



The Speech Acts

Language is Power

“We will go the moon.”

Language happens to be of the most powerful tools leaders – and all of us – have at our disposal. It is what we say that distinguishes us from all other creatures.

Language is action. Fernando Flores is one of the thought leaders who distinguished language as not simply a tool we use to describe a world that already exists, but rather *an action that produces a world and a future that would otherwise not have existed.*

Agency becomes possible. Speaking as creation is a profound shift in understanding our relationship to the world. It implies we are not describers of an objectively knowable world, fixed and the same for everyone. Rather, we are designers and authors of a world with which we interact. *Our speaking actually makes things so!*

The implications are staggering, as you might imagine. The reality that language shapes our world has been backed up by all of the latest research in Quantum Physics and Philosophy. (For more on the underpinnings of the current thinking in leadership and management today, please [contact us.](#))

The Speech Acts is the name Flores gave the five primary moves human beings make in language every day. These are: *Declarations, Assumptions, Assertions, Promises and Requests.*

Exercise: Read these declarations out loud and feel into the effect they have. The implications are historical.

“One day all men (and women) will be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.”

“India will be free.”

“I now pronounce you husband and wife.”

Language and practice make it so. This last quote is a great example many of us have experienced directly or indirectly. Does marriage exist out there somewhere? Is it the piece of paper you sign? Can you go and find a marriage? NO! Marriage is a declaration made in language and backed up with a certain set of practices we all agree constitute being married. There is no marriage out there somewhere. It lives in language and practice.

Declaration Inventory. Take stock of your relationship to how you speak, the declarations you make and have made, and their effects on your life and work.

- What declarations have you made that now become context, and for which you have invented powerful practices?
- What declarations have you made that no longer serve you, that still run your life? This is a way to look at what is old, in the background or in conflict with our current declarations.
- What is the biggest declaration you have ever made?
- What declaration is lurking in the background that you know needs to be made, and that will alter everything?
- What declaration, if made, would catalyze a huge breakthrough in your team, in your organization, in your life?

Leaders make declarations no one else will dare to make. They are out on the skinny branches, going where others are afraid to go. They are willing to experiment, to learn in their mistakes and make new declarations.