

**Elżbieta Siarkiewicz**

University of Lower Silesia

## **Performative utterances in counselling practice**

This article discusses the power and significance of words and utterances which appear in formal and non-formal counselling practice. The author focuses on utterances which can have a performative, i.e. causative, character. Thereby, she draws on John Austin's concept of speech acts and theories and philosophies of language, linguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnography and anthropology of speech, which address the power of language and its role in constructing and organising the social world. Counselling practice is examined as a specific, socially formed world in which utterances may effectively make things happen. Based on the analysis of the utterances of counsellors, therapists and counselees, four types of performative utterances are distinguished:

1. Utterances conveying power and resolve to deal with difficulties
2. Utterances expressing helplessness and vulnerability of counselees or counsellors
3. Utterances as a symbolic weapon to fight against weakness
4. Utterances as the language of institution.

It is suggested that performative utterances in counselling practices appear as a certain procedure, an adopted/acknowledged custom or as a one-time original construct with a single addressee.

**Keywords:** counselling practice, verbal practices, performative utterances, action, context, effectiveness

In this article, I will reflect on the power and significance of words as well as on the performativity of utterances encountered across various counselling practices – in interventions which aim to provide help and support. I will seek to show how a counselling intervention can be, and in fact is, enacted exactly through language, word and text. In doing this, I will consider both formal/professional counselling practice as well as non-formal counselling practice performed beyond and outside the professional counselling institutions.

My article is underpinned by the concept of counselling as one of many social processes and draws on the idea of counselling as a dynamic social space which “becomes” – a site where various interpersonal relationships are constructed and

social life is sustained and reproduced.<sup>1</sup> Such representations of counselling increasingly frequently build on theories and philosophies of language, linguistics, sociolinguistics, ethnography and anthropology of speech, that is, on the conceptual frameworks which focus on language and underscore its perennial power and role in constructing and organising the social world.

Language research is frequently and eagerly resorted to by psychologists (for example, Jacques-Marie Lacan, whose work on psychoanalytical theory and practice was formatively informed by linguistics and structural anthropology, as *The Rome Report* made clear); historians (for example, Hayden White, a reputed post-modernist, constructivist and narrativist, who contends that our thinking about the world is narrative in nature and, assuming that it is through language that history is available to us, insists that we should read history the way we read a literary text); educators and sociologists of education (for example, Basil Bernstein, a well-known sociologist of education, who explores education, teaching and school space through analysing the language of primary socialisation and identifying language codes); sociologists (for example, Pierre Bourdieu, who, investigating social, cultural and symbolic capitals and identifying social competencies related to social status, points out that status is reproduced and perpetuated, among others, by school and language, which serves to sustain domination); and ethnologists (for example, Claude Levi Strauss, who regards language as a social phenomenon and the proper object of research through which access can be obtained to things invisible and unrecognised directly). Drawing on these ideas, I assume, like many other scholars before and currently, that language is a significant factor in constructing and organising the social world,<sup>2</sup> and in this article I will seek to examine how language organises and constructs counselling practices. Counselling practices are comprehended here as social action “through which” and “in which” help and support are enacted and provided. I will try to show how essential an utterance/a word is in these practices and how an utterance/a word may sometimes “turn into” a counselling intervention, “becoming” performative, as interpreted by counsellors, counselees or counselling researchers.

---

<sup>1</sup> The concepts of counselling I employ in this article are formulated by Alicja Kargulowa in terms of social and cultural anthropology. In this framework, counselling processes and practices are comprehended as a peculiar development unfolding within the self-constructing social life, which finds itself in the process of becoming (as inspired by Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration and “becoming” society), and counselling interventions are regarded as one of dimensions/kinds or components of interactions and relationships which bind people together. Cf. A. Kargulowa, 2004, and *Studia Poradownicze/Journal of Counsellogy* 2012 and 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo* [Language, discourse, society], an anthology of texts on the linguistic turn in social philosophy, compiled and edited by Lotar Rasiński (Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2009). Featuring excerpts from Claude Levi Strauss, Norman Malcolm, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jacques Derrida and John Austin, the volume documents the multidimensional and interdisciplinary nature of the linguistic turn, revealing a variety of its traditions and sources,

