"I Asked You to Mail that Letter, not to Burn It," An Illocutionary Logical Analysis of Directive Acts and Arguments

JOHN T KEARNS

Abstract: *Illocutionary logic* is the logic of speech acts, or language acts. The "units" of significant speech are *illocutionary acts*, which are typically constituted by someone's using a sentence or sentential clause to perform a certain job, like making an assertion or denial, giving an order, or making a promise. To use that sentence or clause to say something meaningful is to perform a *locutionary act*, and to perform the locutionary act in a certain manner, or with a certain force which determines what job is carried out is to perform an illocutionary act. The most familiar logical theories focus on *statements*, which are *assertive locutionary acts*, though there are also theories of the *assertive illocutionary arguments* which are composed from assertions, denials, and suppositions. A *directive illocutionary act* orders, or requests, or recommends that its addressee perform or not perform a certain action. A *directive locutionary act* is a *plan*, like "Mark, close the door," which is performed with a suitable force to constitute the illocutionary act. Just as there are logical theories of assertive locutionary acts and assertive illocutionary acts and arguments, so there are (or can be) logical theories of directive locutionary acts and directive illocutionary acts and arguments. This paper explores some features of directive acts and arguments.

Keywords: speech act, language act, speech act logic, illocutionary acts, illocutionary arguments, directive acts, illocutionary logic

1 Illocutionary Acts

Illocutionary logic is a study of speech acts, or language acts, and of arguments composed from language acts. A speech act, or language act, is a meaningful act that someone performs by saying something, or writing something, or thinking something using words and sentences. *Illocutionary acts* are one kind of language act, such an act is typically one in which

someone uses a sentence or sentential clause to perform a certain job, like making a promise or making a request, threatening someone or giving her advice, asserting that something is the case, or asking someone what time it is.

Illocutionary acts are the "units" of speech or language, they are the complete, concrete language acts that people perform when they address or write to one another, or when they are thinking things through for themselves. Assertions, denials, and acts of supposing a statement to be the case, or not to be the case, are illocutionary acts; they are examples of *assertive illocutionary acts*. A straightforward assertion might be constituted by someone's using a sentence to represent things being a certain way, accepting that this is how things are. A person can make an assertion when she is alone, or she can address her assertion to someone else, endorsing the statement that she asserts.

Assertive illocutionary acts are one of the five categories of illocutionary acts in John Searle's taxonomy (this is found in Searle (1969) and Searle (1985)). *Directive (illocutionary) acts* constitute another category. A person who *orders* someone else to carry out some action, or who *asks* the someone else to carry it out, or who *advises* that someone to carry it out, is performing a *directive* illocutionary act. Directive acts are sometimes confused with imperatives, but orders, or commands, are only one kind of directive act. What gives these acts their directive character is their being designed and intended to get the addressee to do or not do something. Directive acts require an addressee. You can't ask someone to pass the salt if there is no someone there.

The third category of illocutionary acts that I will consider here are *commissives*. The person who performs a commissive illocutionary act commits herself to perform, or to refrain from performing, some further act, ordinarily a non-illocutionary act. Promises may be the most well-known kind of commissive act, but if I say to myself, or someone else, "I think I'll get a bottle of beer from the refrigerator in the basement," I have committed myself to act without promising anything to anyone. Like assertive acts, a commissive act may or may not have an addressee, though promises seem to be an exception to this. People make promises to other people. Searle's two other categories of illocutionary acts are *expressives* and *declarations*, but they aren't closely linked to the topics I am discussing in this paper.

2 Locutionary Acts

Upon analysis, a relatively straightforward illocutionary act can be recognized to be constituted by performing another language act, a *locutionary act*, with a certain *force*, or in a certain *manner*. The force or manner determines the "job" the speaker is carrying out by performing the locutionary act. (The 'locutionary,' 'illocutionary' terminology is due to Austin, and is explained in Austin (1965).)

