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VARIOUS USES OF LANGUAGE—J. L. AUSTIN

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Abstract

In this paper I like to show the different uses of language as shown by J. L. Austin in his book- *How to do things with words*. Austin's constative- performative dichotomy and his theory of speech-act are landmarks in the philosophy of language. Our language is very rich – it's subtle distinctions are noteworthy. Its' uses are variegated. Language has variety of functions. Its' function is not exhausted in describing facts. The traditional philosophers like the logical positivists assume that the language has only one function - that is to represent facts. That is, statements are supposed to describe facts which should be either true or false. Expressions like questions, commands, exclamations, wishes etc. are thrown out from the purview of statement. For they neither describe facts nor can be said to be either true or false. According to them, such statements are pseudo statements. Against this Austin observes that there are certain sentences like — 'I name this ship Queen Elizabeth.' and 'I bet you six pence.', 'It will rain tomorrow.' are meaningful. These utterances are called performative utterance. These kinds of utterances are neither true nor false and at the same time not nonsensical. Such utterances, Austin calls 'performatives' as distinguished from constatives. They not only say something but do something. That is to say they do not describe or report any fact and are thus not true or false. But the distinction between constative and performatives fails because constatives at times behaves like performatives and vice versa. Hence, Austin looked out to distinguish utterances in another way and give his theory of speech -act, which initiates a new direction in the philosophy of language. Evaluation has been made as to how much his theory is tenable. However, through his theory Austin has shown how language is intimately related with our life . He wants to show how language works in a particular situation, i.e. he points out the active application of language in a particular situation.

Key words: Language, uses, performatives, constatives, speech-act, meaningful etc.