

Speech Act or Speech and Act?

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Austin's (1955) infelicitous (therefore, *weak*) signs are seen by Derrida (1999) as a feature of *all* linguistics signs that are vulnerable to appropriation, reiteration and, re-citation, or the 'essential iteration of a sign' which cannot be contained or enclosed by any context, convention or authorial intention. Rather signs can be cited in unexpected ways which he calls 'citational grafting'. *All* speech, therefore, is in some sense beyond the speaker's control or *ex-citable* (Butler 1997). In fact, according to Butler, utterances may always exceed the moment they occasion (1997: 14). In short, these critics conclude that it is not the case that we speak the language but it is the *language that speaks us*.

The problematic that we identify in this paper in connection with this stance is that if this were so, what status does injurious speech, in particular, nicknaming and name-calling, attain in this context? That is, is the perpetrator (of injurious speech) then absolved of all guilt just because speech and act are not synonymous and a sovereign speaking subject is absent? For example, take the case of the performative: 'It's a girl'. It is an interpellative performative statement and the language that seems merely to describe the body actually constitutes it. More acutely, it is a performative utterance that compels the 'girl' to cite both sexual and gendered norms in order to qualify for subjecthood within the heterosexual matrix that 'hails' her. A similar enactment of a speech act is discussed in the paper in the realm of nicknaming that has the potentiality of far-reaching consequences that violate civil/ moral codes.

However, an interpellation doesn't always effectively enact what it names, and it is possible for the subject to respond to the law in ways that undermine it. For example, "queer" is a word as a performative that has been converted from an insult into a linguistic sign or affirmation. It might in fact then be possible to resignify and recontextualise representations and words that are deemed to be wounding. Nicknames, we claim, are not abusive by definition just because the re-citation possibility that we claim is inherent in name-calling, disjoins the subject-effect enactment of nicknames. Nicknames, thus, have the ameliorative effect which is a result of their inherent reiterability which makes redundant any further law/ act to counter the subject(ive)-effects of nicknames. The redemption, therefore, is through resignification that contain the promise of affirmative recontextualisation and subversive redeployments -- more effective tools than legal measures.

However, we envisage problems in this political act of 'performing'. If all signs are citational, then how will we know the difference between the power we promote and the power we oppose? Butler accepts that words cannot be metaphorically purified of their historicity completely. We show that the moral issue that injurious speech raises is resolved in resignification and recontextualisation of a sign.