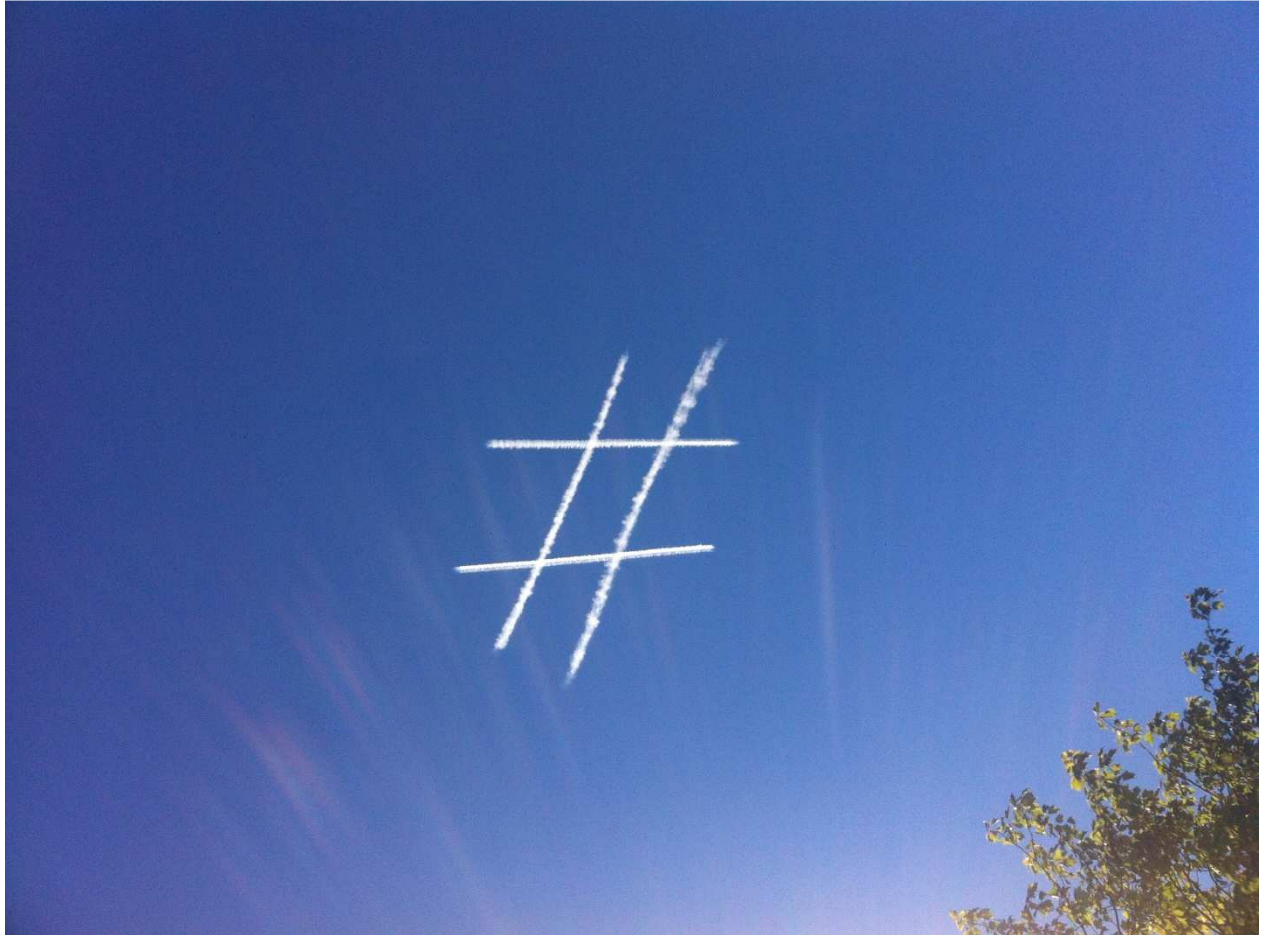# NEW ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Die Idee sitzt gleichsam als Brille auf unsrer Nase, und was wir ansehen, sehen wir durch sie. Wir kommen gar nicht auf den Gedanken, die Brille abzunehmen.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

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Introduction

It must have been around six months ago that I was taking a stroll through my neighbourhood, when I saw a crayon drawing on the sidewalk straight in front of a house. The drawing depicted a child with a smartphone, making a selfie. Under the drawing there was a caption: 'Vind je deze tekening leuk? Druk op de deurbel' ('Do you like this drawing? Press the doorbell'). Children asking for a resemblance of a Facebook 'like' in a street-playing setting: it was one of the instances that made me realise that the way in which we communicate on social media is pervading our 'offline' lives. Social Network Services[1] (SNS's), more commonly known as social media, have pervaded the western societies in record speed. New generations grow up with them: many young children can swipe before they can speak. And it is not just the youngest who are online; all generations are represented on SNS's. Social media are influential. In the governmental elections in the US (2016), the Netherlands and France (2017), Twitter and other SNS's had a large impact on the campaigns, the voting turnout and the election outcomes. Politicians use SNS's, like Twitter, to make their ideas and views known to the public. Many types of behaviour have changed quite radically since the emergence of SNS's. Social media have changed the ways in which people can communicate as well as the content of their communications. The changes are interesting and can be studied in different ways: in social and linguistic studies, for instance, and in media and technology studies. But what about philosophy? Is the rapid emergence of SNS's philosophically relevant? I believe that it is. I will argue in this thesis that SNS's have created a new type of speech act: the meta-speech act. The view that I will defend is that this is a new speech act, particular for social media. I will show that it is new by proving that it does not fit into any

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[1] The term SNS is borrowed from the computational academic field and applies to for all online social networks services, including but not limited to: Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn, blog websites and vlog websites.

existing categorisations of speech acts within speech act theory as coined by J.L. Austin and further developed by John Searle. Their taxonomies are not comprehensive enough to include all possible speech acts on SNS's.

The first step in any research project is to study published literature on the topic in question. I found out that to date, there is almost no literature on SNS's and speech acts in philosophy of language.[2] This means I need to incorporate some basic groundwork this thesis, since I cannot refer to other works and build upon those. A drawback of this approach, which exists of ranking speech acts on SNS's in existing speech act taxonomies, is that the enumeration part does not have much philosophical depth. I try to make up for this by an extra focus on the (analytical) philosophical aspects of this thesis, for instance by specifying the different philosophical terms and exploring relevant connections with existing debates in philosophy of language. This means the thesis contains some side steps with a relevance to the subject at hand.

One of the goals of my thesis is to make the first link between existing speech act theory and speech acts on SNS's. I took it upon me to list all the possible speech acts on Facebook and Twitter (which I have chosen as representatives of SNS's) and categorised them in the existing taxonomies of illocutionary acts by Austin and Searle. In doing so, it became clear that a very common and frequently performed speech act on SNS's does not fit the mould and is new in two ways: it has no counterpart in real life[3] and it has no place in either of Austin's and Searle's taxonomies.[4] The new speech act I am referring to is *hashtagging*. To

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[2] There is literature on SNS's in other academic fields, among which are social studies, linguistics and computational studies. Some of these mention speech act theory, however they do not refer to the philosophical understanding of this theory; they refer to the linguistic understanding.

[3] Throughout this thesis, I will use the phrase 'in real life' for the situations in which people can verbally exchange language, for example in conversations in person or by telephone. 'In real life' is synonym with 'not online' or 'offline'.

[4] Austin: *How to do things with words*, 1962; Searle: *A Classification of Illocutionary Acts*, 1976

hashtag is to give one's speech a *tag*, like a label, in order to make it easier for other people to find it. In that sense, it is comparable to everyone becoming their own librarian, putting tags on their online utterances, so that readers are able to look them up with search terms matching the tags. But there is more. Hashtags are not only search helps, they are also names, and ways to mix into a community. And, finally, the most striking feature of this speech act is that it is used to do something with another speech act – it is a meta-speech act. This type of act is specific to SNS's and raises several questions that form the heart of this thesis. What kind of speech act is hashtagging? What is so different about this act compared to other speech acts on SNS's, which (as will become clear from my enumeration) almost all fit in the, apparently still very topical, existing speech act taxonomies? And even if we grant that hashtagging is a new speech act, why is this philosophically relevant? All these questions will be discussed in chapter 3.

This paper is structured as follows. In chapter 1, I will first address the question whether or not acts on SNS's are speech acts. I believe that they are. Austin provides background on why his speech act theory pertains to both verbal and written speech. I will defend this view in discussing Barry Smith's argumentation that written speech results in document acts, which, in his opinion, take speech acts to a new level. Document acts are new things one can do with words beyond regular speech. (Smith discussed these as part of a discussion on social ontology.) If Smith is right, then the predominantly written speech on SNS's might be document acts and not speech acts. I argue against this point of view. In paragraph 1.2 I discuss Internet availability, since it might be argued that if only a minority has access to SNS's, the acts on them are not as omnipresent as offline speech and could therefore be an exception to speech act theory. The third paragraph of this chapter is dedicated to a definition of illocutionary act. I will also address some problems with the terms used in speech act theory and discuss the product-act distinction of illocutionary acts. Chapter 2 is the

chapter in which I first list and assess SNS's speech acts in their relation to the existing illocutionary act taxonomies. I will start by briefly discussing illocutionary acts on Facebook and Twitter and introducing the speech act taxonomies of Austin and Searle, followed by the actual categorisation of the different illocutionary acts. At the end of the chapter, I give an overview of these. The third and final chapter is dedicated to the hashtag. I discuss its uses and what kind of speech act it is. Next, I discuss two possible characterisations for the illocutionary act of hashtagging: as a family resemblance term, and as a meta-speech act. I will argue for the latter.

Chapter 1: Illocutionary acts online

Introduction

Before introducing my arguments, I need to clarify some terms I will use throughout this thesis. In offline speech, words and sentences are audible and there is not always a need to record them. I contrast offline speech with online speech. Offline speech is verbal, audible speech such as is used in common everyday communication. Examples of offline speech are conversing and delivering a speech. I regard it speech when the person doing the speaking, speaks out loud. For something to be speech, it is not necessary that there be an audience or 'uptake', in Austin's terms. Note that this applies to speech as such, *not* to speech *acts*. Online speech is speech that is uttered via computer mediation. Examples of online speech are e-mails, status updates and other communication on SNS's, blogs and vlogs.[5]

The word 'speech' can designate many different things. For instance, 'speech' includes uttering a single word like 'cat'; it includes uttering (meaningful) sentences on a stage during a play; it includes euphemisms, metaphors and ironic utterances. The main point of my thesis, that there are new speech acts as a result of the existence of social media, will come across most clearly when I restrict the term 'utterance' to what Searle calls "serious literal utterances".[6] The 'serious literal utterance' contrasts *serious* utterances with play-acting, teaching a language, reciting poems, practicing pronunciation, etc., and contrasts *literal* with metaphorical, sarcastic, etc.. So, for instance, if John utters the following sentence directed at Peter: 'I will be at your party tomorrow', and it is a serious literal utterance by John, then

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[5] A blog is a diary entry posted on a website or an SNS. Examples are philosophy blogs featuring philosophical topics (e.g. http://digressionsnimpressions.typepad.com/) and food blogs featuring information about food and recipes. A vlog is a spoken diary entry that is digitally recorded and uploaded to a website or an SNS such as YouTube or Vimeo. Examples are fitness vlogs in which people share their view on training and nutrition, and personal vlogs by well-known ('famous') people (e.g. the vlogs of philosopher Jason Silva: https://www.youtube.com/user/ShotsOfAwe/videos). By diary entry, I mean that the blogger or vlogger shares one (or more) topic per blog/vlog, making each blog similar to a 'written article' and a vlog to a 'video message'.

[6] Searle, 1968, p, 406

Peter has justification for his belief that John will be at his party tomorrow. Because of the notion of serious literal utterance that is applicable to this thesis, I will be able to treat utterances on their face value and will not have to go into the sentence being uttered in jest, or ironically, or as a lie, for every example given.

