

## Speech Acts

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When we speak we can do all sorts of things, from aspirating a consonant, to constructing a relative clause, to insulting a guest, to starting a war. These are all, pre-theoretically, speech acts—acts done in the process of speaking. The theory of speech acts, however, is especially concerned with those acts that are not completely covered under one or more of the major divisions of grammar—phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics—or under some general theory of actions.

Even in cases in which a particular speech act is not completely described in grammar, formal features of the utterance used in carrying out the act might be quite directly tied to its accomplishment, as when we request something by uttering an imperative sentence or greet someone by saying, “Hi!” Thus, there is clearly a conventional aspect to the study of speech acts. Sometimes, however, the achievement cannot be so directly tied to convention, as when we thank a guest by saying, “Oh, I love chocolates.” There is no convention of English to the effect that stating that one loves chocolates counts as an act of thanking. In this case, the speaker’s INTENTION in making the utterance and a recognition by the addressee of that intention under the conditions of utterance clearly plays an important role. Note that whether convention or intention seems paramount, success is not guaranteed. The person to whom the conventionalized greeting “Hi!” is addressed might not speak English, but some other language in which the uttered syllable means “Go away!”, or the guest may not have brought chocolates at all, but candied fruit, in which cases these attempts to extend a greeting and give a complement are likely to fail. On the other hand, failure, even in the face of contextual adversity, is also not guaranteed. Thus, one may succeed in greeting a foreigner who understands nothing of what is being said by making it clear through gesture and tone of voice that that is the intent. Much of speech act theory is therefore devoted to striking the proper balance between convention and intention.

Real-life acts of speech usually involve interpersonal relations of some kind: A speaker does something with respect to an audience by saying certain words to that audience. Thus it would seem that ethnographic studies of such relationships and the study of discourse should be central to speech act theory, but in fact, they are not. Such studies have been carried out rather independently of the concerns of those philosophers and linguists who have devoted their attention to speech acts. This is perhaps not a good thing, as Croft (1994) has argued, but since it is the case, anthropological and discourse-based approaches to speech acts will not be covered in this handbook entry.

### 1. Austin

The modern study of speech acts begins with Austin’s (1962) engaging monograph *How to Do Things with Words*, the published version of his William James Lectures delivered at Harvard in 1955. This widely cited work starts with the observation that certain sorts of sentences, e.g., *I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin; I now pronounce you man and wife*; and the like, seem designed to **do** something, here to christen and wed, respectively, rather than merely to **say** something. Such sentences Austin dubbed PERFORMATIVES, in contrast to what he called CONSTATIVES, the descriptive sentences that until Austin were

the principal concern of philosophers of language—sentences that seem, pretheoretically, at least, to be employed mainly for saying something rather than doing something.

While the distinction between performatives and constatives is often invoked in work on the law, in literary criticism, in political analysis, and in other areas, it is a distinction that Austin argued was **not** ultimately defensible. The point of Austin's lectures was, in fact, that every normal utterance has **both** a descriptive and an effective aspect: that saying something is also doing something.

### 1.1 Locutions, Illocutions, and Perlocutions

In place of the initial distinction between constatives and performatives, Austin substituted a three-way contrast among the kinds of acts that are performed when language is put to use, namely the distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, all of which are characteristic of most utterances, including standard examples of both performatives and constatives.

LOCUTIONARY ACTS, according to Austin, are acts **of** speaking, acts involved in the construction of speech, such as uttering certain sounds or making certain marks, using particular words and using them in conformity with the grammatical rules of a particular language and with certain senses and certain references as determined by the rules of the language from which they are drawn.

ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS, Austin's central innovation, are acts done **in** speaking (hence **illocutionary**), including and especially that sort of act that is the apparent purpose for using a performative sentence: christening, marrying, and so forth. Austin called attention to the fact that acts of stating or asserting, which are presumably illocutionary acts, are characteristic of the use of canonical constatives, and such sentences are, by assumption, not performatives. Furthermore, acts of ordering or requesting are typically accomplished by using imperative sentences, and acts of asking whether something is the case are properly accomplished by using interrogative sentences, though such forms are at best very dubious examples of performative sentences. In Lecture XXI of Austin (1962), the conclusion was drawn that the locutionary aspect of speaking is what we attend to most in the case of constatives, while in the case of the standard examples of performative sentences, we attend as much as possible to the illocution.

The third of Austin's categories of acts is the PERLOCUTIONARY ACT, which is a consequence or by-product of speaking, whether intended or not. As the name is designed to suggest, perlocutions are acts performed **by** speaking. According to Austin, perlocutionary acts consist in the production of effects upon the thoughts, feelings, or actions of the addressee(s), speaker, or other parties, such as causing people to refer to a certain ship as the Joseph Stalin, producing the belief that Sam and Mary should be considered man and wife, convincing an addressee of the truth of a statement, causing an addressee to feel a requirement to do something, and so on.

