then I do the kinds of things that a sociolinguistically competent agent recognizes as warning people, which means doing the kinds of things relevantly attuned agents pick up on as affording a response of warning: I shout "Look out!" in a loud voice, I wave my arms and hands to get my hearer's attention, I point to the source of danger. Perhaps no one of these individually might warn my hearer; but, being a sociolinguistically competent agent, I know the kinds of things I need to do and say to bring off the perlocutionary act of warning. These actions together afford my hearer a response of being warned, of doing the sorts of

things one does in response to being warned: shouting, gasping, turning, running away. If my hearer doesn't have the relevant attunements and she fails to pick up on my act of warning, it does not necessarily follow that I have completely failed to perform a perlocutionary act of warning. I performed the sort of act that would warn a properly attuned agent, even if such an agent is not present to me; that is, I have failed in achievement (see figure 1, above).

Here are four examples to illustrate the Social-Ecological Model, some of which point to interesting extensions of the theory of perlocutions and future research to be done with the Social-Ecological Model.

3.3.1 Getting to obey

Ahmed and Ben, competent members of the same sociolinguistic community, are making dinner. Ahmed utters to Ben, "Mince two cloves of garlic," and Ben subsequently finds two cloves of garlic and minces them.

Ahmed got Ben to mince two cloves of garlic by means of the utterance "mince two cloves of garlic." On the Social-Ecological Model, Ben picked up on those social actions afforded him by Ahmed's utterance in virtue of being properly attuned as a competent member of the sociolinguistic community. Another way of putting the matter is to say that Ben picked up on the right sort of move to make in the ongoing social interaction.

3.3.2 Frightening

Catherine and Donald have been married for seven years. After a nasty row, Catherine says to Donald, “I’m leaving you.” Donald is frightened as a result of Catherine’s utterance. Catherine's utterance afforded Donald the response of being frightened and Donald picked up on that social affordance.

This case is similar to the previous one of getting to obey insofar as a speaker's utterance has an effect on the hearer. But we also see how it is interestingly different: Catherine's utterance had the effect of frightening Donald. But, following what I mentioned above in §3.1, some responses to perlocutions don’t involve overt actions, and Donald’s being frightened is just such a case.

This points to a relevant difference between cases like that of Catherine and Donald (being frightened) and Ahmed and Ben (getting to obey). Some perlocutionary acts invite a response that the responding agent elects to perform—just as Ben elects to mince the garlic. Other perlocutionary acts invite a response that agents typically do not elect to perform, like becoming frightened, feeling elated, or shouting when startled.

This suggests another dimension along which to taxonomize perlocutionary acts — see figure 2. The new dimension falls under the branch for an intended, successful perlocution. When the intended act succeeds in producing some effect, the response by the hearer is either elected or unelected.

3.3.3 Unintentional perlocutionary acts

Eleanore and Francois are talking about a recent party they attended. Eleanore says, “That party was an unmitigated bore.” Francois is subsequently amused, but Eleanore never intended for her utterance to be taken as amusing.

Unintentional perlocutionary acts highlight the commonplace that our utterances can bring about effects independently of our intentions: Though Eleanore didn’t intend for her utterance to amuse Francois, it amused him nonetheless. But rather than think about this as something out of the ordinary, the Social-Ecological Model regards such cases as uncovering something new and interesting about the sociolinguistic communities of which we are a part. We discover the effects our utterances have on the social world.

Even though Eleanore didn't foresee that her utterance would amuse Francois, she has now discovered that it does. Just as we often discover new uses for old items, Eleanore has discovered a new use for this old utterance.

