

PROMISE AS A SPEECH ACT

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A typical speech situation involves 3 items: the speaker, the hearer and the utterance of the speaker.

The philosophical problem generated by a speech act (linguistic act) is the question of the relationship involved in the 3 items.

Philosophers of language have identified kinds of acts associated with the speaker's utterance. Some are physical in relation to how the jaw and tongue make noises. Other acts include what the utterance does, such as informing the hearer, referring to somebody or an event and of course making statements. J.L. Austin (1962) has referred to the last set of acts as illocutionary acts.

In this paper, I shall be concerned with the idea of promise as an illocutionary act. The paper will discuss the linguistics, epistemological, metaphysical and ethical problems generated by the act of promising. The epistemological and metaphysical questions that arise here are concerned with the relationship between a word as a linguistic entity and the world as physical entity. The ethical question asks whether the act of promising in itself generates an obligation on the part of the promisor to fulfil the content of a promise to a promisee.

An attempt will be made to apply the resulting analysis to examine the Jamaican saying that "Promise is a comfort to a fool"

Key words: Speech act, illocutionary act, speaker, hearer, promise, linguistics, philosophy.