John Searle (in Searle (1969) and Searle (1985)) has objected to locutionary acts, either because they don't exist or, if they do exist, because they are simply abstract components of the concrete illocutionary acts that people perform. They are not abstract in the way that numbers, properties, and propositions are abstract, but are abstract by being "what is left" if we (mentally) subtract from an illocutionary act the force which gives that act its distinctive character. Although a locutionary act can be performed, on its own, to illustrate locutionary acts, it is true that ordinarily these acts are abstract components of illocutionary acts. But so what? Assertive locutionary acts are the focus of much logical research, and semantic features of these acts play an important role in determining the logically important features of assertive illocutionary acts.

I use the word 'statement' for the locutionary acts that are used to perform assertive illocutionary acts. These statements are typically performed with sentences or sentential clauses, are appropriately evaluated in terms of truth and falsity, and can, among other things, be asserted or denied or supposed to be true, or to be false. For someone to make a simple factual assertion is for her to produce or perform a statement, accepting that statement for representing or presenting things as they are. In denying a statement, a person is not asserting the negation of the statement being denied, instead, the speaker *rules out* the statement's assertion, because the statement fails to represent or present things as they are.

It is much more common, and idiomatic, to deny that Milwaukee is in Illinois by saying:

(1) Milwaukee is not in Illinois.

than it is to use this rather long-winded (and pompous or pretentious) sentence to make a denial:

(2) I deny that Milwaukee is in Illinois.

Sentence (1) can be used (on different occasions) to perform language acts having different structures, but I think it is most common to use (1) to make what used to be called a *judgment of division*. The 'not' functions as an illocutionary force-indicating expression by separating, or dividing, the act of referring to Milwaukee from the act of predicating 'is in Illinois.' The 'not' is used to rule out the assertion that Milwaukee is in Illinois by blocking the formation of the statement 'Milwaukee is in Illinois.'

While sentence (1) might be used naturally to block the assertion of the statement "Milwaukee is in Illinois" without formulating that statement, the speaker who uses sentence 2 to make her denial explicitly produces the statement whose assertion she rules out.

Positive and negative suppositions occur commonly in arguments by natural deduction. Supposing a statement to be true is like temporarily accepting that statement, and supposing one to be false is like temporarily blocking or impeding the positive supposition of the statement. In deductive arguments especially, it is common both to introduce and to discharge suppositions.

The locutionary acts used to constitute positive directives are (second-person) *plans*, like this:

> "Mark, please get up from your seat and close the door."

The plan represents the addressee as carrying out, or performing, the directed action. If the addressee does carry out the directed action, he has *implemented* the plan. But in order to implement a plan, the addressee must *intend* to perform the action involved. If Mark stumbles and accidentally knocks the door shut, he has not implemented the plan "Mark, please close the door."

Just as statements can be asserted or denied, so someone can be directed to implement a plan or to refrain from implementing that plan. The speaker who says to Mark, "Don't open that window" is not directing Mark to implement a negative plan, instead he is trying to block, or *rule out*, Mark's implementing the positive plan of opening the window. While a statement is *satisfied* if it is true, a plan is *satisfied* if it is *implemented*.

For commissives, the locutionary acts are first-person plans like "Michael, I will meet you at the Andrews Theater at 7:45 tonight." This plan represents the speaker as carrying out the action that she commits herself to perform. It is *implemented* if she does meet Michael at the theater at 7:45.

There is an important connection between directive acts and commissive acts. For a speaker's directive act "Mark, please close the door" to be suc-

cessful, several things need to happen: Mark must hear, and understand, the speaker, Mark must agree to implement the speaker's plan, and Mark must close the door *in order* to implement that plan. If Mark makes his agreement explicit, he performs a commissive illocutionary act. Even if Mark agrees without saying anything, or thinking any words, Mark's agreement *commits* him to close the door–in such a case we might regard him as tacitly, or "in effect," performing a commissive act.

3 Assertive Locutionary and Illocutionary Arguments

Locutionary and illocutionary acts occur in arguments of different kinds. An assertive *locutionary argument* is an ordered pair whose first member is a set of statements, the *premisses*, and whose second member is a single statement, the *conclusion*. An assertive locutionary argument is *valid* if the premisses entail the conclusion, and is *logically* valid if the premisses *entail* the conclusion on the basis of the logical forms of premisses and conclusion–in that case, the premisses *imply* the conclusion. Familiar logical systems focus on statements, locutionary arguments, and on semantic features of statements that can be traced to their logical forms.