Finally, by 'speech act' I mean an intentional (serious literal) utterance with a performative function, meaning that in saying something, an act is performed. In the example of Peter and John, in saying 'I will be at your party tomorrow', John performs the act of promising Peter that he will attend his party.[7] The performative function (or illocutionary force) of the utterance is to make a promise. I will go into more detail on the definition of speech acts and more specifically, illocutionary acts, in paragraph 1.1, but the term speech act will be used before then, so it had to be defined preliminarily here.

This chapter consists of three paragraphs. In the first paragraph, I discuss whether or not acts on SNS's are speech acts. The second paragraph contains a discussion on internet penetration, since the number of people who are able to perform speech acts on SNS's is relevant to the question of application of speech act theory to this domain. The third and last paragraph is dominated by a discussion of illocutionary acts, and is concerned with their definition and the distinction between the act and its product.

1.1. Are acts on SNS's speech acts?

I argue that speech on SNS's can contain speech acts. Am I justified in arguing that? Much of the speech on SNS's is written speech. Does written speech differ from verbal speech with regards to speech act theory? Is written speech, perhaps, a physical act rather than a speech

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[7] One could take this utterance as a threat, as well, but again, I am assuming that utterances are serious and literal for the purpose of this thesis.

act? Or is it a document act, following Barry Smith's theory?[8] In the event that John had written down his utterance about attending Peter's party, would this have been a speech act? I hold that written utterances qualify as speech and are subject to speech act theory. I am following John Austin in this perspective. In *How to do things with words[9]*, Austin did not differentiate between spoken and written language. Even though the terms he uses in laying out the speech act theory, such as 'utterance' and 'speech' may imply auditive language, it is not the case that the theory applies to spoken words alone. On three different occasions in *Words*, it becomes clear that Austin thought that his theory covered *written* utterances as well. His mentioning of written utterances is so casual, that I suspect he did not see how anyone could disagree: a speech act is a speech act, regardless of its mode of delivery. The first instance where Austin mentions written utterances acts is on page 8, where he states that performing an act can be done by uttering words 'whether written or spoken'. The second mentioning of written utterances can be found on pages 60-61, where Austin speaks about connecting a speaker to written words *'by appending his signature (this has to be done because, of course, written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are).'* The part in parenthesis shows that written speech is different in the way it is tethered to its origin, but not in the sense that they are not utterances. The third occasion on which Austin mentions written speech is found on pages 74-75 and is regarding the different possible illocutionary forces of one single utterance. 'It's going to charge', is the example Austin gives. This utterance can be taken up as a warning, a question or a protest (these are the different illocutionary forces). In verbal communication, we use tone of voice, cadence and emphasis to help convey our intention and hence help to communicate the illocutionary force. This is different in written language. In written texts we have to resort to punctuation like question

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[8] Smith, 2012; 2014

[9] Austin, 1962

marks, exclamation points and italics, but Austin finds these 'rather crude'.[10] (SNS's have added possibilities for conveying intentions: emoji's, see also 2.2). I concur with Austin's view that written utterances can be speech acts just as spoken ones can be, and that includes written utterances on SNS's. In fact, SNS's only broaden the scope of things one can do with words in the same way that (analogue) documents already did, as noticed by Barry Smith. He proposes a document act theory in his publications *How to do things with documents* (2012) and *Document acts* (2104). Smith contends that speech acts exist only in their execution and are evanescent entities, as opposed to documents. A document is *'something that is able to endure self-identically through time.'[11]* The same can be said about utterances on SNS's. Once placed online, messages and images remain on the social medium. They can be deleted, of course, just as a paper document can be ripped up or shredded or burnt. However, it is very easy for other users of the SNS to share online messages and images – one mouse-click suffices – and once this process has begun, it is very difficult to retract them. The speaker may delete her message or post a new message saying that she retracts her words, but if it has been shared in the meantime, and if someone makes a screenshot of the message and posts, copying the message, then the words are out of the sphere of control of the original speaker. What Barry Smith argues about documents, could be argued about messages and images on SNS's as well. So, what is his point of view? According to Smith, whereas speech acts begin and end

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[10] Over 50 years after Austin's book was published, in 2015, the *Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year* was an emoji called 'face with tears of joy'. 😂 It was chosen as 'the word that best reflected the ethos, mood and preoccupations of 2015'. Apparently, with the enormous growth of written communication in the digital era, some features of spoken language like tone of voice and emphasis were emphatically missed. This led first to smileys and later to all kinds of other face-like images to convey a certain tone of voice or intention to accompany a written utterance. I conclude from this that people still want their speech acts to come across as verbal speech acts, regardless of its being in written form. Emoji's might have broadened the scope of the possible uptake of written messages with the readers, but I venture to say that Austin would still have found them 'rather crude'.

[11] 2012 p. 181

with the speaker and the hearer(s), there are more things you can do with words once they are printed (or written) on a document. Documents make it possible to do other, new things which you cannot do with verbal speech. For example, releasing funds and naming an heir are things you can do with documents, Smith contends. Documents also create new sorts of entities that make them part of social ontology. Smith describes social ontology as the theory of how entities that play a role in social life, come into existence. Banknotes and bonds are examples of resultants of speech acts: making a debt or a promise. Documents prolong speech acts. Smith holds that 'the theory of speech acts provides what seems to be a satisfactory explanation of how entities such as debts or corporations or trusts *begin* to exist: (roughly) people make certain promises'.[12] Speech acts create the beginning of document acts, but documents serve to prosthetically extend the mnemonic powers of individuals and, as such, create 'novel artefacts of social reality'[13]. In other words, it is possible to do things with documents that you cannot do with speech, and this warrants the existence of a separate document act theory. Smith bases the need for a separate document act theory on three differences between speech and documents. The first difference is that speech acts are, in Smith's terminology, 'events/occurants', whereas documents are 'objects/continuants' according to Smith. [14] These 'continuants' make a fleeting speech act continue further than the original utterance; a birth certificate containing the speech act of naming a new-born child and can be used as proof of one's identity. In Smith's view, use of that birth certificate to get a license of some sort, for instance, would be a document act. His view, summarised, is as follows. In the example of the birth certificate, first there is the speech act of naming. This speech act results in the child's name (this could be called the 'internal product', but Smith

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[12] Smith 2014, p. 23

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

does not say anything about this. I will, at the end of this paragraph.) For Smith, the document on which this name is then recorded, the birth certificate, is the continuant of the speech act. And since this continuant is a physical object, there are many more things you can do with it than just with the 'event' of the speech act. These physical objects, documents, are what Smith calls entities in social ontology. In our society, for some forms of social behaviour, such as getting a passport, buying a house or getting married, one needs a proof of one's identity such as a birth certificate. The way our society is structured, demands that some original speech acts can endure through time. I do have some critical side notes to this line of arguing (and this pertains to the other arguments of Smith as well), but I will save these until after I have listed all three differences that Smith believes warrant a document act theory. The second difference according to Barry Smith is that documents form the basis for 'new enduring dimensions of social reality'.[15] On his view, documents create social entities, such as receipts, money and insurance policies. 'The effect is that private memory traces inside human brains are prosthetically augmented by publicly accessible documents and associated document technologies', Smith says.[16] I understand Smith to hold here that the 'internal product' of the speech act, to which I will return shortly, is available more broadly in documents than when it is confined to the speech act of a speaker and her audience. If Anne gets prescribed medicines by her GP, then the doctor's receipt will procure her medicines that she would not be able not get without the doctor's speech act of prescribing. The document is the continuant that will convey the speech act of Anne's GP to the pharmacist. The third and final of Smith's differences is that 'documents differ from speech acts also in the variety of ways in which pluralities of documents can be chained together (for example to form an audit trail), or combined to form new document-complexes whose structures mirror relations, for example of

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[15] Smith, 2014, p. 23

[16] Smith, 2014, p. 181

debtor to creditor, among the persons and institutions involved'.[17] Putting documents together can result in new social artefacts, creating even more possibilities of things one can do with documents: they make possible new kinds of enduring social relations, changing socioeconomic reality. For instance, with criminal records, and bank accounts, and mortgage deeds. Smith even states that 'the development of such artifacts [sic] and of the networks of social behavior and of claims and obligations with which they are associated is then in some ways analogous to the processes of biological evolution.'[18]

To me, it is obvious that Smith is right in stating that speech acts are fleeting and documents (or messages on SNS's) have a more enduring character. However, I differ in opinion regarding the status of the things you can do with documents, or his document act theory. It is not what you can do with and/or to documents that creates new social artefacts, in my opinion. Speech acts create social artefacts and they can (or cannot) be recorded on documents. Every speech act results in a 'product', and it is this product that is recorded on a document. For instance, the speech act of promising results in a promise. This promise can be called the *internal product* of the speech act. And, following Smith's terminology, I would argue that it is the internal products of speech acts that make up the social artefacts that change social relations and reality. As Van der Schaar points out, it was Kazimierz Twardowski who stated in his 1912 paper 'Actions and Products' that the distinction between actions and products does not just apply to the distinction between an action and the physical product that results from that action, such as composing music and the resulting work of music. The distinction applies to the mental realm as well; a mental action (or state) leads to a mental product. The act of thinking leads to a thought, and the act of judging leads to a judgement. Van der Schaar notes that the distinction applies to speech acts: there is the speech

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[17] Smith, 2014, p. 24

[18] Smit, 2012, p. 182

act and its resulting (internal) product.[19] It is important to note that every illocutionary act results in a product. The act of asserting results in an assertion, the act of promising results in a promise, the act of marrying results in a marriage. These internal products are there, regardless of whether or not they are recorded (written down or typed). So, to be clear, there are:

1. the (physical) illocutionary act of speaking (or writing);

2. the non-physical internal product of the illocutionary act (this is non-physical even when it is written down!);

3. possibly, a physical product – if and when the internal product is recorded.

For example, making an assertion leads to the assertion made; and if it is recorded, then there is physical 'evidence' of that assertion. Writing down an assertion without verbally uttering it is still a combination of an illocutionary act, its internal product, and turning the internal product into something physical. This is because the internal product necessarily results from the illocutionary act.

Another issue pointed out by Van der Schaar, is that the term assertion – like the term *statement* in Austin, and like all performative verbs – is ambiguous in the following way. 'The term may either stand for the act of assertion or for the assertion made'.[20] The assertion 'the cat is on the mat' is both a speech act and its product, the assertion. Austin's first view was that in saying 'the cat is on the mat', no act is performed, and it is therefore not 'performative'. An assertion is an utterance that says something about the world as it is; it is a finding. That assertions are not performative was Austin's original position. They fall within the true/false realm, and sentences within this realm Austin called *constative*, opposing them with performatives on the basis of the dimension of truth value: 'I promise' is neither true nor

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[19] Van der Schaar, 2015, p. 96-97

[20] Van der Schaar, 2011, p. 189

false. Rather, it is successful or unsuccessful (felicitous or infelicitous, in Austin's terms). The performative/constative distinction fails, however, which is assented to by Austin in his later lectures in *How to do things with words*, and which is confirmed by others who have written about speech act theory, among whom Searle. The distinction fails because uttering 'the cat is on the mat' is equivalent to uttering 'I state / assert / declare that the cat is on the mat'. And asserting, stating and declaring are performative verbs. Therefore, assertions, statements and declarations are speech acts. As we have seen, a difference can be made between the speech act itself and its result, the internal product, and this is exactly the point that Van der Schaar makes. The speech act of asserting is an act and is performative, but the internal product is the assertion made and this assertion has truth value, and is, in the earlier Austinian sense, constative.