## Verbal counselling practice as a social custom

In my view, it is legitimate to claim that each counselling intervention is executed in utterances, through words or by means of a text. This is true both for the practices intrinsic to counselling conceived as a formal, institutional operation (individual and group counselling, consultancy, diagnostic descriptions, therapeutic or reparative conversations, etc.) as well as for the practices within counselling conveyed by the media and virtual communities (advice books, press, radio, the Internet, on-line social networks and forums, blogs, posts, etc.). Moreover, it is also true for the counselling practices performed in everyday situations, in minor, often fleeting, informal events, which seem to be meaningless and, as such, apparently do not deserve scholars' attention. All of them have one thing in common: namely, they all utilise words – an appropriate text, an utterance which is distinct to a particular cultural custom. The counselling practices which are embedded in everyday interactions are, undoubtedly, a prerequisite to communal life. In fostering special solidarity within small local communities, which cluster around what we refer to as “the community of fate” or “shared experience” (neighbourly or friendly help, informal support groups), they prompt social collectives to develop a specific language code, a verbal ritual which, in turn, activates and constructs counselling action. Sometimes responding to a person's call for help and support and sometimes reacting to an individual or social need identified by the potential counsellors, these counselling practices may be/become a unique form of “reinstating social holism” in the world, which so many researchers have designated as an “individualised” one (Cf. Kaufmann, 2004). Difficult situations, subjectively perceived as liminal experiences, may create conditions which encourage falling back on social “atavisms” and resorting to social resources, “external family” or language “habits,” which Jean-Claude Kaufmann views as a residue of the past employed for the sake of the present so as to bind the individual to society and enable him/her to survive in taxing circumstances, marshal strength and initiative and seek advice and help.

In her description of the culture of individualism, Małgorzata Jacyno highlights issues which are of particular relevance to counselling researchers: *...in the culture of individualism, communication has reparative and therapeutic functions ascribed to it. Direct contact, negotiation, exchange, collaborative creation of the world are supposed to forestall what are perceived as the ills of modernisation, in particular, the experience of alienation and isolation. In this way, communication not only is supposed to contribute to the “healing” of human relations but also seems to kindle hopes for restoring genuine bonds in the modern world. Communication is expected to be a remedy which furthers individualisation and, at the same time, pre-empt all the harm induced by this very process* (Jacyno, 2007, pp. 232-233).

Everyday involvements breed customs and habits which constitute us as human and social beings and enable us to construct social practices (including the verbal, communication-related ones discussed by Jacyno) of helping and supporting

nature. These actions may be one-time, singular, incidental events (cf. depiction of incidental counselling, Siarkiewicz, 2010), but they may, and do, become familiar, repeatable rituals, conventions and habits often endorsed by the participants of social life and discernible in the activities of formal and informal counsellors (Maffesoli, 1996, pp. 92-93, Goffman, 2008; Kaufmann, 2004). Importantly, these rituals, conventions and habits are not just purely recurring or replicated practices; rather, they form a basis for further action, condition indispensable dynamics and permit launching initial activities (including language-based ones) anchored in the known. Kaufmann calls such habits an ensemble of schemata for regulating action and contends that to say that a human being has habits is misleading – rather, a human being “consists of habits” in various degrees open to reflection (Kaufmann, 2004, pp. 151-152).