Austin (1962:101) illustrates the distinction between these kinds of acts with the (now politically incorrect) example of saying "Shoot her!", which he trisects as follows:

Act (A) or Locution

He said to me "Shoot her!" meaning by *shoot* "shoot" and referring by *her* to "her."

Act (B) or Illocution

He urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her.

Act (C) or Perlocution

He persuaded me to shoot her.

Though it is crucial under Austin's system that we be able to distinguish fairly sharply among the three categories, it is often difficult in practice to draw the requisite lines. Especially irksome are the problems of separating illocutions and locutions, on the one hand, and illocutions and perlocutions on the other, the latter being the most troublesome problem according to Austin himself.

Austin's main suggestion for discriminating between an illocution and a perlocution was that the former is *conventional*, in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula; but the latter could not" (Austin 1962:103). This, however, is more a characterization of **possible** illocutionary act than a practicable test for the illocution of a particular sentence or an utterance of it. While the test can give direct evidence as to what is **not** an illocutionary act, it fails to tell us for sure what the illocution is. If, for example, someone says "The bull is about to charge," and thereby warns the addressee of impending danger, do we say that the speech act of warning is here an illocutionary act of warning because the speaker **could** have said "I warn you that the bull is about to charge?" Another reasonable interpretation would be that in this case, the warning of the addressee, i.e., the production of a feeling of alarm, is a perlocutionary by-product of asserting that the bull is about to charge. Many authors, such as Searle (1969, 1975a) and Allan (1998a), seem to accept the idea that potential expression by means of a performative sentence is a sufficient criterion for the recognition of illocutions, while others, e.g., Sadock (1977), do not. Austin himself says that to be an illocutionary act it must also be the case that the **means** of accomplishing it are conventional.

Though a great many subsequent discussions of illocutions are couched within some version of Austin's theory that illocutionary acts are just those speech acts that could have been accomplished by means of an explicit performative, there are examples, such as threatening, that remain problematic. Nearly every authority who has touched on the subject of threats departs from the Austinian identification of illocutionary acts with potential performatives, since threatening seems like an illocutionary act but we cannot threaten by saying, for example, "I threaten you with a failing grade."

As for the distinction between the locutionary act of using particular words and constructions with particular meanings and the illocution performed in using that locution, Austin says that there is a difference between the locutionary MEANING and the illocutionary FORCE of the utterance. Without independent knowledge of the use of these two words in this context, however, the criterion seems circular. The contrast between locution and illocution is often intuitively clear, but problems and controversies arise in the case of performative sentences such as *I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin*. Is the performative prefix *I christen* to be excluded from the locutionary act or included within it? If it is included, is the primary illocutionary act that is done in uttering this sentence to **state** that one christens? Austin presumably would have said that to utter these words **is** to christen, not to state that one christens, but Allan (1998a), for example, insists that the primary illocution is to state something.

There is a considerable literature on the validity and determination of the differences among locutions, illocutions, and perlocutions, some of which will be discussed or mentioned below.

## **1.2 The Doctrine of Infelicities**

An important aspect of Austin's inquiry concerns the kinds of imperfections to which speech acts are prey. The motivation for this interest in the way things can go wrong is that, at first sight, it appears that constatives are just those utterances that are false when they fail, whereas failed performatives are not aptly described as false, but rather as improper, unsuccessful, or, in general, INFELICITOUS. If, for example, a passing inebriate picks up a bottle, smashes it on the prow of a nearby ship, and says, "I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin," we would not ordinarily say that he or she has said something false, whereas if I **describe** that event by saying, "The passerby christened the ship," I could properly be blamed for uttering a falsehood.

Austin distinguished three broad categories of infelicities:

- A. Misinvocations, which disallow a purported act. For example, a random individual saying the words of the marriage ceremony is disallowed from performing it. Similarly, no purported speech act of banishment can succeed in our society because such an act is not allowed within it.
- B. Misexecutions, in which the act is vitiated by errors or omissions, including examples in which an appropriate authority pronounces a couple man and wife, but uses the wrong names or fails to complete the ceremony by signing the legal documents. Here, as in the case of misinvocations, the purported act does not take place.
- C. Abuses, where the act succeeds, but the participants do not have the ordinary and expected thoughts and feelings associated with the happy performance of such an act. Insincere promises, mendacious findings of fact, unfelt congratulations, apologies, etc. come under this rubric.

As interesting and influential on subsequent investigations as the doctrine of infelicities is, Austin concluded that it failed to yield a crucial difference between performatives and constatives. In the case of both there is a dimension of felicity that requires a certain correspondence with "the facts." With illocutionary acts of assertion, statement, and the like, we happen to call correspondence with the facts TRUTH and a lack of it FALSITY, whereas in the case of other kinds of illocutions, we do not use those particular words. Acts of asserting, stating, and the like can also be unhappy in the manner of performatives when, for example, the speaker does not believe what he or she asserts, even if it happens to be true.