Now it seems to me that what Smith is doing in his document theory, is ignoring the internal product of a speech act only recognising it when it is recorded on a document. What is recorded on the document, is the existing internal product of the speech act. The naming of a new-born is a speech act performed by the parents of the child. The child's name is the internal product of this speech act. When this name is recorded by a local government official and put onto a birth certificate, then this would be the physical act of recording the name. This could be called a document act, but it is not the document that changes the world; it is not the document that gives the child its name. That is the exclusive preserve of the speech act and its resulting product. The child received its name upon the utterance of the speech act of naming, and not by putting the name on paper and/or storing the document in the municipal archives. So, Smith's second difference between speech acts and document acts is not convincing to me, and neither is his third difference to warrant a document act theory: the fact that you can physically staple documents together. While it is true that you cannot physically staple verbal speech, the combining of documents as carriers of speech acts is nothing more than the

combining of the internal product of speech acts that are recorded on paper. In my view, the possibility of saying things in different modes, whether verbally, written of electronically, is not enough reason to state that in every different mode, there is a need for a new sort of 'act theory'. The mode of delivery of a speech act does not make it a different sort of act. It remains a speech act. Therefore, I will adhere to my belief that speech act theory, not document act theory, pertains to speech acts on SNS's. This is also important because it is the reason why I do not argue for a separate SNS act theory. It would be an option to separate online speech from offline speech and create a different speech act theory for online speech, much in the same way as Barry Smith has done with his document act theory. When in reality, online and offline speech are very similar – even if the consequences of online speech acts are bigger, or different, from those of offline speech acts. In my view, the mode of delivery of speech is in itself not enough to warrant a new type of 'act theory'.

There is one more type of speech that needs to be addressed when talking about SNS's: images and videos (with or without speech). Some SNS's, Instagram and YouTube being the most well-known and popular, have as an explicit purpose to share visual content; photos in the case of Instagram, videos in the case of YouTube. Are these speech? And can they be used to perform speech acts? The question of imagery and its rating as speech is discussed elaborately in the discussion on illocutionary acts in pornography, argued by, among others, Rae Langton and Nancy Bauer.[21] In this literature, it is argued that imagery, including pornographic imagery, is speech, since 1) it carries illocutionary force, the proof of which is that there can be no doubt about the meaning of the imagery (illocutionary force is defined as 'meaning' in this argument), and 2) imagery counts as speech when there is uptake (and there is, considering its large audience worldwide). Pornographic imagery consists mostly of

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[21] For further reading: Bauer, N., 2006. How to do things with pornography, in *Reading Cavell*, edited by S. Shieh and A. Crary. New York: Routledge, 68 – 97; Langton, R., 1993. Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22, 293 – 330.

photographs and films, but imagery may also include paintings or sculptures, and if they meet conditions 1) and 2), these count as speech as well, according to the view of the authors mentioned above. In a televised interview with John Searle by prof. Bryan Magee, Searle explicitly included imagery (paintings) as speech acts with illocutionary force.[22] However, for the purpose of this thesis, it is not necessary to take a standpoint on whether or not pure imagery is speech. I include videos with spoken or written words as speech. The reason to include written speech is, hopefully, clear by now; the reason to include videos that include speech is that there is no question that offline speech is speech, and so online speech is speech as well. It is the difference between an inaugural lecture being uttered in the privacy of the home as a rehearsal; the same lecture being uttered in an actual inaugural ceremony and the lecture being recorded on video and uploaded unto YouTube. These are not all different lectures that need their own lecture theory; it is one lecture that has different modes of delivery, but that is subject to one speech act theory. So, let us now go into this theory deeper and explore the connection between speech acts and illocutionary acts.

1.2 Illocutionary acts, speech acts and performative verbs – a further look

What is the relationship between a speech act and an illocutionary act? So far, I have only defined the term speech act preliminarily at the beginning of this chapter. Since the main question of my research is whether there exist new *illocutionary* acts that can only be performed on SNS's, it is necessary to further explore the term 'illocutionary act'. Since the illocutionary act is a part of a broader speech act theory, I will touch on other speech acts as well, and explore several problems and ambiguities in J.L. Austin's original work that have been discussed in the literature on speech act theory.

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[22] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGKaBUWrWwE: 32:58 – 34:24 mins

Let me begin by noting that speech act theory is about recognising that words can *do* things besides inform or convey information. It is a theory about things you can do with words within a certain conventional context, meaning a context in which certain rules are in place. These rules need to be in place for an illocutionary act to be successful or felicitous. For instance, uttering 'I do' in a marriage ceremony will not be felicitous if the person speaking is already married. An illocutionary act is performed when something can be accomplished with speech that changes the status of the world. It is through speech that people can get married, make a promise or name a child. Actually *doing* something with words is at the heart of the theory of speech acts. Now, there are different things one can do with words. At the basic level, one can utter words. If these words are comprehensible, then the mere uttering of the words constitutes a locutionary act. The locutionary act is literally the act of speaking; it is the act of saying something in the 'full normal sense'.[23] But then, according to Austin, there are two more types of acts in which speech acts can be subdivided. The act on which I focus in this thesis, the illocutionary act, is the combination of three aspects:

1. it is a (serious, literal) utterance that has a certain (propositional) content, and
2. it is said in a certain context, i.e. a conventional environment, and
3. it has a certain illocutionary force.

The words 'open the window, please', when they are an utterance conforming to (1), have the content 'to open the window'. (2) Within the right context, i.e. when I utter these words in a room, to another person, who understands English and can hear me, they can be taken up by the other person in the sense that she can understand the content and the illocutionary force of the words. The illocutionary force of the words depends on whether the words are uttered as a question, a plea, or an order. The utterance 'open the window' can be used with several

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[23] Austin, 1962, p. 94

different illocutionary forces, especially if we can change the order of the words. In addition

to the illocutionary acts already mentioned (question, plea, order), they could form other

illocutionary acts as well: an assertion, a guess, a promise, a suggestion, a vow, and so on. So,

one single utterance can be used with many different illocutionary forces. And, finally, the

third type of act Austin distinguishes is the perlocutionary act: the effect one's words have on

the hearer(s). Words can, for instance, convince, annoy, or bore them. This effect – whether or

not intended by the speaker – Austin called perlocutionary. It is the act that follows an

illocutionary act, as a result of the illocutionary act. Now, the illocutionary acts that are most

easily recognisable contain verbs that, when uttered in the first person singular, present tense,

constitute the performance of an act: performative verbs. Austin called them *explicit*

performative verbs.[24] A performative verb may be 'used to effect what it signifies'.[25]

Examples of performative verbs are promise, reckon, estimate, beg, apologise, agree, and ask

– to give only a few. To see whether or not a verb is performative, a provisional litmus test[26]

would be to inject the word hereby when it is used in the first person singular, present tense: 'I

hereby name this ship…' 'I hereby promise…'. It is of these explicit performative verbs that

both Austin and Searle have made taxonomies in their quest for clarification of the different

illocutionary acts. In this thesis, I am also concerned with illocutionary acts on SNS's. That is

why in chapter 2, I will dissect the illocutionary acts on SNS's that are different from

illocutionary acts in real life, and assess whether or not they are new illocutionary acts. This

will reveal that most of the illocutionary acts on SNS's are subject to the existing taxonomies

of Austin and Searle. As we saw before, all illocutionary acts are speech acts, but not all

speech acts are illocutionary acts: there are locutionary acts (the utterance itself) and

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[24] Austin, 1962, p. 149

[25] Van der Schaar, 2011, p. 190

[26] This litmus test is far from full proof, and I will discuss it in chapter 3, when I give my argument why 'to hashtag' is a new illocutionary act.

perlocutionary acts (the effects) as well. Speech acts can be illocutionary acts even when they do not contain performative verbs; a sentence can be performative without a performative verb.

The last item that needs to be addressed regarding illocutionary acts is whether these can be performed online. I have already made the argument that speech act theory holds for all speech acts, regardless of their mode of delivery. This includes their delivery on SNS's. It is possible to make promises, ask questions, give judgements, and so on, online. Instagram and Pinterest are a bit different since a status update on these SNS's requires an image, but still, anything can be posted. Just as offline, there are rules on SNS's regarding hate speech, discrimination, racism, pornography, and so on, and libel and slander are punishable under the law. (The fact that utterances on SNS's are actionable, just as verbal or otherwise written speech, also implies that there is no difference between speech acts on SNS's and offline speech acts.) Just as in real life, a mixture of speech acts can be found on SNS's. The fact that these utterances are typed and that some physical activity is necessary to post them – pressing buttons and clicking with the mouse or pressing enter – does not alter this. Uttering a sentence verbally requires some physical activity as well, after all.

1.3 Can everyone perform speech acts on SNS's, and is this relevant to research on speech act theory and SNS's?

The last important issue about posting on SNS's that I will discuss here, before categorising speech acts on SNS's, is the fact that not everyone can do it. To be able to perform speech acts, people need a voice, a mouth, muscles, and they need to know a language, but other than that, verbal speech is simply a matter of uttering words. To be able to post something on a social medium, for instance on Twitter, one additionally needs access to a device with an

internet connection and the Twitter application, plus a Twitter account.[27] This already is a high demand: smartphones, laptops, tablets and computers are relatively expensive and in some parts of the world, hard to obtain. Add to this the fact slightly over half of the world population has access to the internet[28] (51%), and one could argue that these requirements are pre-conditions that make SNS's a different sort of speech environment that is not similar to the speech environment Austin and Searle were writing about, i.e. everyday speech interaction such as encountered in normal, everyday life. I maintain that while it is true that a social medium is a different sort of speech environment, four reasons make it plausible that SNS's can be compared with 'normal' situations with regards to speech acts.

1. In some parts of the world, known as the western countries, internet is available to the vast majority of people.

2. It is not a necessary condition for a speech act to have the potential to reach everyone.

3. There are also people who cannot perform offline speech acts, for instance people with speech impediments.

4. A telling sign that SNS's are a speech act platform, is that they are conventional surroundings.

Ad 1. Internet availability varies greatly per continent. Even though the average is less than fifty percent, the percentages in the parts of the world better known as the 'western' world are much higher: North-America (88.1%), Europe (79.1%) and Oceania/Australia (69.6%)[29]. In these parts of the world many people can perform online speech acts.

Ad 2. An utterance does not have to have the potential to reach the whole world for it to be a speech act. When I utter 'I promise to make supper tonight', with only my husband in the

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[27] Note that for some people, it is easier to speak online than offline; people with speech impediments, for instance, or people who are extremely shy.

[28] http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm, date of verification: August 31, 2017, date of data: Q2 2017

[29] Source percentages: see note 29

vicinity, the reach of my speech act is limited, but it is valid as a speech act nonetheless. A Tweet not reaching certain people for lack of internet access is similar to the speech act performed in my living room not reaching them for lack of being in my living room. If anything, it is the other way around: one Tweet can reach the whole Twitter community much easier and faster than any other method of communication could. Ad 3. There are people who cannot perform speech acts offline: young children, people with speech impediments or disabilities like deafness and muteness, and people with certain psychological problems. The fact that not one hundred percent of people can perform an online speech act, likewise does not entail that speech act theory does not hold, since speech act theory is generally accepted in spite of the fact that not everyone can speak as a result of speech impediments.