Ritual-like verbal counselling practices are made up of reiterated words referring, as a rule, to stereotypes and symbols which are common currency in a given culture. The counselling “repertoire” incorporates also certain conventional conduct, gestures, entrenched notions and activities. We are intimately familiar with the words habitually spoken with a view to supporting people who are embroiled in confusion and dilemmas or strained by problems – phrases such as “just hang on,” “you’ll get along,” “everything will be ok,” “things will work out somehow.” Most of us are likely to know the title of Bobby McFerrin’s song “Don’t Worry, Be Happy,” which came to figure as a customary piece of advice friends offer to those who are wrestling with this or that difficulty. It turned into a popular tidbit of graffiti scribbled on walls, in underground passageways, in attics and across facades of council estates buildings. We would not err much if we construed the still recurrent and persistent spraying of the song’s title onto any available surface as an initiative for “the uplifting of the saddened hearts,” as a part of a local, informal social campaign aimed to raise the spirits or usher support into the symbolic space to be partaken of by the city- or district residents, passers-by, tourists and odd wanderers. (Created in 1988, the song soon became internationally famous and hit top places in pop charts across the world.) Following Ortega y Gasset, we could conclude that the utterances cited above add up to a culturally entrenched and sanctioned social custom comprised of a system of verbal habits which are fixed and intelligible within certain collectives (Ortega y Gasset, 2003, pp. 169-171). Such a custom is not created by those who participate in it and enact it; rather, it is a culturally and socially transmitted idea and property. Such “counselling custom” tends to be socially endorsed and may even be socially imposed (because good manners make it imperative to assure a person in a distressing situation that *everything will turn out all right*). Michel Maffesoli views mutual help as a particular manifestation of vitalism – an animal, unconscious reaction of the social will of life, which is instrumentally relevant to social unity and closeness. He writes:

*Therefore alongside a socio-political analysis, we can also underline the socio-anthropological dimension and emphasise the close links between proxemics and solidarity. In some ways, such mutual aid exists by force of circumstances, not out of purely disinterested motives: the help given can always be redeemed whenever I need it. However, in so doing, we are all part of a larger process of correspondence and participation that favours the collective body.* (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 24)

The point of counselling practice (as expected by the counselees) often does not lie in verbal guidance or words as such, but in a unique encounter – one that represents engaged, secure being-together bred by small gestures, body postures, clothes and unfolding circumstances. Still, even such an encounter, such particular being-together, such counselling co-presence are inevitably accompanied by words. Words effectively co-create, consolidate or destroy the co-presence in which unique counselling constructs are erected. It is through words, too, that this co-presence makes a difference and is made sense of. An utterance, a word and/or a text become an essential “tool” (if not the sole one) of counselling practice in advice books, press counselling, mediated counselling and their likes. We could also assume that the utterances, words and texts which have or acquire efficacy in the helping process turn into action, becoming performative utterances. “*The words helped me the most*” – this is what people tend to say relating their counselling sessions. “*Doing well!*” said a note in a patient’s file folder which Milton Erickson deliberately left lying open on his desk so that when he left the room the patient could “accidentally” read it and boost his confidence in the effectiveness of his own efforts to improve his condition.<sup>3</sup>

### Utterances as actions

In identifying performative utterances in counselling practices, I draw on the notion of “performative utterances” formulated by the English philosopher John Austin (1911-1960). In his book *How to do Things with Words* (1962), a collection of articles and lectures compiled and edited by James Opie Urmson and Marina Sbisa, Austin argues that there are utterances which create new facts and, consequently, “in saying something we do something” sometimes. His premise is that through speech people organise collaborative actions (including counselling interventions, we could add) which may alter reality (including the reality that made the individual seek advice, help and/or support, we could add).

According to Austin, performativity occurs when speech directly creates a new reality. We are all familiar with the biblical passages expounding that property of

<sup>3</sup> For the patients’ accounts of their meetings with Milton Erickson and the transcripts of conversations and therapeutic sessions are to be found, see e.g. Jeffrey K. Zeig, 1985 (the quoted excerpt comes from p. 55).

language: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1) or *And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light* (Genesis 1:3). The creative *fiat* exemplifies the divine origin of the word, whose might and meaning reside in that it can indeed make things happen. The word was invested with similar puissance in Ancient Greece. The pronouncements of the Delphic Oracle (whether spoken or inscribed on pottery shards, hides and boards) also had divine power, commanded submission and were efficacious – they worked. And as such they were worth making the enormous effort it took to work one's way across the Parnassus, wait long to be admitted into Pythia's presence and deliberately formulate one crucial question to ask her. Those who found themselves coping with insecurity and weakness made the effort – an exertion necessary to arrive at the famed Oracle, receive help and support in a critical situation and have their further lives headed in the right direction.

To illustrate the performative power of words, we could cite examples from the canonical law (giving a name to a child, getting married, ordained, canonised or excommunicated). The words pronounced in a particular context by a formally appointed person do work and transform reality (*now you are husband and wife*). But words do work also beyond the ecclesiastical domain – in commercial, penal or civil law and, simply, in social custom: *I bet that...*, *I accept the bid*, *I challenge you to a duel*. They all are but a random handful of examples (Grodziński, 1979).

