

Chapter 7

WE SPEAK OURSELVES INTO THE WORLD

“He who loves wisdom must investigate many things.”¹

Heraclitus (540BC–480BC)

In the previous chapter we shared a model in which language (speaking and listening, internal and external conversations) is seen as being not in a vacuum, but instead is seen as being fully inter-related and connected to our emotional space and physical body/biology. And at the beginning of the book we made a big claim—that our language has to do with *Action*, with *coordination of action*, with *creating* and *generating* (vs. merely communicating with others about how things are). This is the broad new interpretation upon which everything else I’m sharing with you rests.

In this chapter, we go from this broad interpretation of language toward the *specific actions* that we say we’re involved in with our language. That is, if language is action (as we say it is), then *what exactly are the actions we take?*

Remember our conversation about the power of distinctions? *These are distinctions in language*, which represent new possibilities for taking

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action and producing results in the world. Building directly on the work done by John Searle ² and J. L. Austin ³, and especially Fernando Flores, we offer that no matter what, when human beings are speaking, this is the “universe set” of possibilities for speech acts:

1. Assertions
2. Assessments (a special type of declaration)
3. Declarations
4. Requests
5. Offers
6. Promises

Every conversation among human beings involves one or more of these. Said another way, in this interpretation, all human speech is either a declaration, an assessment, an assertion, a request, an offer, or a promise. Everything that we do with our language falls within one of these categories.

In this way of thinking, every conversation—private and public—you have ever had was full of these and only these. And every conversation you ever *will* have will be full of these and only these. We claim that what’s needed for those of us looking to produce new results in our lives is to gain competence in these speech acts. These are what we call *distinctions in the domain of language* that—like the forester in forestry, the auto mechanic with car motors, and the wine connoisseur with wine—allow us to see possibilities, take purposeful action, and produce desired results in a given domain. However, in this case, the domain is huge. The domain is far bigger than forestry, auto mechanics, or wine. *The domain is language*, and we claim that it encompasses virtually every aspect of our lives. New distinctions in this domain bring the possibility of seeing ourselves and others anew, and literally redesigning who we are in the world. Conversely, having no distinctions here often leads to actions which many of us would say are not desirable and do not bring happiness or desired results.

These 6 distinctions are the actual vehicles, the actual mechanisms that we use as we do *whatever* it is that we do. What’s needed are awareness, understanding, time, and practice. So let’s take a look.

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Footnotes:

1. *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, by Diogenes et. al.; Harvard University Press; 1938.
2. *Expression and Meaning*, by John Searle; Cambridge University Press; 1985.
3. *Linking Language to Action*, by J.L. Austin; Cambridge University Press; 1962.