Ad 4. Austin's illocutionary acts require *conventional surroundings* in order to be felicitous. For example, the christening of a ship is brought off well iff performed by the right person who is following the right procedures and performing the appropriate speech acts. In cultures where there is no such thing as ship christening, however, this process would be meaningless. Conventional surroundings, therefore, are at least partly culturally and regionally determined. Conventional here means: within a certain context and according to certain rules. An example will elucidate this; the example is borrowed from Austin,[30] and it is the utterance 'I divorce you'. In some countries with Islamic law, a husband's triple consecutive uttering of the sentence 'I divorce you' equals the act of divorcing.[31] When these utterances are complete, a divorce has been accomplished. The same utterances would not constitute a divorce for the wives of these Islamic husbands or for Christian spouses in say, France or Switzerland. Of course, circumstances matter: there must be uptake of the utterances, the Islamic husband uttering them has to be married, etcetera. This is what Austin calls a *conventional* surrounding

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[30] Austin, 1962, p. 27

[31] A wife cannot do this; it is a male privilege.

that is needed for the speech act of divorce in this example to be felicitous. The best way to see if convention is in play, is to ask whether one utterance would be able to yield the same results under different circumstances. If I walk out onto the street, go up to another person and utter the words: 'I do', then this will not lead to marriage. If I utter the exact same words during a marriage ceremony, to a person who is not already married, in front of a person with the power vested in her to marry people, then the result of the very same utterance will lead to my being married. The ceremony of marriage, including all the right people and institutions, is a conventional surrounding. In the same sense, SNS's are examples of conventional surroundings. Most speech acts that you can perform on SNS's will not yield the same result in other circumstances. For instance, all SNS's offer the possibility of sharing (some SNS's have different names for the same act: sharing on Facebook, retweeting on Twitter, and so on). Sharing someone else's status update (for instance a link to a website or a video) is very common on SNS's. It has the function of conveying that you think someone has posted something interesting that you would like to share with my friends and/or followers. For instance, a link to a news item or a video. Sharing a status update could be, among other things, endorsing it; agreeing with it; promoting it; and so on. All of these are (existing) illocutionary acts. I will return to this in the next chapter, when I categorise speech acts on SNS's. The speech act of sharing cannot be felicitous outside of the SNS's conventional surroundings. If you wanted to perform the same act in a personal conversation with your friend, you would not be able to do so. When you are talking to your friend and she says something you want to repeat to other people, you cannot say 'share'. This is a rule that is specific to Facebook, in this example. Of course, there are offline acts that resemble Facebook sharing. You could repeat her words, but then they become your words and they are no longer attached to the original source, your friend. Even if you added that the words are hers, there would still be you as the mediator or messenger, and the Facebook share takes you directly to

her words or post. Another way would be to have her write down her words and sign her name to them. You could then make copies of this document and distribute them among your friends and acquaintances. This would be close to Facebook sharing is. But then, the sender is her, not you, whereas on Facebook, the person doing the sharing is the sender of the shared status update, and the original sender is still the sender of the original status update. So in the comparison with the document, you would have to at least add your name to it, or add your name plus your own message, for instance, why you are distributing this document – because you endorse it, or because you think it is total nonsense. However, since you would have to mail or personally hand over the documents, and they will not reach the people at the same time, there just is no *exact* copy of a Facebook share or retweet in real life. It was for this reason that, when I did the research for this thesis, I started with the assumption that sharing was a new illocutionary act, not covered by Austin's and Searle's illocutionary act taxonomies. However, the intention to share – which comprises the actual illocutionary act – is not something new.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have argued that verbal and written utterances are part of speech act theory, as are videos. Furthermore, SNS's are pervasive enough to regard them as a platform for speech acts. Moreover, that surrounding is conventional, just as real-life situations are with respect to the performance of speech acts. Therefore, speech on SNS's is subject to speech act theory. In the next chapter, I will rank the SNS's specific speech acts into the existing taxonomies and find that there is a new illocutionary act on SNS's that is not found in real life: hashtagging.

Chapter 2: Illocutionary acts on SNS's

Introduction

Against the background of illocutionary acts on SNS's given in the first chapter, in this second chapter I will turn to the task of ranking different kinds of illocutionary acts on SNS's in the existing categories of illocutionary acts. As I am not aware of any published work on speech act theory related to SNS's, I will give these classifications as a starting point for further discussions. I hope the results will help to define the scope of the subject of illocutionary acts on SNS's and hopefully benefit any future research pursuing this direction. The categories I will be using to rank the illocutionary acts on SNS's are the taxonomies provided by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976[32]). The reason to do this categorisation is the following. If I want to find out whether SNS's have introduced new illocutionary acts, it is necessary to have an overview of the illocutionary acts on SNS's and compare them with the pre-SNS's taxonomies. An overview of all possible sorts of illocutionary acts that are specific to SNS's will help to sift out any new illocutionary acts. In chapter one, I preliminarily pointed toward the outcome that there may be little or even no difference between online and offline illocutionary acts. However, I cannot just make this assumption and then pick out one illocutionary act that I argue is new and does not fit into existing speech act theory. That would be too random. What I will be doing is describing the different illocutionary acts that are possible on SNS's, and explaining per illocutionary act 1) what it entails, and 2) whether it falls within existing speech act theory and why (not). And 3) if the answer to the second question is affirmative, then I will rank the type of illocutionary act in Austin's as well as

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[32] It may seem as if Searle has written two different articles on the taxonomy of illocutionary acts. In 1975 he published the article *A taxonomy of illocutionary acts* in the book *Language, Mind and Knowledge, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, pages 344-369. A year later, *Language in Society* printed Searle's article *A classification of illocutionary acts.* This concerns the same article with some small changes (such as the title), based on a lecture that Searle gave at the Summer Linguistics Institute in Buffalo in 1971. I will adhere to the 1976 article, since this is the most recently revised article.

Searle's taxonomy. For the sake of brevity, I will list only the illocutionary acts that are specific for SNS's, such as sharing, retweeting, @-ing, hashtagging, liking, etcetera. On SNS's, it is of course possible to congratulate someone, or to thank someone, or to promise something, but I have not included these illocutionary acts because they differ in no apparent or important way from the same illocutionary acts offline. It is because of this task of ranking that I had to explore speech acts so extensively in chapter 1.

It is striking how comprehensive Austin's and Searle's taxonomies are, seeing that almost every illocutionary act on SNS's fits in one of their categories. With one exception, however. We will come by one illocutionary act on SNS's that has no counterpart in offline speech, or so I argue. The illocutionary act I refer to is *hashtagging*. A hashtag on a social medium is a form of labelling an utterance, so that other users of the same social medium can find the utterance. It is my intention to show that hashtagging does not have a place in Austin's and Searle's taxonomies and that a new sort of illocutionary act needs to be established to mark its existence.

2.1 Illocutionary acts on Facebook and Twitter

boyd and Ellison[33] defined social network services (SNS's) as web-based applications allowing three functions: '1) users construct a public or semi-public profile; 2) present a list of other users to whom an individual is connected; and 3) view and follow that list and the lists of others within the system.'[34] Most SNS's are free for the users, and are sustained by advertisement income. Since there are many SNS websites, I focus on two of them. When

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[33] Most scholars in computer-mediated communication take boyd & Ellison's definition of SNS's as a starting point.

[34] 2008, p. 211

looking at the top five most- used SNS's networks[35]: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google+ and Instagram, Facebook and Twitter are the most likely candidates for the purpose of my thesis. They are both well-known, have a large reach, and are influential in modern day society. YouTube and Instagram are video and image based respectively, making them more attractive to younger generations. YouTube is by far the most similar to offline speech situations. It is essentially a platform for people's videos; if asked to describe it to someone who has never been on the internet but does know television, I would say it is do-it-yourself television. Anyone can start her own YouTube channel and upload videos. No subject is lacking, it seems: academic subjects, sports, economy, health and fitness, travelling, medicine, transportation, doing odd jobs, animals, and many more. People who upload videos on a regular basis in which they give what is best described as small lectures, are called 'vloggers' and their videos are 'vlogs' (video-log, cf. blogs: web-logs). There are vlogging doctors, lawyers, judges, academics, teenage girls and boys, students, personal trainers, chefs, athletes, municipal facility workers, and any other occupation you can think of. One can find tutorials or 'how to' videos, explanatory videos, support seeking or offering videos, review videos of almost any product or appliance available and even vlogs of vloggers watching other vloggers on YouTube – this seems to be a favourite teenage pastime at the time of writing this thesis. (And giving a new perspective to the question of regression.) Within the subject of philosophy, one can find videos ranging from explanations for laypeople – like 3-minute philosophy about Hume, Descartes and Plato[36] - to MOOC's (open classes) for BA / MA students from sometimes very well-known philosophers[37], and it is in this way that lectures

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[35] http://www.smartinsights.com/social-media-marketing/social-media-strategy/new-global-social-media-research/

[36] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1awvC1I7mM&list=PLgYuWYisC1bmITLvPX8eEdj9PIj2jPg-g

[37] Harvard University's *Justice* by Michael Sandel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBdfcR-8hEY&list=PL8E76EB832BA66E75

held at universities of recognised standing like Harvard and Oxford become available to anyone with a device, worldwide. The question presents itself: if YouTube is so popular, why don't I include it in my research? The answer is that the one thing all of these videos have in common, is that they mainly portray 'regular' speech situations, comparable to being spoken to, or watching television. It is a one-way form of communication (not counting the possibility to leave a comment under the video, because this is not incorporated in the actual video – you cannot reply or answer in real time) and it is not as accessible a platform as Twitter and Facebook are. Instagram is photography-based; an Instagram update consists of a photo with or without caption. Posting without a photo is not possible. Google + is very similar to Facebook. So, in choosing from the five most popular SNS's, I have chosen the two platforms that offer the most options for textual input, and therefore for illocutionary acts, by the users. Also, since most SNS's websites offer (almost) the same kinds of possibilities to their users, by discussing the possibilities that Twitter and Facebook offer, many (if not all) of the possibilities on other social networks will also have been discussed. Twitter and Facebook can be seen as representatives in this sense.

First some background information on Twitter. Twitter is a web-based social networking site for microblogging that allows registered users to 'tweet'. It is called 'microblogging' because the distinguishing feature of Twitter is that tweets have a maximum of 140 characters. A tweet is a written message on the Twitter platform, available via smartphone, tablet, laptop and/or desktop computer.[38] Twitter users are people who have signed up for a Twitter account, and they can enter the platform with the use of a personalised user name and password. On Twitter, the users can unilaterally follow other users and be followed by other users on a non-reciprocal basis. This means that a user can follow any other

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[38] From here on, to avoid repetition of the enumeration, I will refer to the smartphone, tablet, laptop and/or desktop computers as 'devices'.

user, and the user being followed does not need to follow back. Although Twitter started out as a text-based platform, users are increasingly posting pictures and links to other websites. Hashtags originated on Twitter, and I will elaborate on this in the section where I categorise Twitter speech acts. Twitter has 328 million monthly active users worldwide[39]. Facebook has 1.86 billion monthly active users around the globe[40] and the number is rising every year. Facebook users create a user profile with information about their professional and personal life, much like a CV, as elaborated or scant as they choose it to be. Other people can be added as 'friends' – this is a reciprocal function for which consent is needed. Users may post status updates, which can be purely text-based or include digital photos and/or links. Additionally, they may join common-interest user groups – for instance, there is a Spinoza group, in which scholars studying Spinoza can contact each other with thoughts, links, news and questions about Spinoza's work. There are work-related groups, illness-related groups, school-related groups, etcetera. Facebook and Twitter both provide private messaging services, which I will not take into account here. 'Saying' something on Facebook is typically called a 'status update', while a message on Twitter is called a 'tweet'.

In what follows, I will first introduce the illocutionary act taxonomies of Austin and Searle. Next, I will make an overview of illocutionary acts on SNS's that are in any way different from illocutionary acts in real life. I will discuss this difference and then assess the act as either new or not new. If it is not new, I will rank it within the existing taxonomies. If it is new, then I will give the reason why it is new and why it does not fit into the existing categories. This will be the case for hashtagging.