## **1.3 The Performative Formula**

Austin investigated the possibility of defining performative utterances in terms of a grammatical formula for performatives. The formula has a first person singular subject and an active verb in the simple present tense that makes explicit the illocutionary act that

the speaker intends to accomplish in uttering the sentence. Additionally, the formula can contain the self-referential adverb *hereby*:

(1) “I (hereby) verb-present-active X ...”

Such forms he calls EXPLICIT PERFORMATIVES, opposing them with PRIMARY PERFORMATIVES (rather than with implicit or inexplicit performatives.) But as Austin shows, the formula is not a sufficient criterion, at least without the adverb *hereby*, since in general sentences that fit the formula can be descriptive of activities under a variety of circumstances, e.g., *I bet him every morning that it will rain*, or *On page 49 I protest against the verdict*. Nor is the formula a necessary criterion, since there are many forms that differ from this canon and nevertheless seem intuitively to be explicit performatives. There are, for example, passive sentences like *You are fired*, and cases in which the subject is not first person, e.g., *The court finds you guilty*. Austin therefore came to the conclusion that the performative formula was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the recognition of those sentences we might want to call performatives.

There still are numerous clear cases of performative formulae, but the fact that explicit performatives seem to shade off into constatives and other non-performative sentence types greatly weakens their utility as a litmus for illocutionary force, since there are clear cases of illocutionary acts that **cannot** be accomplished in terms of an explicit performative formulae, e.g., *\*I fire you*. It can also be argued that the illocutionary act performed in uttering a sentence in one or another of the sentential moods (see below) cannot be accomplished by uttering a performative formula, since any such sentence will necessarily be more specific than what is accomplished by the use of the simpler sentence. For example, the illocutionary act that is accomplished by uttering *Come here!* can be reasonably taken to be not an order, request, command, suggestion, or demand, but some more general act of which all of these are more specific versions, a general act for which there is no English verb that can be used in the performative formula. (Compare Alston’s notion of ILLOCUTIONARY ACT POTENTIAL discussed below.)

## 2. The Influence of Grice

Grice’s influential articles (1957, 1967), while not dealing directly with the problems that occupied Austin, nevertheless have had a profound influence on speech act theory. In the earlier of these papers, Grice promulgated the idea that ordinary communication takes place not directly by means of convention, but in virtue of a speaker’s evincing certain intentions and getting his or her audience to recognize those intentions (and to recognize that it was the speaker’s intention to secure this recognition.) This holds, Grice suggested, both for speech and for other sorts of intentional communicative acts. In his view, the utterance is not in itself communicative, but only provides clues to the intentions of the speaker.

A later part of Grice’s program spelled out how various maxims of cooperative behavior are exploited by speakers to secure recognition of the speaker’s intentions in uttering certain words under particular circumstances. Grice distinguished between what is SAID in making an utterance, that which determines the truth value of the contribution, and the total of what is communicated. Things that are communicated beyond what is said (in the technical sense) Grice called IMPLICATURES, and those implicatures that

depend upon the assumption that the speaker is being cooperative he called CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES. (See Horn (this volume).)

### 2.1 Strawson's Objection to Austin

Strawson (1971) criticized the Austinian view as wrongly identifying speech acts such as christening and marrying as typical of the way language works. He pointed out that such illocutionary acts ordinarily take place in highly formal, ritualistic, or ceremonial situations such as ship launchings and weddings. These do indeed involve convention, Strawson conceded, but what one says on such occasions is part of a formalized proceeding rather than an example of ordinary communicative behavior. He argued that for more commonplace speech acts, such as are accomplished by uttering declarative sentences of various sorts, the act succeeds by Gricean means—by arousing in the addressee the awareness that it was the speaker's intention to achieve a certain communicative goal and to get the addressee to reach this conclusion on the basis of his or her having produced a particular utterance.

Warnock (1973) and Urmson (1977) go one step farther than Strawson, arguing in essence that since the act of bidding in bridge, for example, is part of the institution of bridge, it does not even belong to the institution of (ordinary) language. (See Bird 1994 for a criticism of this point of view.)

### 2.2. Searle's Defense of Austin

Searle 1969, a work that is second only to Austin's in its influence on speech act theory, presents a neo-Austinian analysis in which convention once again looms large, contra Grice and Strawson. While not denying the role of Gricean intentions in communication, Searle argued that such an account is incomplete because 1) it fails to distinguish communication that proceeds by using meanings of the kind that only natural languages make available, and 2) it fails to distinguish between acts that succeed solely by means of getting the addressee to recognize the speaker's intention to achieve a certain (perlocutionary) effect and those for which and those for which that recognition is "...in virtue of (by means of) H[earer]'s knowledge of (certain of) the rules governing (the elements of) [the uttered sentence] T." (Searle 1970: 49-50). These Searle labels ILLOCUTIONARY EFFECTS.