In discovering a new use for an old utterance—that is, in discovering an unexpected affordance manifested by an agent's utterance—there is no ontological difference, between intentional and unintentional perlocutionary utterances. It's not as though one does not have something that the other lacks:[11] both are utterances manifesting social affordances. The difference between intentional and unintentional perlocutionary acts is epistemic, in knowing how the hearer will respond to the utterance. What makes intentional and unintentional perlocutions different is what the speaker knows about how her audience will react. Unintentional perlocutionary acts do not fail to be speech acts because they fail to have some appropriate intention (cf. Sbisà 2002: 422). The focus is not on the intentions of individuals but rather on the "total speech act situation" (Austin 1975: 148): affordances situated in the environment and picked up by appropriately attuned social agents. And if the total speech act situation is one in which the hearer picks up on affordances to which the speaker is not attuned, then it only means that the speaker wasn't aware of some way to which her hearer would respond.

Unintentional perlocutionary utterances on the Social-Ecological Model are like unforeseen moral consequences of our actions: a doctor may end up harming someone in her attempt to help. The *wrong* description says that the doctor helped or hurt

[11] Ryle (1949) makes a similar distinction regarding intentional and unintentional behaviors.

simpliciter; for the doctor *anticipated* that her action would help but it instead ended up killing the patient. The *right* description says that the doctor tried to help, but ended up hurting, the patient; the doctor neither helped nor harmed *simpliciter* but only helped or harmed in a qualified way. The same can be said for unintentional perlocutionary utterances: I anticipated that my utterance "the moon is in waning gibbous" would get my hearer to believe that the moon is in waning gibbous; however, I neither got her to believe nor alarmed her *simpliciter*.

3.3.4 Self-directed perlocutionary acts

The Social-Ecological Model claims that utterances afford social responses to the properly attuned agents. Anecdotal evidence suggests that we can affect our own behavior and through self-directed utterances: sometimes we get ourselves excited by talking about some upcoming event; we calm ourselves down through talking out a solution to a stressful problem; we sometimes convince ourselves in our attempts to convince others.

Research in psychology supports the intuitions underlying the anecdotal evidence. For example, Behrend, Rosengrend, and Perlmutter (1989) suggest that children's private speech is self-regulatory, that children talk to themselves to aid in the completion of a difficult puzzle. Self-directed utterances have the effect of helping the child to complete the puzzle.

Another example of self-directed perlocutionary acts, found in the implicit social cognition literature, is an implementation intention. An implementation intention is used

to help an agent follow through on her plans to achieve some goal in critical situations. They have the structure "Whenever situation x arises, I will initiate the goal-directed response y!" (Gollwitzer 1999; Gawronski and Payne 2010). For example, if I have as a goal eating more healthily, simply saying to myself “I want to eat better” is not helpful in those critical times when I am most tempted. What does help is saying to myself “Whenever I see cake, I will eat fruit instead!” Utterances specifying concrete actions can help change my behavior under certain circumstances—that is, implementation intentions are self-directed perlocutionary acts.

The Social-Ecological Model of perlocutions has a ready account of self-directed perlocutionary acts. We are attuned to the social affordances of our own utterances: we can pick up on appropriate responses from the utterances we produce. We can do this knowingly when (for example) we tell ourselves that we're going to hit a homerun before going up to bat. And we can do this unknowingly when we recite the instructions of a recipe to help add the right ingredients in the right order. We can—with still-to-be-discovered limitations—affect our attitudes and behaviors by our own utterances.

4 The Received Model

I’ve spent the past two sections of this paper unpacking my favored account: the Social-Ecological Model of perlocutions. But one common way of unpacking the concept of perlocutions is by appeal to the effect of the utterance. On this account, what makes my

utterance of "Look out!" an act of alarming my hearer is that it does, in fact, alarm my hearer.

Gu (1993) analyzes this account of perlocutionary acts—what he calls the *Received Model*—in detail. He writes (1993: 406) that a speaker is attributed with the performance of a perlocutionary act when:

> (1) S says something to H;
> (2) H is affected in a certain way; and
> (3) that H is affected in a certain way is treated as a consequential effect of S's saying something. [12]

Claim (2) entails two theses: the *Multiplicity Thesis* and the *Infinity Thesis* (1993: 407). The Multiplicity Thesis holds that some speech act may produce multiple effects. The Infinity Thesis holds that the possible consequences emerging from any speech act are nearly limitless; there are no clear limits on what can be intended or achieved by some speech act. Claim (3) entails the *Causation Thesis*: the speaker's saying something *causes* the hearer to be affected in some way.