2.2 Speech act taxonomies

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[39] The official Twitter Blog https://about.twitter.com/company 07-21-2017

[40] Facebook Newsroom http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/

To be able to categorise the speech acts on SNS's, it is now time to introduce the two different taxonomies of illocutionary verbs by Austin and Searle. I will rank or assign the illocutionary acts on SNS's to existing categories in these taxonomies, where possible. First, Austin's speech act taxonomy:

Type	Examples (tokens)
Verdictives: the giving of a verdict	To find, reckon, appraise, hold, rank, assess
Exercitives: the exercising of powers, rights, or influence	To appoint, order, vote, urge, advise, declare, warn, announce, give
Commissives: making a commitment or announcing an intention	To promise, plan, side with, pledge, guarantee
Behabitives: expressing attitudes (to others), social behaviour (derived from 'behave')	To apologise, congratulate, commend, condole, curse, toast, welcome
Expositives: make plain how we use words, how utterances are 'expository'	To reply, argue, concede, assume, postulate, affirm, deny, call

Table: Austin's illocutionary acts categories: 'classes of utterance, classified according to their illocutionary force', in: How to do things with words, *lecture XII p. 151 ff.*

Searle takes issue with Austin's taxonomy on several points. The main reason for him to reject Austin's classification is that 'there is no clear or consistent principle or set of principles on the basis of which the taxonomy is constructed.'[41] This leads to a lack of clear-cut distinctions and too much overlap between the proposed categories. Searle therefore proposes a different taxonomy,[42] predominantly based on (1) point (or purpose) of the act, (2) the direction of fit between words and the world and (3) expressed psychological states. [43] The illocutionary point is the purpose of the speaker making the utterance, and it is part of the illocutionary force. An example of (1) is an attempt to get the hearer to do something, as with the illocutionary acts of ordering and requesting. By (2), Searle means that illocutionary points partly entail making the world fit the words or vice versa. Assertions, for instance, are words matching the world. In the utterance 'It is raining in Leiden' when it is indeed raining in Leiden, the words fit the actual state of the world (cf. Austin's initial constative). Making the world match the words is part of the illocutionary point of promises and requests. If I have made a promise to make supper for you and kept my promise, then the world has fitted the words (cf. Austin's initial performative). Now with (3), Searle points towards what an illocutionary act is meant to express. An assertion *expresses a belief that p*; a promise *expresses an intent to a*; an order *expresses a desire that X do A,* and an apology *expresses a regret at having done A*. What is expressed, respectively belief, intent, desire and regret, are

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[41] *A Classification of Illocutionary Acts*, 1976, p. 8. It is beyond the scope of my thesis to discuss Searle's issues with Austin's taxonomy in detail. Searle's article is suggested for further reading on this topic.

[42] 1976, p. 10 ff.

[43] There are nine other dimensions of illocutionary acts that Searle discusses, but he states that the first three seem to him "the most important, and I will build most of my taxonomy around them". (1976 p. 5)

psychological states, according to Searle. Plus, for Searle, psychological states are equivalent

to sincerity conditions since it is 'linguistically unacceptable (though not self-contradictory) to

conjoin the explicit performative verb with the denial of the expressed psychological state'.[44]

Sincerity conditions are introduced by him in *Speech acts: an essay in the philosophy of*

language (1969)[45] in which he argues that an insincere promise is still a promise. Even if S

does not have the intention to keep her promise to *a*, the mere fact that she makes the promise

to *a* means that she takes responsibility for having the intention to *a*, even if she does not

intend to *a*. The way I interpret this is that S knows that the *conventional* uptake of a promise

to *a* is coupled with the intention to *a*. The conventional uptake will be that a promise to *a* is

made sincerely, i.e. with the intention of S to *a*. Just knowing this, gives S the responsibility

for invoking the belief that she will *a* when she promises to *a*. This responsibility is shown,

Searle says, by the absurdity of uttering 'I promise to *a* but I do not intend to *a*.[46] Even if the

intention is not there, the responsibility for the intention (and its uptake in the hearer) *is*.

Searle concludes from this that the psychological state is the same as the sincerity condition,

since even if the utterance is insincere, it still falls under S's responsibility that the hearer

believes that the promise is sincere; that there is a psychological state of intent. With Searle's

three distinctive points explained, we can now turn to Searle's categorisation of illocutionary

acts:

Type:	Examples (tokens)
Representatives Illocutionary point: to commit the speaker to something being the case, to the truth of the	To suggest, put forward, state, boast, conclude

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[44] 1976, p. 4

[45] 1969, Ch. 3

[46] 1969 p. 62

expressed proposition. The utterances in this class are assessable on the dimension of assessment which includes *true* and *false*. Direction of fit: words-to-world. Sincerity condition: belief that p.	
Directives Illocutionary point: the speaker attempts to make the addressee perform an action. Direction of fit: world-to-words. Sincerity condition: want (wish, desire).	To ask, order, request, invite, advise, beg
Commissives Illocutionary point: to commit the speaker to doing something in the future. The propositional content is always that the speaker S does some future action A. Direction of fit: world-to-words. Sincerity condition: intention.	To promise, plan, vow, bet, oppose
Expressives Illocutionary point: to express the psychological state or sincerity condition regarding a state of affairs (specified in the utterance).	To thank, apologise, congratulate, welcome, deplore

Direction of fit*: none.* The truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed. Sincerity condition: a range of different possible psychological states.	
Declarations Illocutionary point: the successful performance of a declaration brings about the correspondence of the propositional content to the world. Declarations bring about some alteration in the status or condition of the referred-to object(s) in virtue of their successful performance (changing the state of the world). Direction of fit: both world-to-words and words-to world. Sincerity condition: none.	To fire, appoint, nominate, declare, marry

Table: Searle's illocutionary acts categories

I will continue by listing the speech acts on Facebook and Twitter and, where possible, assign them to Austin's and/or Searle's categories.

2.3 Facebook

I have already given a short description of the SNS Facebook, but will provide a short

overview of this platform, specifically focusing on the way one can 'speak' on Facebook.

When logging on to Facebook, the opening screen shows your timeline.[47] This is a vertical series of status updates, consisting of a) status updates from friends, b) status updates from organisations that you have 'liked', c) messages from groups that you have joined, and d) some 'suggested messages' from advertisers. Facebook friends are made by searching for people with the search bar, or by accepting friend invitations from people who have found you, or by letting Facebook help you and selecting people from their list of suggestions for friends ('people you may know') or having Facebook send friend invitations to the contacts in your e-mail database. Facebook groups (private or open) are essentially the same as organised groups in real life, like book clubs or peer support groups. The landing page of users gives a status bar at the top of the screen. In this box, the user can give a status update, and if she decides to do that, her status update will appear on her 'wall' and can then appear on the timeline of her friends. A Facebook wall is the name for the user's own page, on which she can find all of her own status updates in a chronological order. Her friends can respond to her status update in two ways: by typing a response (this can include a visual addition such as a photo) or by clicking on one of Facebook's six emoji's: a like button (the well-known thumbs up), a 'great!' button (heart), a laughing face (funny), an amazed face, a sad face or an angry face.

The following is a list of the possible speech acts on Facebook and a preliminary judgement of the category or categories to which they belong.

1. **Status updates** (including written responses to other people's status updates)

   A status update can be anything you could also say in real life. I could upload holiday pictures and add a caption with some information, just as I could show the same pictures on my smartphone to my friends and tell them the 'captions'. I could write

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[47] See addendum: screenshot at the end of this thesis

one sentence about how I am struggling with writing my thesis, just as I could call my mother and tell her the same thing. I could even just type 'blah' if I wanted to, or some other nonsensical word. If I see an interesting article on a website, I can put a link to that article in the status update box and submit it, with or without my own comment. This is the same as me sending an e-mail containing a link to the website. We can conclude from these examples that creating a status update equals speaking, and that there is no difference with offline speech other than the mode of delivery and the audience you can reach. Since status updates equal speech, the things you can say fit into the existing illocutionary act categories. Therefore, the full taxonomies of Searle and Austin apply. There is no need for an addition to the existing taxonomies.

Status updates: regular offline taxonomies apply

2. **Sharing:** when you update your status and the message appears on your wall, then one of its features is that there is a button under it saying 'share'. Other users can click on 'share' and in doing so, create a message on their own walls. For instance, if John had made a status update 'I am having a party tonight', then Peter (or any of John's other Facebook friends) could click 'share' and have the status update appear on his (Peter's) wall. Peter can share this status update with or without his own comment. He could just share the message as it is, or add something to it, such as 'Looking forward to a great night!' In the case of sharing a status update as it is, without further comment, the user performs two conventional illocutionary acts. By 'conventional' I refer to the usual uptake of shared messages on Facebook. The first illocutionary act one performs by sharing 'as it is' is citing. In sharing something that someone else has said, the act of citing is performed. This is not different from citing someone in regular media. In citing, one brings attention to something someone else has said. Now, even

though a Facebook share is a verbal repetition of someone else's status update, the person doing the sharing is tethered to the quote. If Peter shares John's status update, Peter's friends on Facebook will see it on their timelines as a message from Peter. Because of that link between the person doing the sharing and the shared content – the shared content is now 'uttered' by the sharer – another illocutionary act is performed, and that act is agreeing or endorsing or assenting.[48] Agreeing is a complex illocutionary act, since it is not a stand-alone act; by definition, it needs someone else's utterance to be felicitous. I will revisit this illocutionary act in chapter 3, when I discuss hashtags. Typically, sharing a Facebook status update without any extra comment is conventionally taken up as agreement with the content of the status update. If one does not agree with the content of the status update that one is sharing, one will always make a comment that appears above the shared content. For instance, if somebody in John's group of Facebook friends holds a grudge against John for whatever reason, then she could not just share the status update about the party without giving the impression to her friends that she likes the party, or is even going to attend it. That is just how shares are conventionally taken up. If she is really vindictive, she could share the status update and add a comment like: 'So this will be lame. Last place I'd go to tonight.' But, again, the typical uptake if she was to share it without added comment would be as an incentive to join the party. The only exception to this conventional uptake might be that someone shares something that is *so* appalling that it can be taken for granted that she is horrified by it, since any normal person would be. From this it becomes clear that sharing a message and adding one's own comment is different from sharing without comment. Sharing with comment is a combination of citing and a 'normal' status update as mentioned under 1). In the

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[48] these three different acts will for readability purposes fall under the heading 'agree'

comment, you are free to say what you want about the message you are sharing. You can voice your agreement or disagreement, make a quirk about it, add your thoughts on the subject, say why you (dis)like the content, and so on. This does not differ from voicing your opinion about messages in 'old' media like newspapers or comments that your friends have made. Also, where illocutionary acts are concerned, sharing with comment does not differ from giving your own status update. The shared content is an addition to your own message. There is, first, your message, and second, the content of the shared message. Therefore, in the case of sharing with comment, there is the illocutionary act of citing and the illocutionary act of the regular status update.

Sharing without comment: expositive (citation) and verdictive (agreement) in Austin.

Sharing without comment: representative (citation) and declaration (agreement) in Searle.

Sharing with comment: comment can be any speech act, citation is expositive in Austin.

Sharing with comment: comment can be any speech act, citation is representative in Searle.

3. **Tag**: when you create a status update, you can tag people who are connected to or involved with the content about which you are creating the status update. For instance, if you upload holiday pictures, you can tag people in the pictures. If the people you tag accept the tag, then the status update and/or photo will appear on their Facebook wall. For instance, Joan uploads a photo of her son's third birthday party and his uncle Ben and aunt Janet are in the picture. Joan then selects Facebook's tag option, clicks on the faces of Ben and Janet and adds their names to their images. Depending on their personal settings, the photo will then also appear on Ben's and Jenny's Facebook

walls, and can be seen by their Facebook friends on their timelines, even though they did not upload the photo themselves. Tagging a person is approximately equivalent to indexically pointing someone out to other people offline. For instance, in the example given, the offline situation would be that Joan has made a photo-album containing her son's birthday party photos, and she shows the album to other friend, pointing at Ben and Janet while saying that they attended the birthday party as well. The main difference is that this photo-album will not be automatically in the possession of Ben and Janet, while on Facebook, the photo will be added to their online photos. To tag someone is to assert their involvement in the activity and/or image, making a tag an assertion. But, just like assertions in offline speech, it is something else as well. To tag is also to involve someone. The identification part of it, the actual pointing out, is done with physical action in real life, but is done with words on SNS's. Just like the Twitter @ (see 2.4.4), the tag is a public message to an individual person. It expresses an attitude towards another Facebook user, and it is meant to be received by the addressee.

Tag: expresses an attitude towards someone, so a behabitive in Austin.