To (informally) represent an assertive locutionary argument from premisses A, B, C to conclusion D, I will use the following:

$$< \{\ A, B.C\ \}, D >$$

The ordered-pair notation and the braces are intended to show that the argument which is represented involves sets, and so is an abstraction which a person can represent and evaluate, but is not an argument which a person can make or address to someone else.

An *assertive illocutionary argument* is one that someone does make, by reasoning from assertive illocutionary act premisses to a conclusion of that same kind. Here is a simple example:

> Washington, D.C. is the capital of the United States or else Philadelphia is the capital. Philadelphia isn't the capital. So it must be Washington, D.C. which is the US capital.

If this were a serious argument that someone makes, the premisses and the conclusion would be assertions.

Deductive illocutionary arguments depend on *rational commitment*, which is a person's commitment to do or not do something, or a commitment to

remain in a certain state, like that of accepting a given statement. Making a decision to carry out a given action rationally commits a person to carry out that action. Performing some intentional acts can rationally commit a person to perform others. Rational commitment is either immediate or mediate. A person's immediate commitments are evident to her if she gives the matter her attention, but if performing act X_1 will immediately commit Anne to perform act X_2, and performing X_2 will immediately commit her to perform X_3,..., and performing X_{n-1} will immediately commit her to perform X_n, then performing X_1 may only *mediately* commit her to perform X_n. A person's mediate commitments may not be evident to her.

Rational commitment is not some kind of causal necessity. Like most people, I make many decisions which I don't carry out. Sometimes I forget what I decided to do, sometimes I change my mind, and sometimes I am unable to perform the action I decided on. Rational commitment, when recognized, *motivates* a person to act, but it may not carry the day. Honoring this commitment is a requirement of reason, and may or may not be a moral requirement. I can decide to do something like get a bottle of beer from the refrigerator, and then fail to do it, either because I forget what I intended to do, or for some other reason, without being culpable in any way.

Some commitments are conditional, like the commitment to close the upstairs windows in my house if it rains while I am at home, and others, like my commitment to get beer from the refrigerator, are unconditional. With the commitment to close the windows, we might say that I am committed to close the windows *on the condition of it raining while I am at home*. But it is more accurate to say that the commitment is *on the condition of my realizing that it is raining while I am at home*. My commitments can't motivate me to act unless I am aware of them, and, in the conditional case, I also need to be aware that they are "in force."

Coming to accept, or continuing to accept, some statements, and rejecting others, will *inferentially* commit a person to accept further statements, and to reject further statements. Positively or negatively supposing statements will commit a person to suppose others (either positively or negatively). If the person who accepts certain statements, and rejects others, is inferentially committed by this to, say, accept statement A, she has an *assertive inferential commitment*. The *inferential* commitment characteristic of assertive illocutionary acts is not a commitment to carry out reasoning, but is instead a commitment, *when* carrying out deductive reasoning, to make "moves" based on immediate commitments which she recognizes.

If asserting A inferentially commits a person to assert B, and supposing

A to be the case inferentially commits a person to suppose B, it does not follow that supposing A will inferentially commit her to assert B. An assertion is stronger than a supposition, and can commit the arguer to assert or deny further statements, while suppositions can only commit the arguer to make further suppositions. Inferential commitment is an epistemic feature.

A person can simply recognize her immediate commitments, and can, in principle anyway, come to recognize her mediate commitments. On investigation, some commitments turn out to be based on semantic features like entailment or implication. If statement A entails B, and their connection is easy to grasp, this may help us to understand why asserting or supposing A will inferentially commit someone to assert or suppose B. But not all inferential commitments are based on entailment or implication. If I assert "It is raining," this will commit me to assert "I believe that it is raining," but the statement "It is raining" does not entail the statement that I believe this.

Although I accept many statements and reject many others, I am uninterested in exploring most of the "commitment consequences" of these beliefs and disbeliefs. For example, if I accept the statement "Today is Thursday," I will be inferentially committed to accept the statement "Either today is Thursday or it is now snowing in Beijing." However, I would have no interest in this consequence, and would not be committed either to consider or accept it. Still, if the matter somehow came up, and I took some interest in the issue of whether the statement was true, I would be committed to accept that either today is Thursday or it is now snowing in Beijing. It would be irrational to accept that today is Thursday, but refuse to accept the disjunction.