Of the various locutionary acts that Austin mentions, Searle singled out the PROPOSITIONAL ACT as especially important. This in turn consists of two components, a REFERENTIAL ACT, in which a speaker picks out or identifies a particular object through the use of a definite noun phrase, and a PREDICATION, which Searle did not see as a separate locutionary act (or any other kind of speech act) but only as a component of the total speech act, i.e. the combination of illocutionary force with propositional content.

Searle (1969) observed that quite often the form of an utterance displays bipartite structure, one part of which determines the propositional act, and the other part the illocutionary act. The parts of an utterance that together are used by a speaker to signal the propositional act he symbolized as *p*. Formal features of the utterance that determine the literal illocutionary force (which are often fairly complex) he called the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), which he symbolized as *F*. The form of a complete utterance used to accomplish a complete speech act, including the propositional portion of the locution and the IFID, he therefore wrote as:

(2) *F(p)*

Among Searle's arguments for the validity of this formula was the claim that negation can be either internal or external to the IFID, at least at the abstract level of grammatical analysis that Chomsky (1965) called deep structure. Thus, if *p* is (underlyingly) *I will come* and *F* is *I promise*, there are two negations, namely *I promise not to come* and *I do not promise to come*, the second of which Searle said must be construed as an illocutionary act of refusing to promise something, not as an illocutionary act of asserting, stating, or describing oneself as not making a certain promise.

A central part of Searle's program is the idea that "speaking a language is performing acts according to rules" (Searle 1969:36-7), where by "rule" he means a conventional association between a certain kind of act and its socially determined consequences. These are CONSTITUTIVE RULES, he said, in the same sense that the rules of chess are constitutive of the game itself. To perform an illocutionary act, according to Searle, is to follow certain conventional rules that are constitutive of that kind of act. In order to discover the rules, Searle, following Austin, proposed to examine the conditions that must obtain for an illocutionary act to be felicitously performed. For each such condition on the felicitous performance of the act in question, he proposed that there is a rule to the effect that the IFID should only be uttered if that felicity condition is satisfied. The project was carried out in detail for promises, a kind of illocution that Searle described as "fairly formal and well articulated," (Searle 1969:54) and from which "many of the lessons learned ... are of general application." (Searle 1969:54) For the illocutionary act of promising, the rules that he postulated are (Searle 1969:63):

1. *Pr* (the IFID for promising) is to be uttered only in the context of a sentence (or larger stretch of discourse) *T* the utterance of which predicates some future act *A* of *S*.
2. *Pr* is to be uttered only if the hearer *H* would prefer *S*'s doing *A* to his not doing *A*, and *S* believes hearer *H* would prefer *S*'s doing *A* to his not doing *A*.
3. *Pr* is to be uttered only if it is not obvious to both *S* and *H* that *S* will do *A* in the normal course of events.
4. *Pr* is to be uttered only if *S* intends to do *A*.
5. The utterance of *Pr* counts as the undertaking of an obligation to do *A*.

Rule 1 Searle called the PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT RULE; rules 2 and 3 are PREPARATORY RULES; rule 4 is a SINCERITY RULE; and rule 5 is the ESSENTIAL RULE. Searle found a similar set of rules to be operative in the case of other kinds of illocutions, as shown in the following table for assertion, thanking, and warning:

	<i>Assert</i>	<i>Thank (for)</i>	<i>Warn</i>
Propositional content	Any proposition <i>p</i>	Past act <i>A</i> done by <i>H</i> .	Future event or state, etc., <i>E</i> .
Preparatory	1. <i>S</i> has evidence (reasons, etc.) for	<i>A</i> benefits <i>S</i> and <i>S</i> believes <i>A</i> benefits <i>S</i> .	1. <i>H</i> has reason to believe <i>E</i> will

	the truth of <i>p</i> . 2. It is not obvious to both <i>S</i> and <i>H</i> that <i>H</i> knows (does not need to be reminded of, etc.) <i>p</i> .		occur and is not in <i>H</i> 's interest. 2. It is not obvious to both <i>S</i> and <i>H</i> that <i>E</i> will occur.
Sincerity	<i>S</i> believes <i>p</i> .	<i>S</i> feels grateful or appreciative for <i>A</i> .	<i>S</i> believes <i>E</i> is not in <i>H</i> 's best interest.
Essential	Counts as an undertaking that <i>p</i> represents an actual state of affairs.	Counts as an expression of gratitude or appreciation.	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that <i>E</i> is not in <i>H</i> 's best interest.