Tag: @ denotes a wish that the addressee receive and take note of the tag, so is a directive in Searle.

4. **Check in**: clicking on the check-in button on your status bar creates a status update of your location on your Facebook wall. Examples are: the university library, the local swimming pool, the restaurant you visit during your holiday. Some businesses require you to check in on Facebook in order to be able to use their Wi-Fi services.

   Location check-in: an announcement, and therefore an exercitive in Austin.

Location check-in: a word-to-world assertion on the true/false dimension: respresentative in Searle.

5. **Likes and emoji's**: Facebook has become famous for its 'like-button': an image (emoji[49]) of a thumbs-up.

Facebook like

'Liking' is the most frequently performed illocutionary act on Facebook. It is possible to like status updates from friends, messages from companies, organisational pages (if you like an organisation, their messages will appear on your timeline from then onwards – unless you disable this feature). Clicking the 'like' button is an appreciated response. It is common for Facebook users to be proud or glad that a message or photo they posted received many likes. Liking shows involvement, even though it takes only seconds to give a like. Until 2016, the thumbs up button – 'like' – was the only emoji Facebook provided as a response to a status update, other than typing your own response. Sometimes, this would lead to awkward situations: when a friend's status update is about the death of her pet, or failing for an exam, a thumbs-up is not the first response you would want to give. Since many of the Facebook users like to scroll through the messages on their timeline and just click 'like', without having to type a response themselves, Facebook introduced five other emoji's, giving the users more options to respond to a status update in one click than a thumbs-up. These emoji's are:

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[49] There is some confusion about the term emoji and emoticon. An emoticon is an expression of an emotion in a text-only context: :) or :(. An emoji is an actual image of a face, or other things (people holding hands, a dancer, a slice of pizza are just a few examples). So with regard to Facebook, we are talking about emoji's.

heart (great), laughing face (funny), stunned face (amazed), teary face (sad), angry face (mad). So now, it is equally easy to quickly express these emotions in reaction to a status update that is not positive, but sad, or maddening. From this, we can conclude that clicking on an emoji is primarily meant to convey an emotion in reaction to a status update.

Likes and emoji's: social behaviour, therefore a behabitive in Austin.

Likes and emoji's: about expressing a psychological state, so an expressive in Searle.

Regarding emoji's, Dresner and Herring (2010) are of the opinion that

'in many cases emoticons are not used as signs of emotion, but rather as indications of the illocutionary force of the textual utterances that they accompany. As such, they help convey the speech act performed through the production of the utterance. These uses neither contribute to the propositional content (the locution) of the language used nor are they just an extralinguistic [sic] communication channel indicating emotion. Rather, they help to convey an important aspect of the linguistic utterance they are attached to: What the user intends by what he or she types.'[50]

Illocutionary force is described by them as 'illocutionary acts performed through linguistic utterances' and as 'part of what a speaker means by the utterance, part of what he or she intends to convey by making it'. In other words, the authors take the illocutionary force to convey the intention of the speaker. They describe a case in which an anxious student makes a request and places :) at the end of the request. The student is anxious in making his request with a professor, since he is asking for a favour. Therefore, it is unlikely that the smile

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[50] P. 255

represents actual happiness, they state. It is more likely the student is nervous and adds the smiley to the request to come across as friendly. The emoticon is placed to 'modulate an already identifiable act'. Another example Dresner and Herring provide is of a woman on a forum for fellow sufferers of a disease, on which she has written a litany of complaints with a :) at the end of it. The message is clear about the emotional state of the writer, since she explicitly states that she has been crying, moping and feeling down. In this case, the authors say, 'the smiley functions to mitigate what otherwise could be read as a self-pitying list of complaints.' Or, in a final example, a complaint can be altered from a 'rude, selfish gripe' to a 'mild, humorous complaint' by adding an emoticon. This speaks to intention, Dresner and Herring hold, not to emotion. There are two problems with their reasoning, in my view. The first is their uptake of what illocutionary force entails. Illocutionary force is identical with the speaker's intention. Utterances are used with a certain kind of illocutionary force; therefore, by means of the utterance, an illocutionary act with that illocutionary force is performed. Usually, the speaker's intention and the illocutionary force will overlap, since the intention of the speaker determines the illocutionary force. However, this does not make the illocutionary force the result of the intention; it is the result of the utterance. Secondly, while I agree that emoticons *can* be used as typographic additions in order to clarify speaker meaning, emoji's can also be used stand alone. Responding with a singular emoji to a status update message on Facebook is specifically designed to convey an emotion about the message. If John uploads some photos of his party and his Facebook friends like the photos, or press the heart (great) button, or the laughing emoji, it is quite clear that they convey their emotions about the photos in question: they like them, or they think they are great, or funny. Now, it could of course be the case that someone hits the 'like' button without sincerely liking the content; maybe because of peer pressure, or feigning involvement with the content when it is not felt. Searle's argument about a promise made still being a promise, even though it is not sincere, holds in

this case.[51] The emoji clicked on is still the responsibility of the person who clicks, since she will know the conventional uptake of the emoji, just as the promiser would in Searle's example. There is a difference, however, between the response emoji's that stand alone (text cannot be added), and emoji's used in status updates. When used in status updates, I concur with Dresner and Herring that emoji's, especially the smiley face, are sometimes used to for instance mitigate or soften the message, or to signal an intention of the speaker, and hence could be seen as carriers of illocutionary force – if you view illocutionary force as the intention of the speaker, as Dresner and Herring do. However, the authors do allow for emoticons to be 'used to express or perform emotion, where the emoticon iconically represents an emotional facial expression.' I believe that this is accurate with regard to the Facebook emoji's, since they are not accompanied by text and therefore are stand-alone ways for a speaker to convey a response of emotion to a message. Therefore, I have categorised the emoji's under social behaviour, making them behabitives in Austin and expressives in Searle.

      Now, we turn to Twitter.

2.4 Twitter

1. **Tweet**: Twittering is the same act as writing a status update on Facebook. The only (great) difference is that Facebook does not limit the number of characters for a message and a tweet contains 140 characters or less. But within that space, any speech act can be performed. So tweets would be categorised in the same way utterances in real life are. So, tweets are speech, and therefore, the full taxonomies of Searle and Austin apply for the things Twitter users can say (cf. Facebook status updates).

Tweets: regular offline taxonomies apply

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[51] This thesis, p. 30

2**. Retweet:** retweeting is the same act as 'sharing' in Facebook, including the possibility to retweet with/out one's own comment, so for its categorisation I refer to that topic.

3. **Hashtag:** it is not an exaggeration to state that Twitter is ruled by hashtags. An example will make this clear. The night of the terrorist attack on civilians in Nice, France on the national holiday' le quatorze Juilliet', 2016, two hashtags were trending on Twitter[52]. They were #NicePortesOuvertes and #RechercheNice[53]. The first hashtag was created to find tweets from inhabitants of Nice who opened their homes to people who were not able to reach their own home, or who had no roof over their heads, to stay overnight. The second hashtag was created to find missing people; to try to get in touch with friends and family who were in Nice at the time of the attack but could not be directly contacted or found by their families and friends. These two hashtag examples mirror the usefulness and importance of hashtags on SNS's. People who otherwise would have had to sleep on the streets, or in their cars, were welcomed by citizens of Nice who generously opened their doors to them. Twitter brought them together, via a hashtag. Also, many worrisome nights were prevented by the second hashtag, making it easier for people who were separated by hundreds or thousands of miles, to find each other. Oftentimes, hashtags play an important part in the role Twitter can assume during incidents and crises. It is not a random SNS that is used; it is specifically the hashtag function that makes the difference. A hashtag is a sort of label, used to categorise a tweet's topic(s). Twitter users can use hashtags as search criteria in the search box to find tweets with the same hashtag. For instance, a search for #NicePortesOuvertes will list all tweets to which this hashtag is added, in chronological order. Hashtags are marked by the hash sign: # (better

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[52] Trending on Twitter means that the hashtag is the most used on Twitter, usually given in a top 5 or 10 of most used hashtags.

[53] Even though upper and lower case letters are used here, hashtags are not case-sensitive.

known as pound sign in America), followed by a term meant to 'collect' tweets that are related to the term. One can use just one hashtag or a series of them. By adding a hashtag to a tweet, it is 'named' or 'labelled' – *tagged* – so that it can be found by people who also want to say something about the same topic, or who want to read about it. A tweet without a hashtag will appear on the timelines of a Tweep's[54] followers, but will be hard to find by people who are not following that person on Twitter. So, if a Tweep wanted her tweets about Hilary Clinton to be found by other people during the 2017 American elections, adding #USElections #HilaryClinton #Democrats to her message will have made it appear on the pages with tweets that are tagged with the same hashtag. An important trait of hashtags is that Twitter users create them. Many hashtags have, of course, already been invented, but a hashtag like #NicePortesOuvertes did not exist before the incident. Most likely, one Twitter user from Nice came up with this hashtag. Other people saw it, started retweeting the tweet and/or making their own tweets with this hashtag added, and then it became *trending* ('most used' in Twitter jargon). Functionally, the hashtag is a search improver. However, hashtags have many other functions that make it difficult to categorise this as one illocutionary speech act. I will argue that hashtagging is a meta-speech act (chapter 3). Therefore, no categorisation is provided here.

4. **At (@)**: adding an @ to your tweet makes the tweet directed at another Twitter user. For example, if one is enthusiastic about the service on board of a Singapore Airlines flight, one could tweet something like 'Arrived fresh and fit after a 12-hour flight, thank you @SingaporeAir'. The owner of the Twitter account that is tagged will then receive a notification of the tweet. In this case: Singapore Airlines receives a notification, and the tweet can be found by all Twitter users who search for Singapore Airlines on Twitter. Essentially, @

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[54] Tweeps are people who (avidly) use Twitter.

is a public message meant for a specific person or organisation. This is not new, in itself. Newspapers, for instance, offer publicists and sometimes readers the possibility to write a public message about something. The happy passenger could have sent a letter to her newspaper containing her positive review of the flight, or she could go to the airline's website or Google and add her review there. Even though it is not possible in offline communication to use the @ sign, there are ways to direct public messages to a specific person or organisation. Therefore, the existing taxonomies apply.

At (@): the sender of the tweet expresses an attitude towards another Twitter user, so this is a behabitive in Austin.

At (@): a directive in Searle, since @ means a wish for the addressee to receive and take note of the tweet.

5. **URL/link**: a link to a website page posted in a tweet makes it possible for the reader of the tweet to click on the link and be directed to the website. This may be an article or a video, for example. (Not that on Facebook, this function is integrated in the status update.) Usually, some comment about the link is made in the tweet. It could read 'Love this latest insight from @HuffingtonPost and then give a link to an article on Huffington Post. The comment part is similar to a Facebook status update or a tweet. The function is similar to the Facebook share, since a website link can be tweeted with or without comment. Therefore, this act is similar to *2. sharing* on Facebook and I refer to the categorisation in that section (see 2.3.2).

6**. Embed tweet**: tweets can be embedded on websites and blogs. An embedded tweet is a fully functional tweet – including hashtags, @'s, links, photos, videos – taken out of the Twitter context and put into the context of regular websites or blog sites. In a way, it is like making a screen shot of a tweet and placing a fully functional copy of it on a website, which

makes it a copy-paste action. This, too, can be seen as a form of citation. It is taking literally what someone has said on Twitter and repeating it on a website or blog. Citing has already been treated in *2. sharing* on Facebook, so I refer to the categorisation found there (2.3.2).

7. Favourite: originally designed to place tweets in a folder so they can be reread at will, the Twitter favourite is more commonly used as a 'like' button. When clicking on favourite, the favoured tweet will go into a (public) folder in the account of the Twitter user who clicked on it, and will be saved there. Other Twitter users can access this folder and see which tweets were liked by a specific Tweep. Furthermore, the Tweep who posted the tweet will see that her tweet was 'favoured' and by whom. In the last instance, the Twitter favourite is similar to the Facebook like. I already established in the Facebook section that likes are behabitives in Austin, and expressives in Searle. The folder function however is an act of ranking, but this act is not performed by the Twitter user. It is a function of the SNS Twitter. Therefore, the folder function cannot be judged to be an illocutionary act by the Twitter user.