Performativity of language, reliance on its efficacy and the art of producing performative speech acts are culturally transmitted and ingrained. In fables, verbal charms and spells solve a variety of quite different problems, suffice it to mention "*Little table, spread thyself*," a magic formula which helps avoid hunger, or "*Open, Sesame*," a codeword which clears the road to happiness and Alibaba's treasures. The fables and fairy tales fantasise the perfect wish-fulfilment of having such words – keys and passwords – at one's disposal and being able to change at will the reality which has gone sour, painful, unbearable. In the transmission of culture, the power of words is underscored time and again so that we know for a fact that words *are sharper than a sword*, and we agree that one knows the power of words *by their fruit*. We are also familiar with the message time and again targeted at children, who have the *magic power of words* inculcated in reiterated assertions that there are words that do wonders – *please, thank you, I'm sorry*.

Speech and words are relied on for creating reality (Austin, 2009). This is attained through conventional verbal procedures: *I name this ship Elizabeth* signifies not only the act of naming but also the act of conferral – it will be so from now on. Similarly, with the uttering of the words *I hereby bequeath my house to my son*, the house in question becomes the son's property both in law and in social custom. All this insistently reminds us that, to put it bluntly, one must walk one's talk (which in an old Polish saying is pictorially conveyed in an image of a mare waiting at a fence to be kissed on the tail by a king as a result of boastful betting) (Cf. L. Rasiński 2009, pp. 190-191).

The efficacy of words is explained also by neurological insights. The physiology of the mind teaches us that when we hear *a thief!* or *fire!* our hormonal and nervous systems instantaneously start to operate in different ways, accelerating our actions (control, protection of one's belongings, checking whether the purse sits safely in the bag, rescuing others or running away) and enhancing their precision and effectiveness.

Among performative utterances, there are some whose working is "delayed," that is, ones whose consequences may be remote in time, yet inexorably serious. This comes to pass when we say/hear *I'll show you, I'll never forgive you*, or when we use certain words in a strikingly new context, which happened, to provide a recent example, when "*betrayed at dawn*," a line from Zbigniew Herbert's poem, was evocatively employed by Jarosław Kaczyński in the aftermath of the Smolensk catastrophe and accrued considerable power in political struggle.

The identification and analysis of words/utterances in counselling practices will enable us to establish rules and mechanisms involved in their "becoming" counselling action. In this way, we will also be able to scrutinise the social world for counselling games engaging help-providers and help-seekers.

If we agree with the researchers who identify/anticipate a decline of individualism precipitated by participation in new communities mushrooming in communication networks and by the drive to integration (even if some consider integration a myth only), it hardly comes as a surprise that communities or, as Michel Maffesoli calls them, "tribes" (in the vein of postmodern tribalism) proliferate in the virtual space. Many people view the Internet with its social networks, forums, support groups, advice websites and blogs, as offering and enabling access to help and support (Maffesoli 1996, Batorski, Marody, Nowak 2006, Zielińska-Pękał 2012). It is one of the spaces in which signs, words and texts embedded in everyday counselling practices may acquire a special meaning and a special potency, retaining at the same time relative permanence (through being digitally stored on the websites) and, thus, being available to researchers.

### **Counselling practices as a domain of performative utterances**

In Polish counselling studies, the notion of counselling practices is, with increasing frequency, extended to include not only the narrowly defined helping activities bound up with the performance of institutionally affiliated, formal counsellors but also the broadly conceived and multidimensional social phenomena, facts and processes which might receive institutional frames in time but may as well unfold in everyday life as purely individual, personal experience (Cf. Kargulowa 2012, p. 32). Drawing on modern anthropology, sociology and philosophy, counselling researchers identify counselling practices in everyday experiences, in the space of encounter between those who expect guidance and those who offer it, in dialogue,

in relations, in texts of culture, in the media space and in the virtual world.<sup>4</sup> Given this, counselling researchers are fully justified in their recourse to ethnography and ethnomethodology for methodological models and inspirations.