The *Intention Irrelevance Thesis* holds that attributions of perlocutionary acts to speakers is independent of the speaker's intentions. This follows from the point previously made that perlocutionary acts can be brought off independently of the speaker's intentions.

Gu claims that the Received Model is the conjunction of (1) Multiplicity, (2) Infinity, (3) Causation, and (4) Intention Irrelevance. And, as Gu argues, the Received Model is riddled with problems, the two most serious being with the Causation Thesis and the conjunction of Multiplicity, Infinity, and Intention Irrelevance. These problems

[12] Compare with Levinson (1983: 237-8).

are so serious, Gu contends, that they merit jettisoning the Received Model, and hence most of Austin's theory of perlocutions.

I argue that Gu hastily infers that the Received Model follows from the conjunction of (1)-(4) and prematurely jettisons Austin's account of perlocutions. The Social-Ecological Model, by contrast with the Received Model, endorses each of (1)-(4), but under interpretations different from those of Gu, thereby avoiding the problems Gu identifies.[13]

4.1 Problems for the Received Model

The first of Gu's arguments against the Received Model focuses on Causation. He argues that the relation between utterance U and perlocutionary effect E is misleadingly described as "causal." After considering a variety of interpretations for the claim "x causes y," Gu argues that under no condition do we find that U is a necessary or sufficient condition for E. But the Causation Thesis entails that U is the cause for E. Consequently, the Causation Thesis is wrong and merits rejection.

The second of Gu's arguments against the Received Model is the conjunction of Multiplicity, Intention Irrelevance, and Infinity, which generates the *Effect=Act Fallacy*. The thrust of the Effect=Act Fallacy is that speakers end up being unjustly saddled with bizarre perlocutionary acts. Suppose I intend to warn someone by saying "The boss is coming to see you." Instead of alerting the person, my utterance causes the person to take a swig of bourbon. The Infinity Thesis holds that a perlocutionary utterance could

[13] Though lacking space to address the issue here, I think the Social-Ecological Model fits well with Sbisà's (2002, 2007) interpretation of Austin.

have any number of consequences, including causing an agent to swig bourbon. The Multiplicity Thesis holds that an utterance can cause more than one effect, so my utterance can have the effect of alarming and causing the hearer to swig bourbon. And the Intention Irrelevance Thesis holds that my intentions are irrelevant in considering what kind of perlocutionary act I perform. Putting all three together, we find that my utterance "the boss is coming to see you" was a perlocutionary act of getting my associate to take a swig of bourbon.

Intuitively, though, this seems wrong. When I utter "the boss is coming to see you," my act is not one of getting my hearer to swig bourbon—I am informing and alerting, not getting my hearer to drink. If I wanted to do that, I might utter "drink this now!" Surely my speech act isn't defined *entirely* by consequences outside my control. And surely my intentions play *some* role (even if not a controlling one) in what kinds of perlocutionary acts I perform. But since the Received Model leads us down the garden path to such absurdities, Gu argues, it merits rejection.

4.2 Intention Irrelevance and the Social-Ecological Model

The Received Model holds that intentions are irrelevant. Agents can perform a perlocutionary act independently of whether they intended to perform that act, as indicated by the taxonomy in figure 1: unintended perlocutions are still perlocutions.