Note that violations of Searle's preparatory conditions produce infelicities of Austin's type A, misinvocations. In a similar way, violations of the sincerity conditions correspond more or less directly to Austin's class Γ of infelicities, the abuses that do not nullify or vitiate the illocutionary act but nevertheless make it flawed. Neither the propositional content condition nor—importantly—the essential condition can be related very clearly to Austin's taxonomy of infelicities.

Two further features of Searle's (1969) theory deserve mention. First, he accepted Austin's idea that a sufficient test for illocutionary acts is that they **could** have been performed by uttering an explicit performative. Thus, he said that more than one illocutionary act can be accomplished by the utterance of a single, noncompound sentence, giving as an example the case of a wife who says at a party, "It's really quite late," and in doing so simultaneously performs the illocutionary act of stating a fact and the illocutionary act of making a suggestion equivalent to "I suggest that we go home." Elsewhere, Searle suggested that illocutionary acts can be cascaded, so to speak. Making a particular utterance may immediately accomplish one illocutionary act, e.g., stating something, which act, having been accomplished, may result in the accomplishment of a corollary illocutionary act, e.g., warning. Second, he observed that an illocutionary act is typically performed with a certain perlocutionary effect in mind, an effect that follows from the essential condition: "Thus requesting is, as a matter of its essential condition, an attempt to get the hearer to do something ..." (Searle 1969:71) Searle doubted that a reduction of illocutions to associated perlocutionary effects could be accomplished, but Austin's worry about the distinction between these two categories is highlighted by this possibility.

### 3. Illocutionary Act Potential

An important improvement on the view expressed by Austin and elaborated by Searle is developed in a number of works by Alston (see Alston 1964, 1994, and the works cited therein). If someone utters a declarative sentence like "This dog bites," one can, depending on the circumstances, be properly described as having asserted, warned, admitted, testified, rendered a finding, and so on. Insofar as any of these acts could have been made explicit in terms of an explicit performative such as *I assert that this dog bites; I warn you that this dog bites; I admit that this dog bites;* and so on, all of these

should count as different illocutionary acts that can be performed by uttering one and the same sentence. Are we to say, then, that the sentence itself is multiply ambiguous with respect to illocutionary force? Should we postulate several (or perhaps many) different *F*s in the Searlean analysis  $F(p)$ , each corresponding to a specific illocutionary force? Given that the sentence has an invariable form and that the various specific illocutionary acts that are standardly accomplished by using it hardly seem like an arbitrary collection, an analysis in terms of ambiguity seems wrong. And yet, this case seems qualitatively different from the case of uttering “This dog bites,” with the intent, perhaps perfectly clear in a given situation, of getting the addressee to put a muzzle on the dog, a case in which, once again, one might have said, “I request that you muzzle this dog because it bites” (see below under INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS).

Alston’s suggestion was to recognize that the conventions of the language are such that a declarative sentence is suited to the production of a certain **range** of illocutionary acts and not others. What particular illocutionary act is brought off ordinarily depends on the particular circumstances, as well as the form of the uttered sentence, but the sentence itself, standardly, because of rules of the language, has the potential, when uttered, to communicate some things and not others. It has, in other words, a single ILLOCUTIONARY ACT POTENTIAL that is closely and conventionally associated with its form.

### 3.1 Strawson Redux: Bach & Harnish (1979)

Bach & Harnish (1979) completely rejected Searle’s program for making constitutive rules central, and proposed to substitute a carefully worked out version of Strawson’s earlier, intention-centered theory. They followed Strawson in distinguishing between ceremonial acts like christening and marrying, for which convention is taken to be the primary illocutionary mechanism, and the case of non-ceremonial acts like asking and stating, which they label COMMUNICATIVE, and for which they assume that intention is crucial to the accomplishment of the illocutionary act. Their contribution was three-fold: 1) to suggest a very general SPEECH ACT SCHEMA (SAS) for communicative illocutionary acts, 2) to show how inferences based on MUTUAL CONTEXTUAL BELIEFS (MCBs) play a role in communicative speech acts, and 3) to make detailed use of Grice’s notion of conversational implicature in fleshing out the theory.

The most general form of SAS consists of the following ordered steps:

- (3) a. S is uttering *e*.
- b. S means ... by *e*.
- c. S is saying so-and-so.
- d. S is doing such-and-such.

In each phase of the interpretation, the derived inference follows from the previous conclusion plus general rules. Premise (3a) follows from hearing the speaker utter *e*, plus the hearer’s knowledge of the language, and (3b) follows from (3a) plus the knowledge that in this language, *e* means ... Then (3c) follows from (3b), supplemented with the assumption that S is speaking literally plus the knowledge that there are certain MCBs in the context in which *e* has been uttered. The reasoning to the conclusion (3d)—that S is

doing such-and-such in uttering *e*—involves the previous conclusion, other MCBs, and what Bach and Harnish (1979:7) call the COMMUNICATIVE PRESUMPTION:

Communicative Presumption: The mutual belief in CL [the linguistic community] that whenever a member S says something in L to another member H, he is doing so with some recognizable illocutionary intent.