An assertive illocutionary argument is *deductively correct* if it is simple and the premiss acts rationally and inferentially *commit* the arguer to perform the conclusion act, while if it is complex, all component arguments must be deductively correct and the initial undischarged premiss acts must inferentially commit the arguer to perform the conclusion act. (Logical theories for assertive illocutionary arguments are presented and discussed in Kearns (1997), Kearns (2000), Kearns (2006), Kearns (2007). The understanding of illocutionary arguments, and the theories themselves, are better in the later papers than in the earlier ones.)

4 Directive Arguments

In addition to assertive arguments, there are also directive and commissive arguments. A *directive illocutionary argument* has a conclusion which is a directive act and premisses which give the addressee reasons to implement the conclusion's plan. But the premisses of a directive illocutionary argument are not themselves directive acts. In this directive illocutionary argument:

> Tara, your mother will be offended, and hurt, if you don't go home for the holidays. So you must visit your family for Christmas.

the premiss is an assertion. This argument doesn't seem properly regarded as deductive, for the speaker is trying to get the addressee to, first, *decide* to visit her family, and, subsequently, to make the visit. The truth of the premiss isn't sufficient to commit the addressee to implement the conclusion.

But this directive argument:

> Kevin, you have promised to pick up Max from soccer practice. His practice ends in 15 minutes, and it takes that long to get to the field from here. So please go now to get Max.

is intended to make Kevin realize that he has *already* committed himself to implement the conclusion's plan. It seems reasonable to regard this as a deductively correct argument.

A *directive locutionary argument* is an ordered pair whose first member is a set of premisses which are either statements or plans addressed to a single addressee, and whose second member, the conclusion, is a plan with the same addressee as the premiss plans. We could represent such an argument like this:

> $<$ {Kevin, please pick up Max after soccer practice; Max's soccer practice ends in 15 minutes; It takes 15 minutes to drive from here to the practice field.}, Kevin, please go now to pick up Max from practice. $>$

This argument is valid, because (roughly) any way of satisfying the premisses will satisfy the conclusion, but this directive *locutionary* argument is not closely related to a directive *illocutionary* argument. The premisses, if

actually addressed, or spoken, to Kevin, give Kevin no reason to implement the conclusion.

There are puzzles concerning disjunction that are sometimes raised in connection with directive acts and arguments, and these puzzles might make someone dubious about the possibility of developing a logical theory which accommodates directives. If Vladimir makes a request to Jaroslav by saying "please mail this letter," handing him a sealed envelope with postage attached, he has asked, and directed, Jaroslav to place the stamped envelope in the mail. And if he has asked Jaroslav to mail the letter, then, clearly, he has either asked Jaroslav to mail the letter or he has asked Jaroslav to burn the letter. But we all recognize that Vladimir has not asked Jaroslav to either mail or burn the letter.

This is a kind of situation which many people have found puzzling. Why hasn't Vladimir made a disjunctive request? If we change our story a little, and have Vladimir handing Jaroslav an envelope with no postage attached, saying "Please put stamps on this so that it can be mailed," and then later saying to Jaroslav, "Please mail that envelope I handed you," it seems OK to say that Vladimir asked Jaroslav to put postage on the envelope and to mail it, although Vladimir did not make one "conjunctive" request. Why is *conjunction introduction* OK here, when *disjunction introduction* is not OK?

Our situating these stories in a speech-act framework allows us to pretty much "erase" their puzzling features. Assertive locutionary acts, or statements, have truth conditions which can be satisfied or not. We define the relations of entailment and implication linking statements in terms of the satisfaction conditions of statements. Plans which are the locutionary components of directive acts have implementation conditions rather than truth conditions, but these conditions can be satisfied or not. And we can define relations of directive entailment and implication linking second-person plans which have the same addressee and are intended for the same occasion. For example, suppose that "Michael, do F" and "Michael, do G" are such plans. Then the "do F" plan entails the "do G" plan iff any way in which Michael implements the "do F" plan will also implement the "do G" plan. In the right setting, the plan:

> Michael, get up from your seat and shut the door.

will directively entail this plan: Michael, get up from your seat.
Michael cannot implement the first plan without also implementing the second.