On the Social-Ecological Model, intentions are not irrelevant to the identity of a perlocutionary act. Suppose I said to my associate *not* "the boss is coming to see you" but rather "the moon is in waning gibbous tonight." Suppose further that my associate is

caught off-guard by the arrival of the boss and subsequently scolded for goofing off during company time. My associate consequently reprimands me for not saying something. I might protest, saying “But I *told* you ‘the moon is in waning gibbous tonight’! Why didn't you look busy for the boss?” Surely this kind of a response is absurd. My associate might likely stare at me with a puzzled sort of a look, and rightly so. In our sociolinguistic community, one cannot, all other things being equal, warn someone with an utterance of “the moon is waning gibbous.” I can’t say just anything and expect my hearer to be alarmed.

But what then does the Social-Ecological Model say about the seeming irrelevance of intentions to perlocutionary utterances? Recall that on the Social-Ecological Model, the difference between intended and unintended effects is epistemic, not ontological. Insofar as I intend to bring about certain effects by means of my perlocutionary act, I have to grasp how a sociolinguistically competent agent would respond to my act. Even if some effects are unexpected, it doesn’t follow that my intention is irrelevant; it only follows that I there was some effect that I didn’t predict would come about.

It”s worth noting that the foregoing discussion fits with Austin's analysis of intentions in “Three Ways of Spilling Ink.” He describes intentions as like a miner’s headlamp: to say of an agent that her action is intentional is to say that she had a sense of what would come about as a result of her action. But just as the miner’s headlamp only illuminates an area in front of the miner and not the whole of the cave, intention-ascriptions throw light on what the agent immediately foresaw but not on everything that could come about as a result of the agent's utterance: “Whatever I am

doing is being done and to be done amidst a background of *circumstances*...This is what necessitates *care*, to ward off impingements, upsets, accidents. Furthermore, the doing of it will involve *incidentally* all kinds of minutiae..." (1970: 284-285). An agent performs a speech act intentionally with limited knowledge of what will come about as a result of her action. Inability to foresee some consequence does not entail ascription of responsibility for that consequence.

4.3 Causation and the Social-Ecological Model

Perlocutionary acts produce effects in the hearer; Catherine's uttering "I'm leaving you" *causes* Donald to feel frightened. Gu implicitly assumes that the only notion of cause that is relevant is that of *efficient* cause: some perlocutionary utterance causes a perlocutionary sequel just as a bat striking a baseball cases the ball to fly.

But, contrary to Gu's assumption about the relevant notion of cause[14], we are interested in how Catherine's utterance is a *reason* for Donald to respond with feelings of fright. Consequently, we might do well to explore other varieties of cause to explain Donald's response to Catherine's utterance. [15] The Social-Ecological Model claims that a better model for understanding how an utterance causes a response in a hearer is that of *final causation*: the speaker produces some utterance in order to bring something about.

[14] Gu (1993: 413) distinguishes between physical and verbal-influential causes. But his analysis of verbal-influential causation suggests that the causal relations are largely the same. He writes that the Received Model is "incapable of explaining cases where U is not followed by R. That is, it cannot explain why U fails to cause R" (420). The need to explain failures of strict regularities is expected in, say, chemistry: why did material M combust under these conditions but not those? However, it's not clear that that is the only notion of cause at work in, say, sociolinguistics or linguistic anthropology.

[15] On a related point, Grice (1989: 221) writes, "...for *x* to have meaningNN, the intended effect must be something which in some sense is within the control of the audience, or that in some sense of 'reason' the recognitin of the intention behind *x* is for the audience a reason and not merely a cause."

[16] Part of picking up on social affordances is making the right sort of response in the social context; pick up of social affordances is *action-oriented*. And we produce social affordances with the expectation that they will be picked up in a specific way by our audience. So our perlocutions are performed on the understanding that it will bring about desired ends. The hearer recognizes my aim in performing the perlocution when she picks up of the affordances manifested in that perlocutionary act. For to perceive the affordances *is* to produce the relevant sort of response in virtue of being rightly attuned.