The way this works for Bach and Harnish is that the sentences of *L* belong, as a matter of locution, to a limited range of sentence types (see below) that are formally connected with the mood of the sentence, and that knowledge of *L* includes knowledge that the locutionary act of uttering a sentence of a certain sentence type is only compatible with the expression of certain sorts of feelings. Uttering a declarative sentence that expresses the proposition *p*, for example, is only compatible with a belief on the part of the speaker that *p*, and is therefore suitable only to illocutionary acts that fit with the speaker's having such a belief, e.g., asserting that *p*, stating that *p*, and so on.

Various additional assumptions are made to accommodate non-literal (e.g., sarcastic or metaphorical) speech acts, and still others are needed for INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS (see below). As with most theories that take inferencing to be a central notion in deriving the force of utterances, quite a few steps are needed to work out the illocution in Bach and Harnish's system.

### 3.2 The Classification of Illocutionary Acts

In his last chapter, Austin (1962) presents a preliminary, intuitive, five-way taxonomy of illocutionary acts that Austin himself admitted was neither particularly well-motivated nor always unambiguous in its application to particular examples. Since he believed that illocutionary acts could always be made explicit through the use of performative sentences, a taxonomy of illocutionary acts could therefore be couched in terms of an analysis of the various potentially performative verbs of English, which he estimated to number between  $10^3$  and  $10^4$ . Austin's five classes, a brief explanation of each, and a few examples of each are as follows:

1. VERDICTIVES: acts that consist of delivering a finding, e.g., *acquit*, *hold* (as a matter of law), *read something as*, etc.
2. EXERCITIVES: acts of giving a decision for or against a course of action, e.g., *appoint*, *dismiss*, *order*, *sentence*, etc.
3. COMMISSIVES: acts whose point is to commit the speaker to a course of action, e.g., *contract*, *give one's word*, *declare one's intention*, etc.
4. BEHABITIVES: expressions of attitudes toward the conduct, fortunes or attitudes of others, e.g., *apologize*, *thank*, *congratulate*, *welcome*, etc.
5. EXPOSITIVES: acts of expounding of views, conducting of arguments, and clarifying, e.g., *deny*, *inform*, *concede*, *refer*, etc.

The ungrounded nature, unclarity, and overlap of these classes has led to a sizable number of attempts to improve on Austin's taxonomy. Some of the more important of these, as well as discussions of the principles that might be used for classifying

illocutionary acts, are to be found in Vendler 1972, Fraser 1974a, Searle 1975b, Katz 1977, McCawley 1977, Bach & Harnish 1979, Ballmer & Brennenstuhl 1981, Wierzbicka 1987, Croft 1994, Sadock 1994, and Allan 1998a. It seems clear just from the length of this list and the fact that the efforts at classification continue apace that there is no firm agreement on the ultimate taxonomic system for illocutionary acts or performative verbs.

There seem in general to be two types of criteria that have been used to classify speech acts, namely formal/grammatical features and semantic/pragmatic features:

Vendler (1972) and Fraser (1974a) based their respective arrangements on the grammatical properties of the complements that performative verbs take. Thus, verbs of promising and requesting generally take *for ... to* complements (*I promise to retire early, I order you to desist*), whereas verbs of stating ordinarily do not (*\*I assert to retire early, \*I explain you to be arrogant*). Verbs of inquiring take subordinate *wh*-complements (*I hereby ask you whether you own such a knife*), whereas verbs of promising do not (*\*I promise whether I will help you*), and so on. McCawley (1977) based his classification on such grammatical properties as whether verbs can occur as performatives in the passive and what sorts of expressions the verbs can be complements of. He observed, for example, that what he called advisories (a subclass of Austin's exercitives) occur comfortably in the passive (*You are hereby advised to resign*), whereas behabitives do not (*\*You are hereby apologized to*.) His class of operatives (another subset of Austin's exercitives) do not occur performatively as complements of *would like to* (*\*I would like to baptise you Kimberly Ann, I would (hereby) like to sustain your objection*), whereas McCawley's class of advisories (yet another subclass of exercitives) do occur in this environment (*I would like to inform you that you are free to leave*.)

Searle (1975b) presented a taxonomy of illocutionary acts based on a number of essentially pragmatic parameters, some of which are closely related to the felicity conditions of his earlier work, but some of which were introduced just for the purposes of classification. The most important of the added parameters is what Searle called DIRECTION OF FIT. This has to do with whether the words are supposed to fit the facts of the world or whether the world is supposed to come to fit the words. There are four values: words-to-world, world-to-words, neither, and both. Ballmer & Brennenstuhl 1981, as well as Wierzbicka 1987, are compendious treatments of the meta-vocabulary for speech acts classified largely on intuitively determined semantic similarities among the classes.