Counselling practices take place in a diversified territory of institutions (counselling services), of everyday life, of a conversation, an encounter, and individual experience stretching over the past and the present. Counselling research covers a diversified field that encompasses both a physical, materially delimited space in which counselling practices are launched and performed as well as a symbolic or metaphorical space. The latter is predominantly a space of experiences, representations and convictions, a virtual space made up by humans and new technologies, a space of symbols, words and signs, a space of concepts. Wherever counselling practices materialise, actions come into being which render help, guidance or support.

Since social practices conceived in these broad terms are, ordinarily, accompanied by words or utterances – ones that frequently turn into a social custom – the broadly conceived counselling practices form a research field of latent meanings to be unravelled, as ethnographic insights make us realise. If we set out to identify processes which make the utterances of (professional, formal, informal, socially or culturally acknowledged) counsellors performative, our field of research stretches far and wide up to the “cognitive horizon.”<sup>5</sup>

### **There is no escaping the context: Challenges and possibilities of identifying and describing it**

Undoubtedly, if we just directly quote counselling utterances or only plainly define and “translate” them, we will get nowhere near to identifying those which hold a performative power, which are efficacious. Out of the context in which they appear, counselling utterances or words tend to be “stripped” – ransacked of what they really are or may come to be. Ethnographic descriptions or analyses seem to play a crucial role in getting access to the context and an insight into counselling senses and meanings. I believe that a thorough investigation of the social and

<sup>4</sup> Polish counselling researchers distinctly seek to identify, penetrate and name “new” areas, “new” fields of counselling practices. Alicja Czerkawska situates counselling practices within a grid of relationships the individual is engaged in with him/herself, society and the world. Violetta Drabik-Podgórnica traces counselling practices in dialogue, Daria Zielińska-Pękał in the virtual space, Ewa Trębińska-Szumigraj, Aneta Słowik and Joanna Minta in individual experiences and biographies, while Joanna Kłodkowska and Anna Bilon in the physical and symbolic space of institutions. “New” is placed in inverted commas here because it does not denote only something “young” because recently emergent (such as a new space of counselling practices as mediated by new technologies) but also something “novel” because newly discerned, identified and described.

<sup>5</sup> I draw here on Barbara Fatyga’s text written for Claude Levi Strauss’s hundredth birth anniversary, in which the author claims that the field of research is constituted by all that we can comprehend with senses, fathom with reflection or embrace with scholarly curiosity (Fatyga, 2011).

cultural context is an essential process in explaining counselling utterances – a process which by itself entails defining through an ethnographic analysis rather than a simple interpretation of words or utterances alone (Malinowski, 2003, p. 116).

The utterances bound up with counselling practices must not be dissociated from the problems experienced by the help- and support-seekers, from the counsellors' knowledge and experience, from the cultural context or from the biographical entanglements of the counselling participants. Counselling utterances are embedded – they do not exist in isolation but unfold in space and time and within social action; therefore, to analyse them as words or sentences alone would be inopportunistically reductive. In seeking to identify performative utterances in counselling practices, we should, I believe, employ ethnographic analysis, narrative research and biographical studies. The methodological commitment is crucial because the context bio-graphical of counselling-, guidance- or instruction-provision is generated by and comprised of a complex ensemble of factors. They include both the directly recordable and observable phenomena, facts and processes as well as those which are latent – buried deep in the counselling participants' experiences and sensations, no to mention the ones which are located beyond the capacities of conscious recognition. All of them add up to a "meaningful whole" which must not be overlooked – it must be acknowledged as a totality of fundamental facts and not only as "supplementary research material," an accessory to understanding how performative counselling utterances come into being within performative counselling practices (Siarkiewicz, 2010b).