If we were concerned with a real event concerning Vladimir and Jaroslav, an inference from this assertion:

> Vladimir asked Jaroslav to mail the letter.

to this one:

> Vladimir asked Jaroslav to mail the letter or he asked Jaroslav to burn the letter.

would be an assertive illocutionary inference which exemplifies the principle *disjunction introduction*, and it would be "deductively correct." An inference from:

> Vladimir asked Jaroslav to mail the letter.

to:

> Vladimir asked Jaroslav to mail the letter or burn it.

would also be an assertive illocutionary inference, but it does not exemplify the principle *disjunction introduction*, and it isn't correct.

For this plan:

> Jaroslav, please mail this letter.

does not directively entail:

> Jaroslav, please mail this letter or burn it.

To implement the simpler plan, all Jaroslav needs to do is mail the letter, while to implement the disjunctive plan, Jaroslav needs to do two things:

> (1) consider the plan's disjuncts and select one
>
> (2) implement that disjunct.

Jaroslav can clearly implement the simpler plan without doing those two things.

All it takes to satisfy a disjunctive statement '*A or B*' is that one of the disjuncts be true, but it isn't sufficient to satisfy a disjunctive plan '*do F or do G*' that one of the disjuncts be implemented. The addressee must *intend*

to *do F or do G*, and this requires him to consider both disjuncts when he chooses one to implement.

This is the right answer to the problem concerning disjunction and *disjunction introduction* for directives, but it calls into question what I said about *conjunction introduction*. For it isn't in general the case that if Mark has been asked to *do F* and has also been asked to *do G*, then he has been asked to *do F and do G*. Just as Mark would need a disjunctive intention to implement a disjunctive plan, so he should have a conjunctive intention to implement a conjunctive plan. But he wouldn't have that if he wasn't asked to carry out a conjunctive plan.

So, in the earlier story, was Jaroslav asked to put postage on the letter and mail it? The first request that Vladimir made was only for Jaroslav to put postage on the envelope. The second request was a request for Jaroslav to mail the letter. We aren't told whether Jaroslav had already put postage on the letter. But you can't really mail a letter if it has no postage attached. You can put the letter in a mail box, but it won't be delivered. In case Jaroslav had not already put postage on the envelope, the second request would cover both putting on postage and dropping the stamped letter in the mail box. In the example above, it seems OK to me to say that Jaroslav was asked to do both of two things, but that assertion cannot be correctly inferred by *conjunction introduction* from two premiss assertions, one for the postage and one for the mailing.

5 Articulating a Conceptual Framework and Developing Logical Theories

In Kearns (2015), I discuss assertive, directive, and commissive acts, both locutionary and illocutionary, as well as locutionary and illocutionary arguments for the three categories of assertive, directive, and commissive acts. I explore the relations between the different kind of acts and arguments, primarily in order to call attention to the different kinds of arguments for which we can develop distinctive logical theories. I described what I was doing in that paper as *articulating a conceptual framework* for the various acts and arguments. That framework "*lays out a logical landscape that can be investigated and explored by a variety of logical theories*."

The present paper amends and corrects that conceptual framework. In the earlier paper, I somewhat misunderstood directive locutionary and illocutionary acts, failing, in particular, to understand the implementation

conditions of disjunctive plans. I have fixed that misunderstanding in this present paper. The correction shows that the treatment of directive acts and arguments can be less complicated than I previously thought, but it also reveals a new respect in which directive acts and arguments differ from assertive acts and arguments.

Although I have further articulated, and corrected, the conceptual framework I outlined in Kearns (2015), I haven't developed and presented a logical theory for either directive locutionary arguments or directive illocutionary arguments. Developing such theories is an interesting project, and might even turn out to be important. But life is short and art, even the art of logic, is long. I hope that someone else will be motivated to use the framework I have articulated as a guide for developing directive logical theories.

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John T Kearns
Department of Philosophy and Center for Cognitive Science, University at Buffalo, SUNY
USA
E-mail: kearns@buffalo.edu