Twitter favourite

2.5 Table of illocutionary acts on Facebook and Twitter

The table below recapitulates the categorisations I have given of the illocutionary acts found on Facebook and Twitter:

Facebook	Twitter	Austin	Searle
Status update	Tweet	All speech acts	All speech acts
Sharing with comment	Retweeting with comment & embed tweet & URL/link	Expositive (citation) and verdictive (agreement)	Representative (citation) and declaration (agreement)

Sharing without comment	Retweeting without comment & embed tweet & URL/link	Comment can be any speech act, quote/citation is expositive	Comment can be any speech act, quote/citation is representative
-	Hashtag	-	-
Check-in	-	Exercitive (announcement)	Representative (announcement)
Likes/emoji's	Favourite	Behabitive	Expressive
Tag	@	Behabitive (expression of attitude)	Directive (intent of receipt by addressee)

2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the SNS platforms Twitter and Facebook and have given arguments for my choice of these two SNS's for the purposes of this thesis. Furthermore, I have ranked the different illocutionary speech acts on Twitter and Facebook. I have argued that almost all illocutionary acts are not new, and can be subsumed in the existing illocutionary act taxonomies of Austin and Searle. There is, however, one illocutionary act that cannot be subsumed in those and that is hashtagging. In the following chapter I will provide my arguments for this point of view and argue that hashtagging is a meta-speech act. Also, I will discuss some possible objections.

Chapter 3: How to do things with hashtags

Introduction

On Twitter, filling out #speechacts in the search bar results in a long list of tweets of people who have used this hashtag with their tweet. #illocutionaryacts only yields two results, so this is not a hotly debated topic on Twitter. What boggles my mind somewhat is that there is a hashtag *#hashtag* as well, yielding an extended list of results. Which means that there are people categorising their tweet by giving it a label that is the label of what they are doing with the label. Again, the question of regression rises. Or does this already point towards the exceptionality of the illocutionary act of hashtagging? The linguistic definition of 'hashtag' is 'a word or phrase preceded by the symbol # that classifies or categorises the accompanying text (such as a tweet)'.[55] In the previous chapter, I stated that all illocutionary acts on Twitter and Facebook have a place in the existing illocutionary act taxonomies of Austin and Searle, except for the hashtag. But if the hashtag is simply a 'label', this would equal the giving of a verdict for Austin, similar to an act like ranking, making it a verdictive in Austin's taxonomy. Somewhat less apparent in Searle, but plausible nonetheless, would be to argue that a hashtag changes the state of the world, at least the state of the Twitter world, so that it could be a declarative in his taxonomy. There is nothing new about that. So, why do I argue that hashtagging is a new speech act? The short answer is that the linguistic definition falls short, and that there is more to the act of hashtagging than classification, and that it does not touch the philosophical aspects of this speech act. Hashtagging appears to be doing much more than categorising accompanying text: one can create new hashtags, thus creating a category; but it can also be used to constitute a social group, or as a mark of distinction. So, you would be hard-pressed to find one category in Austin's or Searle's taxonomy that covers this range. Searle's declarative does not completely cover the act of hashtagging either, since even

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[55] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hashtag

though hashtags have both world-to-word and word-to-world fit, they do not always change the state of the world. It is definitely not in the same category of illocutionary verbs as to fire, to marry or to appoint. The question rises what type of illocutionary act hashtagging is – if it is an illocutionary act at all? I will argue that it is an illocutionary act, but that it is cannot be categorised like the other illocutionary acts on SNS's. There are many different uses, which leads me to the thought that hashtagging does not have one essence or definition, but has many uses, some of which overlapping; and this brings to mind Ludwig Wittgenstein's family resemblance. I will discuss this possibility, but choose to define hashtagging as a meta-speech act.

Hashtagging has no counterpart in offline speech, yet is so influential, that it has made its way into offline speech as a new speech act, for instance in advertisements and in regular media. Take, for instance, radio programmes. In the majority of these, the host will at some point say something like: 'Listeners can react to our topics and guests, use hashtag News on One'. The act of hashtagging is certainly doing something with words, but 'to hashtag' is not an explicit illocutionary verb. The provisional litmus test of 'hereby' fails: 'I hereby hashtag' is nonsensical. Moreover, the hashtag can be added to an utterance that is already an illocutionary act; it can be added to a promise, for instance, or an assertion. To perform the speech act of hashtagging, there has to be another speech act that is hashtagged, which triggers the idea that it is a meta-speech act.

These are the topics of this last chapter: 1) the uses of the hashtag and the types of illocutionary acts they can be, 2) the possibility of hashtagging not having a single essence but being a term of family resemblance, and 3) the idea of the hashtag as a meta-speech act.

3.1 The uses of hashtags

There are different things that using a hashtag can achieve. You can:

1. make your tweet[56] easier to find;

2. create a new category;

3. stand out (e.g. by giving a jocular twist to your tweet);

4. join in;

5. give your opinion;

6. make sure your speech act reaches more people;

7. show you are part of some social construct.

And maybe there are even more uses, but for now, I will focus on these seven. The first use is the intended or the 'official' use – the reason the hashtag was invented.[57] If you are following the national elections, it would be hard to find all the tweets about this topic without a common label. So the first use of the hashtag is as a label. The second use, creating a new category, is applicable when someone coins a hashtag for a topic. I did that for #locutionaryact on Twitter (see below). Some hashtags become quite famous, in the sense that they are trending on a regular basis, such as #TGIF (Thank God It's Friday). The third use is related to the second and is best explained by giving an example. The philosopher and political scientist Eric Schliesser is one of the few philosophers who have embraced social media. Schliesser is a prominent social media presence, maintaining a blog and very active Twitter and Facebook accounts.[58] He regularly adds original hashtags to his tweets and Facebook posts that are not meant in the first place as a tool to find the messages. Examples are #deepthoughtswhilegradingpapers and #publishingabookisweirdmaybeishoulddoitmoreoften. Clicking on these hashtags will give a very short search result: just the messages of Schliesser are listed. This points towards the use

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[56] I talk here about tweets, but this pertains to all SNS's that have hashtags as a function, including Instagram and Facebook

[57] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashtag

[58] Blog: digressionsimpressions.typepad.com

of the hashtag as an illustration or emphasis, or maybe in a way similar to a thought cloud as used in cartoons. Of course, hashtags can also be used to join a group (use 4); this is often seen on Instagram. Being favoured by teens and tweens, this image-based SNS is more about appearances than it is about news (as Twitter is). For instance, food, fitness, and sports are big issues on this SNS. One of the trends within these topics is 'clean eating', which entails avoiding processed and packaged foods as much as possible and only eating 'whole' foods, either plant-based or including animal products. The hashtag #cleaneating results in 32.889.507 public messages (August 17, 2017), consisting mostly of images of healthy meals and fit physiques. Using this hashtag shows that the user joins or underwrites this lifestyle, at least when seen as the serious literal utterances that I assume for this thesis. The fifth use of hashtags is to give an opinion: #impeachTrump and #getridofISIS being some examples. Furthermore, hashtags can be used to reach as many people as possible by placing the message in as many categories as possible, by using many hashtags (sixth use). This would be harder on Twitter, given the limited characters allowed in a tweet, but some Instagram photos are followed by a long list of hashtags, sometimes thirty or more. The hashtags do not necessarily have to be related to the image or message. (Maybe it is helpful to think of this as hashtag 'spamming'.). Seventh, hashtags can show that you are part of some sort of social construct. Using the Twitter hashtag #leidenuniversity shows a connection between the Tweep and the university, and also (as an overlapping function) using the aforementioned hashtag #cleaneating will show you as part of the group of people who feel it is important to eat healthily.

The common denominator of hashtags is that they have to be linked to another speech act. As part of my empirical research for this thesis, I looked up the hashtags #illocutionaryact, #perlocutionaryact and #locutionaryact on Twitter (August 17, 2017) and the latter did not yield any results; it did not exist yet. So first, I tried to make the category

#locutionaryact without adding another utterance, but that was not possible. A hashtag can only accompany another speech act. So, I wrote a tweet and added the hashtag #locutionaryact, creating a new category:
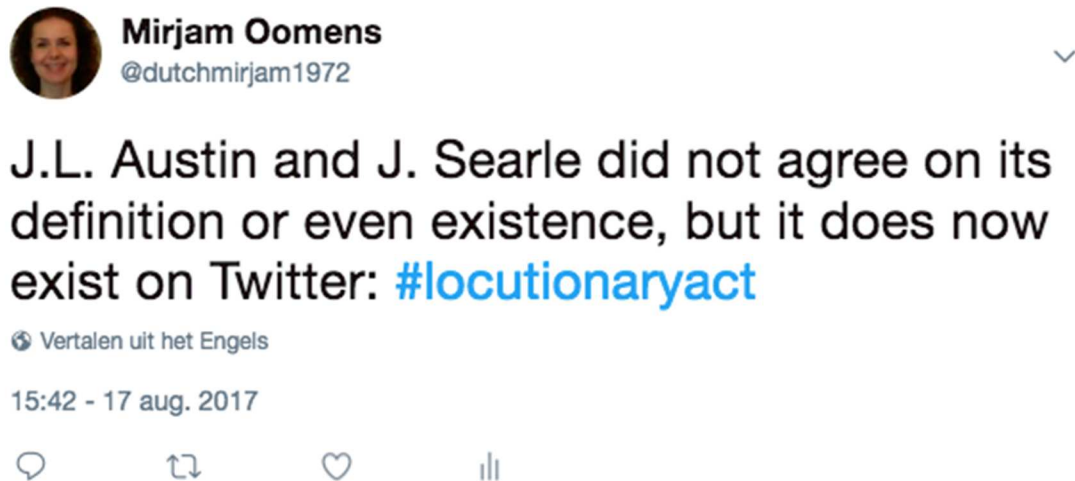
The outcome is that a hashtag can only be used together with another speech act. I needed to write down an utterance to be able to add a hashtag to it. I will return to this later in this chapter.

In answering the question whether hashtagging is an illocutionary act, the first noticeable thing is that Austin's provisional 'hereby' litmus test appears to fail. Since, while it is quite possible to utter 'I hereby assert', uttering 'I hereby hashtag' seems nonsensical. However, this may have to do with the fact that hashtagging is ipso facto a written speech act, since it is not possible to hashtag speech outside of SNS's. How is a written speech act different? To answer this, let me compare the hashtag to a written promise. Assume that John lives in Peter's neighbourhood, and instead of giving his verbal promise to Peter that he will attend his party, John decides to write a note and deliver it in Peter's mailbox on his way to work. So, John writes 'You can count on me tonight. Looking forward to seeing you later.'. Obviously, John has performed the illocutionary act of promising with his note. But wouldn't it be nonsensical to apply 'I hereby promise' to the writing of the note? Even if John were to

think 'I hereby promise' while writing the note, that would be odd – to say the least. So, the illocutionary act of promising is performed but does not meet the hereby test. It is possible to conclude from this that the hereby test fails to sift out all illocutionary acts. However, it still is apt for utterances in the first person singular, present tense. It is the *writing* that makes the test fail for written illocutionary acts. Then again, passing the hereby test is not sufficient (and maybe not even necessary) to prove that hashtagging is an illocutionary act. The questions that need be answered positively to establish the illocutionary character of the act are: is hashtagging a speech act and does it result in an internal product? Hashtagging is an act with words; *in* hashtagging, a hashtag is (per)formed. In this sense, the act is equal to asserting and the resulting assertion, or marrying and the resulting marriage. Hashtagging results in a hashtag; its internal product is the hashtag made. Therefore, hashtagging is an illocutionary act. Against this position, one might say that hashtagging is about its result. One might say that adding a hashtag is done with the intention of 'labeling', or categorising, the tweet. What one wants to achieve, then is that the tweet can be found by other Twitter users. Therefore, the opposing voice may argue, one is after the effect of the act of hashtagging; one wants her/his tweet to be found. Could it not be, then, that hashtagging is a perlocutionary act – and not an illocutionary act? My answer to that objection is negative. In Austin's example, the words 'Shoot her!', are linked to three acts: locutionary (the utterance), illocutionary (the order) and perlocutionary (the effect). Just as is the case with 'Shoot her!', hashtagging has a locutionary, an illocutionary and a perlocutionary aspect. When a person is found through the use of #RechercheNice, the adding of the hashtag is not a perlocutionary act. The finding of the person is the result, so by adding the hashtag #RechercheNice, the tweet can be found by other users who use that hashtag in the search bar, and a perlocutionary act is performed. But the hashtagging itself is an illocutionary act, different from the effect in the same way as in Austin's example of 'Shoot her!'. The *illocutionary* act will have been performed by adding

#RechercheNice, regardless of the effect; even if there is a technical glitch and the tweet is not listed under the hashtag. Intending to find someone determines the illocutionary force here.