Studying counselling utterances, one cannot ignore the role of the researcher as a separate observer who seeks to discern not only what the utterance expresses (the need of help and support, readiness to help, etc.) or what is revealed through words/utterance (roles of the counsellor and the counselee in the social space, the fact of counselling interaction, etc.), but also what happens, takes place, comes to pass and materialises in reality, in our social practices and in our counselling practices through words/utterances. When we find out about the context in which an utterance appears, when we gain an insight into it and come to comprehend it, we are on the right track, according to John Austin, not only to survey the locutionary and illocutionary functions of language (identifying sentences that refer to something and make sense in the former, and promises, assertions, commands, confessions, utterances which contain performative verbs and have an explicit aim in the latter) but also to disclose, expose and point out the utterances which have a perlocutionary function, that is, produce real consequences in the real world – in emotions, thoughts, actions or, for that matter, in abstaining from action. The perlocutionary function of language seems to be of particular importance when tracing performative utterances in counselling practices or performative counselling as such, i.e. counselling which employs first of all performative words.

In his analysis of language codes in culture and differentiation into elaborated and restricted codes, Basil Bernstein insists that what is said does not matter more

than who says that and when, which means that the resources of the speaker, the time taken by the counselee and by the counsellor are of paramount relevance; and intentions of the listener and the speaker, interpretable individually by the parties involved based on their own experiences, are crucial to the utterance (Godlewski, 2003, p. 137). And, indeed, it is essential where and in what ways the counsellor's "I want to help you" and the counselee's "I need your help" meet. If scrutinising counselling practices we identify utterances in their contexts as they are being constructed and analyse those which add up to particular sequences and rituals which may (and likely do) turn into counselling rituals, we might succeed in capturing their efficacy and spell out how counsellors do things with words. Hence, it is so important to perceive counselling practices as cyclically repeated practices which create a secure space for small groups and small communities (including the virtual ones).

In research terms, it is hard to overestimate attention to the context which makes words and utterances potentially capable of initiating action, efficacious and imbued with counselling impact. It is only in a certain context that words can become efficacious, creative, supernatural and cause action (a commander's order amidst fight – a kamikaze's suicide for the cause, a call for help from a sinking ship). In the atmosphere of engagement and self-engagement, a simple *You'll make it, don't give up* uttered by a significant person at a moment of dire need works, inspires, strengthens, boosts confidence that success is attainable against all odds. Contrary to common beliefs, the experience of problems, adversity, vulnerability and a lack of self-efficacy may in a very particular way trigger action, prompt initiative and entice to seek help, including help grounded on words and texts (which takes place in advice books and mediated counselling, where the counsellor is a virtual one). The meaning of words lies here in a unique encouragement or pressure exercised on human minds and human bodies. And what ultimately matters are the effects of this pressure, both those imagined and unfolding in minds (inaccessible to observation or observable only indirectly, a subjective sense that *it helped me, though I wouldn't know how; these words gave me strength*) and those unfolding in practical action and, hence, indirectly observable (cf. Bronisław Malinowski's research observations and experiences, Malinowski, 2003, p. 119 *pass.*).

The power of words manifests itself in various spheres and is pertinent legally (a signed or terminated contract), historically (*Polish death camps* instead of *death camps in Poland*), politically, socially (M. L. King's *I had a dream*), ecclesiastically and morally. I am interested in the counselling power which resides in utterances bound up with counselling practices and performative counselling; this is the sphere I explore, bearing in mind that counselling practice is not a separate or isolated one, that it does not exist beyond an individual and a broader social structure, which is patently relevant to thinking about the context and the field of research.

## Performative utterances in counselling practices

counselling practice as a professional, institutional activity and as a social custom is strongly anchored in institutions, everyday routines and the technology-created world. Unfolding in language and through language, it makes subjects involve in various actions. Based on analyses of my own professional counselling experience, utterances of therapists and counselees, recordings of therapeutic sessions and transcripts of everyday conversations provided by ethnomethodologists and writers-documentalists (who produce accounts of liminal experiences, traumatic events and everyday, instrumental and existential problems/difficulties), I distinguish four properties which substantiate the performative potential of verbal counselling practices:

- I. Counselling practice is often a vehicle of a particular **power** and **will** to act. The power and will may originate both in the counsellor and in the counselee. The point is to identify and evoke them in counselling action: *I can, I want to – You can, you want to; Keep trying – I keep trying; You’ll handle it ok – I’ll handle it ok; or These problems wouldn’t have befallen you if you didn’t know how to handle them.* This practice relies on knowledge, acquired competencies, inner, sometimes unrecognized, reserves, personal confidence, biographical experiences (of one’s own and other people), individual life scripts and social resources. As such, it directly triggers action and, consequently, change.
- II. Counselling practice has **helplessness** and **vulnerability** inscribed in it, as well. They are revealed in such utterances as *I don’t know how, I can’t, I’m exhausted, I’m incompetent, I don’t want to, I’m unable to.* Such words pronounced both by the counsellors and by the counselees often mean giving up on action or herald such resignation. In my view, refraining from a conventionally recognised activity is also an action because acute sorrow/depression has multiple functions and meanings, I believe: it compels the body to take a rest and to adopt such behavioural modes which enable one to act later, to take stock of resources, to replenish them and, in a longer run, to work toward changes. Frequently, the necessary/declared withdrawal from the goal-oriented action which was envisioned as an expected outcome of consulting the counsellor induces another action of another orientation in another sphere (reflection, education, change of living conditions, etc.). In such cases, the proper “counselling goal” is deferred but achieved at a later stage and in an indirect manner.
- III. An utterance/a word tends also to serve as a **weapon** used to fight against difficulty and weakness. It is a weapon in detecting, overcoming or subduing problems: *go/I’ll go, I won’t give up/don’t give up, I’ll stand up for myself/stand up for yourself, stop it/I’ll stop it, what doesn’t kill you will make you stronger.* Such words refer to the inner resources, muster up the inner as yet immobilised potential and activate preparedness, contributing to the development of palpable, genuine skills and to employing them effectively in the helping process.

IV. Counselling practice is also invaded by the **language of total administration**, which makes a counselee into “a client,” “a beneficiary,” “a victim” or “an unemployed person.” Such labelling, marking and grading tends to be humiliating and deprecatory, thereby denting confidence that change is possible. Through language, people who need help and actively solicit it are branded as deficient in subjectivity, turned into weaklings and deprived of attributes of effective agents. Glaring examples of such stigmatisation are provided by nothing else than the very names of the helping institutions, e.g. “The counselling centre for victims of domestic violence.” A person who has experienced domestic violence and decided to change his/her family situation, a person who, facing up to an extremely difficult predicament, has regrouped his/her resources, mustered strength and contacted a counselling service to seek help is made into a “victim.” And, in the common perception, a “victim” has irrevocably lost an ability to fight, a “victim” does not struggle, change or devise solutions to problems. Terms such as “dyslectic” or “health-compromised” work in a similar way. Also the language of various programmes/projects sounds stigmatising and anti-humanistic in its focus on promoting “human capital” rather than human beings. Task descriptions for career counsellors are formulated equally oddly, urging them to run training sessions which will make the unemployed “attractive on the labour market.” Who are they supposed to be attractive to, we might enquire, who is supposed to find them appealing and who, on earth, is that “labour market”? Similar observations can be made about the common insistence that the task of higher education is to make the graduates “meet requirements of the employers” (rather than develop their talents, passions and interests?) because “the human being is the best investment” (and investments, as economic principles have it, should bring ample returns). This is but a sample of examples illustrating how institutional language expresses the goals inscribed in hidden agendas underpinning counselling practices and how far this language departs from the humanistic notions.

For utterances which are an immanent part of counselling practice to become performative, that is, to work, a few conditions must be met:

- ◆ They must be part of a recognised conventional procedure which, as a rule, leads to a certain conventionally predictable effect; the procedure must include pronouncing certain words by certain people in certain circumstances;
- ◆ In any given case, particular people and circumstances must be suitable for instituting a particular procedure;
- ◆ All participants in the procedure must carry it out correctly and completely;
- ◆ Procedures are outlined for the use of certain people who harbour certain thoughts and feelings. A procedure is justified in particular circumstances and by unambiguous intentions (Grodziński, 1979).

I believe that inquiring into the effectiveness of counselling practices we inquire also into the utterances which accompany them, the utterances which emerge as an endorsed custom or as a one-time, unique construct targeted at a one-time addressee. We tend to analyse the utterances trying to find out, unwittingly sometimes, in how far they are performative.