Some authors combine the two modes. Thus, Sadock (1994) sketched a system that is designed to conform to the formal properties of the basic sentence types (see below), but suggests that such a classification might be forthcoming from an examination of three cognitive dimensions that he called the REPRESENTATIONAL DIMENSION, the AFFECTIVE DIMENSION, and the EFFECTIVE DIMENSION. Harnish (1994) also has both formal and functional dimensions in his classificatory scheme for moods. For him, a mood is a conjunction of grammatical form, locution, and fit of the world to the locution.

In nearly all of these studies, there are many more dimensions than are needed to form a taxonomy with a small number of basic categories. Searle (1975b), for example, has a dozen different dimensions, each with several values, that would yield, in principle, tens of thousands of categories. It has therefore been up to the analyst to choose which

dimensions to foreground so as to determine the larger groups and which to use only for the determination of finer divisions.

It is interesting to note that in almost all of the schemes that have been put forward, the imprint of Austin's original, highly intuitive compartmentalization is clearly visible. Austin's class of commissives, for example, seems to survive intact on everyone's list of basic illocutionary types.

### 3.3 Speech Acts and Grammar

Working within the framework of Transformational Grammar (TG), Katz & Postal (1964) proposed that a grammar of this kind should be constructed in such a way that transformational rules not change meaning. In a grammar that is constrained in this way, the deep structure would be all that is required for semantic interpretation. Obvious counterexamples to the proposal in the early TG literature included the rules that derived imperative and interrogative sentences from deep structures identical to those of the corresponding declarative sentences. Such transformations obviously change meaning, at least in a broad sense of the word that would count illocutionary force as a part of meaning. Katz and Postal proposed to eliminate these counterexamples by including markers of force in the deep structures of imperative and interrogative sentences. The transformations in question would apply only in the presence of these markers and would, therefore, not change meaning. In a footnote (Katz & Postal 1964:149), they also considered the possibility that instead of an unanalyzed marker, the deep structures of interrogative and imperative sentences might include whole performative clauses. Thus the deep structure of *Go home!* would be similar to that of the explicit performative sentence *I request that you go home*, and the deep structure of *Did you go home?* would be similar to the performative *I ask you whether you went home*.

Ross (1970a), pursuing this idea within the framework of Generative Semantics, proposed to extend the proposal to declarative sentences as well, thus modeling, in grammatical terms, Austin's and Searle's suggestion that all normal sentences have both a locutionary and an illocutionary aspect. The underlying performative clause in Ross's proposal would correspond to Searle's illocutionary operator *F*, and its deep structure object clause would correspond to Searle's propositional content, *p*. Ross provided a number of arguments for the existence of such abstract performative clauses; some of these pointed to the existence of a higher verb of speaking, some to an element referring to the speaker, and some to an element referring to the addressee. Additional arguments of a similar sort were adduced by Sadock (1969, 1974), Davison (1973), and others.

The grammatical arguments for abstract performative clauses were generally of the following form:

- (4) a. P is a property characteristic of clauses that are subordinate to a higher clause of form F.
- b. P', a special case of P, is found in main clauses.
- c. P' would be explained if in underlying structure, the main clause is subordinate to a higher clause of the form F'.
- d. There exists an abstract performative clause of the form F' that provides just the right environment for the occurrence of P'.

A typical instance of this argument from Ross (1970a) is this:

- (5) a. The reflexive pronoun in the sentence *Nancy claimed that the book was written by Fred and herself* requires coreference with the subject of a higher verb of speaking, cf. \**Alfred claimed that the book was written by Fred and herself*.
- b. First person reflexive pronouns of this kind can be found in main clauses: *This book was written by Fred and myself/\*herself*.
- c. This use of the reflexive would be explained if in deep structure the main clause were subordinate to a higher clause with a first person subject and a verb of speaking.
- d. An abstract performative clause *I state that* provides just the right environment.

This PERFORMATIVE HYPOTHESIS, as it came to be called, was quickly and roundly condemned both on linguistic and on philosophical grounds.

Numerous problems with the syntactic arguments for the performative hypothesis were adduced by Anderson (1971a), Fraser (1974b), Leech (1976), and Mittwoch (1976, 1977), among others. For example, an argument that was intensively investigated in Davison (1973) has to do with the distribution of speech act adverbials like *frankly* in *Frankly, it's terrible*. Both the occurrence and interpretation of this adverbial are apparently explained if we assume that the nonperformative form is derived from a performative like *I tell you frankly that it is terrible* (Sadock 1974). But Mittwoch (1977) pointed to the existence of sentences like (6), in which there is a similar use of *frankly* but postulating an abstract performative clause dominating the *because* clause is out of the question, since it would be at odds with the tenets of the performative hypothesis itself.

- (6) I won't eat any because, frankly, it's terrible.