3.2 Hashtagging as characterised by family resemblance

In chapter 2, I have been categorising the different illocutionary acts on SNS's. The process of this categorisation consisted of looking at the function(ality) of the acts on Twitter and Facebook and then trying to reduce them to their central illocutionary force. One might say that I searched their essence and categorised them according to it. But then, I ran into some complications when I tried to reduce hashtagging to one unequivocal essence. There are so many functions of the hashtag (we have not even touched upon the functions of the sign '#' itself; on the telephone, on number pads) and they are in some ways similar: the uses share some traits, and miss others. This brings to mind Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Familienähnlichkeit* (family resemblance) in *Philosophische Untersuchungen*:

> 'We see a complex network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.' (PU § 66-67) [59]

Wittgenstein is arguing that not all words in a language can be reduced to one essence or (Platonic) idea. A famous example that he uses is that of *Spiel* (game). Many things are called

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[59] 'Wir sehen ein kompliziertes Nerz von Ähnlichkeiten, die einander übergreifen und kreuzen. Ähnlichkeiten in Großen und Kleinen. (67) Ich kann diese Ähnlichkeiten nicht besser charakterisieren, als durch das Wort >>Familienähnlichkeiten<<; denn so übergreifen und kreuzen sich die verschiedenen Ähnlichkeiten, die zwischen den Gliedern einer Familie bestehen: Wuchs, Gesichtszuge, Augenfarbe, Gang, Temperament, etc. etc.' Wittgenstein, PU, 1953

'game': board games, card games, Olympic games. Wittgenstein opposes the idea that for games to be called 'games', they necessarily have one same trait in common; this trait would be their essence. This is not true, says Wittgenstein. Not all games require skill, not all of them have a competitive aspect, not all of them are rule-governed, and not all of them are physical. For every use of the word game, Wittgenstein says, some traits are shared with other uses and some are not. The various different uses of game '*bilden eine Familie*' (form a family). Wittgenstein adds that an analogy can be made between games and language.[60] Sometimes we just throw a ball around playfully, not following any rules, or even making them up as we go along. Some terms may not follow the 'rules' of their 'essence', but have a more diverse application. The hashtag seems to fit the description of family resemblance term. It started out as a label, but we found new ways of using them as we went along. The ways in which we use them are overlapping and criss-crossing at some times, but are used singularly at other times. All different uses are illocutionary acts, since with every hashtag, an act is performed. But it differs from other illocutionary acts on SNS's in that it cannot be categorised like other illocutionary acts on SNS's. Therefore, it may be explained as characterised by family resemblance.

This characterisation, however, may be problematic. One could argue that calling hashtagging a family resemblance term is a categorisation in and of itself. It is categorising the hashtag as falling under family resemblances. My reply to this is that it was not Wittgenstein's intention to invent a family resemblance *theory,* since that would be opposite to his refutation of general theories. He nowhere states anything of a dogmatic or theoretic sort; in fact, his writing style of aphorisms is a rejection of dogmatic reasoning in itself. It is not, as some authors have defended, a doctrine for all language, since that would be the generalisation that Wittgenstein opposes in the first place. A second possible objection is that

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[60] Wittgenstein, PU 83 & 84

while hashtags may have different functions, each function in itself can be categorised in the existing taxonomies. For instance, labelling is a form of ranking, which makes it a verdictive in Austin's book. While this is true, and it is possible to assign a category to every use of the hashtag, that would be the same as categorising them as seven different illocutionary acts. So why are they then all called hashtags, and performed in the same fashion? Is that just a coincidence? Pulling the term apart like this would be equivalent to saying that each notion of the term 'game' can be categorised and that hence, there is no family resemblance to speak of. It is a fallacy of composition. If you see the whole, it is clear that the single word 'game' has many different traits, and the same applies to the word 'hashtag'. A third, possible objection is that unlike the word *Spiel*, there is one thing that all hashtags have in common: their application, namely that they have to be added to another speech act. While this is true in the current set-up of the SNS's, it is not obvious that there could *never* be a possibility to use a hashtag without another speech act. In theory, it would be possible for SNS's to allow users to create a hashtag and not add anything else to it. In my previous example of #locutionaryact, if the Twitter application had allowed it, I would have created this hashtag without adding other text. Just because it is not possible in the current technical settings of Twitter, does not mean that it could not be done at all. There is the technical possibility that not all hashtags have to be added to other utterances, and therefore, it is not necessarily the case that all hashtags have at least one thing in common.

However, I have my own objection against stating that hashtagging is a family resemblance term. I find it problematic to on the one hand, give categorisations for illocutionary acts on SNS's as I did in chapter 2, but to, on the other hand, seek refuge in a non-essentialist reply as soon as a term does not fit into any taxonomy. Of course, as I already stated, there is no dogma in Wittgenstein's family resemblance, so it is not the case that I have to choose between either categorisation or family resemblance. Family resemblance is a

pluralistic view in that one hashtag can be different illocutionary acts, and I feel that it would be too hasty to assume that there is no monistic explanation for the illocutionary act of hashtagging. In my opinion, I have not yet exhausted the possibilities to define what hashtagging is or might be. So, in the next paragraph, I will look at another possible explanation.

3.3 Hashtagging as a meta-speech act

In the previous paragraph, I argued that it is theoretically possible to use a hashtag on an SNS without adding another utterance. In reality, though, this is not possible. In its everyday use, the hashtag is always connected or tethered to another utterance. Hashtagging is something you do with words, that has a certain illocutionary force, and the hashtag is performed to or about or with another speech act. The hashtag is *added* to the speech act. So, there is an original speech act, upon which another speech act is performed. In that sense, we could say that hashtagging is a meta-speech act. 'Meta' can be taken up as related to the use of the word in 'meta-analysis'. Just as a meta-analysis is an analysis of other analyses, a meta-speech act is a speech act performed on other speech acts. One of the first appearances of the prefix 'meta' is found in Quine's article *Logic based on Inclusion and Abstraction* (1937). Quine proposes a 'meta-theorem' in the article. It is one of the earliest uses of 'meta' meaning 'an X about X'. Earlier use of the prefix did not necessarily mean 'an X about X' since meta in (for instance) metaphysics entails 'a Y about X'. The hashtag, to be sure, is an X about X. It is a speech act about a speech act. More specifically, it is an illocutionary act about a speech act – but an illocutionary act is a type of speech act, so 'X about X' still stands. To be complete, I need to add as a side note that research into the existence of meta-speech acts yielded one

earlier description of meta-speech act from Cohen and Krifka[61], who defined a meta-speech act as

> 'operators that do not express a speech act, but a willingness to make or refrain from making a certain speech act. The classic example is speech act denegation, e.g. *I don't promise to come*, where the speaker is explicitly refraining from performing the speech act of promising. What denegations do is to delimit the future development of conversation, that is, they delimit future admissible speech acts. Hence we call them meta-speech acts. They are not moves in a game, but rather commitments to behave in certain ways in the future.' (2011, p. 1)

This description, however, is different from the usual use of the term 'meta'. For instance, in ICT, the term metadata is very common and means 'data about data'. In academics, a meta-study about topic Y is a study of several studies about Y. Therefore, I will follow Quine's use of meta-speech act, with meta meaning 'an X about X'.

Now, what are the consequences if we view hashtagging as a meta-speech act? It seems to me that to answer this question in the best possible way, we need to investigate if a meta-speech act is a new phenomenon. Has the emergence of SNS's created this meta-speech act, or were meta-speech acts already common before the existence social media platforms? The first sign that the meta-speech act is a new speech act, is that it is hard to find examples in offline speech, in which a verbal speech act is accompanied by a meta-speech act in a fashion comparable to the use of hashtags. If I perform an illocutionary act, such as an assertion, or a promise, or give an order, any speech act that follows the initial speech act is simply a new, consecutive speech act. For instance, when I utter 'The new season of The Bridge will be on

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[61] Cohen, Ariel and Krifka, Manfred, 2011, p. 1

Netflix today', followed by 'I'm really excited about this', then (the content of) my second assertion is about (the content of) my first assertion, but it is not a speech act about a speech act. The second utterance is not a meta-speech act but rather a consecutive speech act. The tweet, however, 'The new season of The Bridge will be on Netflix today #TheBridge #excited' couples the hashtag to the assertion. It belongs to the tweet; and from the moment it is posted, it can be found by searching with the hashtag #excited. That is different from uttering two speech acts consecutively. I believe that there is no speech act equal or even similar to hashtagging in offline speech; it is a unique illocutionary act. Even the offline illocutionary of agreeing, which I promised to revisit[62], does not compare. Agreeing is a complex illocutionary act since it requires another speech act to be felicitous. Even though it is possible to agree with nothing, that would be moot. Agreeing is typically done with an utterance made by another. So, there is utterance X by speaker A, and speaker B agrees with the utterance X (or not) and utters a sentence to that effect. One could say that this makes agreeing a meta-speech act; it is an illocutionary act about another illocutionary act. Yet it is still different from the use of the hashtag. In the case of agreeing, the first illocutionary act is by speaker A and the second by speaker B. In the case of hashtagging, the first and second illocutionary acts are performed simultaneously by the same speaker. Moreover, the agreement of speaker B pertains to the content of speaker A's utterance X, whereas the hashtag *could* – but does not have to – pertain to the content of the utterance, and it will be classifying the tweet at the same time, and in doing so, performing an added illocutionary act. Therefore, my conclusion is that the way in which the hashtag is 'meta' is not found in offline, verbal speech. The meta-speech act is a new type of speech act that was created by the emergence of social media.

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[62] Chapter 2, the discussion of the speech act of 'sharing' on Facebook

3.4 Conclusion

The question of this chapter was to unpick the illocutionary act of hashtagging and to see how it can be characterised. Although it is certainly a defendable position to contend that hashtagging is characterised by family resemblance, I prefer the notion of meta-speech act for this illocutionary act. The reason to choose the meta-speech act is that I think the family resemblance description is too broad for hashtags. In my opinion, the meta-speech act description fits better, since the hashtag is always a meta-speech act; this may in some sense be called its 'essence'. So, my conclusion is that hashtagging is a new illocutionary act and a new phenomenon, the complete reach of which we have not yet seen. I see it as deserving of its own place in speech act theory. This conclusion is supported by the fact that hashtags are increasingly making their way into verbal, offline speech, for instance in advertisements. It is also not unthinkable that at some point, people will actually verbally utter some sort of hashtag when they are speaking. I have not heard this happen yet, but if young children ask you to ring their doorbell as a 'like' for their drawing, it is not far-fetched to think of them as at some point saying 'Dad, may I have a chocolate? Hashtag candy rules.' Especially when we are further ahead in time and 'dad' is the boy who made the chalk drawing on the pavement to begin with.

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