The Social-Ecological Model modifies the Causation Thesis so that the notion of cause at work is final cause and not efficient cause. And final causes need not have the kind of strict regularity expected with efficient causes. Consequently, it is not misleading to say that a perlocutionary utterance causes a response, provided that one is talking about *final cause*.

4.4 Infinity and the Social-Ecological Model

Ready-to-hand examples—like my bourbon-swilling co-worker in the above example—suggest that nearly any kind of response can be given to any kind of perlocutionary utterance. But in the majority of our everyday, humdrum social interactions, we are fairly good at predicting the effects of our utterance. As mentioned previously, I can't reasonably expect you to be frightened by my utterance "the moon is waning gibbous tonight." If you *were* frightened, then that would be an exceptional case.

[16] See Juarrero 1999, Scheman 2000, Jaworski 2011, Legrenzi and Umilità 2011, for relevant discussions about distinctions among causes.

The Social-Ecological Model holds that a wide array of responses are available to perlocutionary utterances, but that some are more typical than others. Uttering "the moon is in waning gibbous" *may* cause alarm, but that's not the typical response. So the Social-Ecological Model recognizes that there is a large multitude of effects emerging from a perlocutionary utterance; but it also recognizes that some consequences are more typical than others. Not all perlocutionary sequels are on a par and our theory of perlocutions need not treat them as such.

Consequently, the Social-Ecological Model holds that the Infinity Thesis needs to be amended to read: a perlocutionary act has a finite set of typical responses, but under this set can expand limitlessly with highly specific contextual conditions.

4.5 Social affordance theory of perlocutions vs. the Received Model

In modifying three of the four theoretical commitments Gu identifies in Austin's theory, we see that the Social-Ecological Model thereby avoids the pitfalls of the Received Model. This suggests that the theory of perlocutions given in *How to do Things with Words* is basically right; all that's missing is a proper account of the underlying mechanisms by which perlocutions are brought off. And that proper account is offered by the Social-Ecological Model: a speaker S performs a perlocutionary act P when S performs those actions that afford a response by a relevantly attuned hearer H that is in accordance with the kind of response a sociolinguistically competent agent would reasonably produce. This model provides a way to interpret Austin's theory to avoid Gu's worries.

Though lacking space to explore the matter here, another issue is whether the Social-Ecological Model reasonably approximates what Austin had in mind, what Austin *really* meant. Relatedly, Sbisà's (2002, 2007) reading of Austin fits well with the Social-Ecological Model. Sbisà emphasizes that Austin's speech act theory is, in fact a theory about speech *acts*—that speaking is a variety of action and an account of it ought to be suitably grounded in the day-to-day interactions of situated social agents. The Social-Ecological Model likewise emphasizes the that utterances are a variety of situated social action and ought to be understood along the same lines as other situated social actions.

5 Conclusions

I have offered in this paper a novel account of Austin's theory of perlocutions. Perlocutionary acts manifest social affordances for response that are picked up by properly attuned social agents. This account avoids problems with the Received Model while pointing towards novel areas for research (e.g. self-directed perlocutions) within speech act theory.

There are at least two open questions to be addressed. First, it seems as though illocutions might count as perlocutions in the social affordance framework: illocutions like "I christen this ship the *Mr. Stalin*" might then count as perlocutions since it manifests a social affordance to which hearers are likely attuned. Second, a full explication of the social affordance framework ought also address how it is that hearers pick up on some

affordances rather than others: the same utterance might amuse or offend but what marks the difference in why hearers respond one way or another?

These questions do not cripple the theory but only point towards more work to be done. The Social-Ecological Model has a great deal of explanatory power and avoids many of the liabilities connected with the Received Model. Independently of what Austin intended in his work, the Social-Ecological Model offers a framework that might well bear much fruit.[17]

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[17] Thanks to the participants of the J.L. Austin Centenary Conference for helpful feedback on this paper, especially Marina Sbisà and Gordon Bearne. Thanks to Brian Garvey for help in clarifying several passages and to Jada Strabbing for discussion of related issues.

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