In counselling practice, utterances and words become an active factor in moulding reality rather than just a passive reflection of the counsellor's intent or of the counselling procedure. Given this, we should assume that an action opposite to the intended one may also take place. What I have in mind here is "the perverse effect" defined as an unexpected and unintended outcome of social action, an effect that contradicts the original intentions and will of the actors, individuals and collectives involved (Boudon, 2008). "Perverse effects," the unintended results of the helping action, may be identified by both parties involved – the counsellor and the counselee – as they happen. But they may also be a remote consequence of counselling actions, observable only after a longer time-lapse. "Perverse effects" are usually identified by those who survey, study and assess counselling and helping practices. Paradoxically, such unintended outcomes also exemplify the performative nature of counselling practices and counselling utterances.

*Translated from Polish by Patrycja Poniatońska*

## References

- Austin, J. (2009). Wypowiedzi performatywne. In L. Rasiński (Ed.), *Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo*. (pp. 188-201). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Batorski, D., Marody, M., Nowak, A., (Ed.), (2006). *Spółeczna przestrzeń Internetu*. Warszawa: SWPS.
- Bernstein, B. (1990). *Odtwarzanie kultury*. Warszawa: PIW.
- Boudon, R. (2008). *Efekt odwrócenia. Niezamierzone skutki działań społecznych*. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Fatyga B. (2011). Teren: po horyzont (poznawczy). In T. Buliński, M. Kairski (Eds.) *Teren w antropologii. Praktyka badawcza we współczesnej antropologii kulturowej*. (pp. 93-110). Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM.
- Godlewski, G., Mencwel, A., Sulima, R. (Eds.), (2003). *Antropologia słowa. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*. Warszawa: WUW.
- Goffman, E. (2008). *Zachowanie w miejscach publicznych*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Grodziński, E. (1979). *Wypowiedzi performatywne. Z aktualnych zagadnień filozofii języka*. Warszawa: Ossolineum.
- Jacyno, M. (2007). *Kultura indywidualizmu*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kargulowa, A. (2012). Poradnictwo ery komunikacji satelitarnej. *Studia Poradnicze/Journal of Counsellogy*, 19-34.

- Kargulowa, A. (2013). O potrzebie badań poradowniczych. Ku antropologii poradnictwa. *Studia Poradownicze/Journal of Counsellogy*, 85-105.
- Kargulowa, A. (2004). *O teorii i praktyce poradnictwa*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Kaufmann, J. C. (2004). *Ego. Socjologia jednostki. Inna wizja człowieka i konstrukcji podmiotu*. Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.
- Malinowski, B. (2003). Słowo w kontekście działania. In G. Godlewski, A. Mencwel & R. Sulima (Eds.), *Antropologia słowa. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*. (pp. 113-123). Warszawa: WUW.
- Matynia, E. (2008). *Demokracja performatywna*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe DSW.
- Maffesoli M. (1996). *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, trans. Rob Shields, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
- Ortega y Gasset, J. (2003). Mówienie jako zwyczaj społeczny. In G. Godlewski, A. Mencwel, & R. Sulima (Eds.), *Antropologia słowa. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*. (pp. 169-171). Warszawa: WUW.
- Rasiński, L. (Ed.), (2009). *Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Searle, J. (2009). Ontologia społeczna. Niektóre podstawowe zasady. In L. Rasiński (Ed.), *Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo*. (pp. 202-226). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Siarkiewicz, E. (2010a). *Przesłonięte obszary poradnictwa. Realia-iluzje-ambiwalencje*. Zielona Góra: UZ.
- Siarkiewicz E. (2010b). Poradnictwo performatywne i inne formy pomocy w zdarzeniach krytycznych i doświadczeniach granicznych. *Dyskursy młodych andragogów*, 11, 167-184.
- Taylor, Ch. (2009). Teorie znaczenia. Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo. In L. Rasiński (Ed.), *Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo*. (pp. 147-187). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Wittgenstein, L. (2009). Znaczenie słowa. In L. Rasiński (Ed.), *Język, dyskurs, społeczeństwo*. (pp. 97-112). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Zeig J. K. (1985). *Experiencing Erickson: An Introduction to the Man and His Work*, New York, Brunnel/Mazel, Inc.
- Zielińska-Pękał, D. (2012). Od pomocy do przemocy w poradnictwie. Dwie narracje. *Studia Poradownicze*, 110-125.