McCawley (1985) responded to these syntactic challenges (and some of the semantic challenges discussed below) arguing that certain of these are not in fact problems and that the remainder, while real, only count as refutation if one is willing to give up entirely on making sense of the facts that the performative hypothesis does give an account of: "The problems [the performative hypothesis] was intended to deal with have not been solved so much as ignored." (McCawley 1985:61)

Philosophically, the major objection is that the performative hypothesis seems to lead to an unresolvable contradiction with regard to truth conditions. The argument, with variations, is something like the following:

- (7) a. Either a performative clause is part of the semantics of a sentence or it is not.
- b. If it is not part of the semantic form, then a performative sentence is not subject to judgments of truth or falsity, as Austin suggested.

- c. But under the performative hypothesis, a simple declarative such as *It is raining* has a performative clause in deep structure and is therefore not subject to judgments of truth or falsity, which seems absurd.
- d. If performative clauses are part of the semantics and are subject to judgments of truth and falsity, then a performative sentence such as *I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin* is true just in case the speaker succeeds in christening the ship by uttering the sentence.
- e. But under the performative hypothesis, a simple declarative such as *It is raining* has a performative clause in deep structure and is therefore true just in case the speaker succeeds in asserting that it is raining by uttering the sentence, regardless of whether it is raining or not. This also seems absurd.
- f. In either case we are lead to an absurdity, and therefore, declarative sentences cannot be taken to be dominated by abstract performative clauses.

Boër & Lycan (1980) presented a detailed and sophisticated version of this argument based on the use of speech act adverbials of the kind discussed by Davison (1973) in arguing for abstract performatives. But Sadock (1985) rebutted these philosophical arguments on the grounds that they involved an equivocation on the notion of truth, sometimes taking this to be the abstract truth of a proposition and sometimes as the truth of an assertion made in uttering a sentence. The latter, said Sadock, can be understood as the truth of the complement of an overt or abstract assertive performative clause. Thus both *It is raining* and *I assert that it is raining* are used to assert that it is raining and are true, qua assertions, only if it is, in fact, raining. The controversy is discussed at length in Levinson (1983).

#### **4. Indirect Speech Acts**

As discussed above, Searle (1969) distinguished between effects that are achieved by getting the hearer to recognize that the rules governing the use of an illocutionary force indicating device are in effect, which he called illocutionary effects, and those effects that are achieved indirectly as byproducts of the total speech act, for which he reserved the term perlocutionary effects. But the effect might be very similar and we might use the same words to describe it, whether it is an illocutionary or perlocutionary effect. A speaker might, for example, warn a hearer by uttering an explicit warning that a bull is about to charge, in which case we have an illocutionary effect of warning. Alternatively, a speaker might warn the addressee (in the sense of making him feel alarmed) by making a statement to the effect that the bull is about to charge, producing in the addressee an illocutionary effect of understanding that the speaker is stating that the bull is about to charge, which in turn, under the right circumstances, causes him or her to be warned. In this case the effect of warning is a perlocutionary effect.

Sadock (1970, 1972) argued that in certain cases, there was some conventional indication in the form of the utterance of what might be taken as an indirect, perlocutionary effect. The central sort of example is the utterance at a dinner table of an apparent question like “Could you pass the salt?”. The utterance appears to be a question,

but when produced at a dinner table, a commonly achieved effect is to arouse in the addressee a feeling of obligation to pass the salt. Sadock noticed that this sort of question can also include the word *please* sentence internally, which indicates clearly the intention of the speaker to produce the kind of effect that illocutionary acts of requesting typically do. It is important to notice that not all questions that can provoke such a feeling in the addressee can felicitously include this word. Thus *It's cold in here*, can, given the right circumstances, cause an addressee to feel obligated to close a window, light a fire in the fireplace, fetch a blanket, or the like. But even when intended to produce such results, one cannot say in idiomatic English *\*It's please cold in here*. Sadock argued that examples of the former kind are conventionalized in a sense sufficient to justify analyzing the intended effect as directly illocutionary rather than as an indirect perlocutionary effect.

This idea soon came under attack. Gordon & Lakoff (1971) made the important observation that there is a high degree of systematicity connecting the apparent content of the utterance and the kind of speech act that can be indirectly accomplished through its utterance. Specifically, they observed that a common strategy for indirectly achieving an illocutionary effect is to assert a speaker-based sincerity condition governing that sort of illocutionary act or to question a hearer-based sincerity condition. Thus, an act of requesting has among its felicity conditions: 1) the requirement that the speaker desires the addressee to perform the requested action and 2) that the speaker believes that the hearer is able to carry out the action. The following are, therefore, rather ordinary ways of accomplishing the effect of a request without using an imperative:

(8) I'd like you to (please) take out the garbage.

(9) Can you (please) take out the garbage?

But while Gordon and Lakoff's scheme was fairly successful in predicting what the ordinary ways of accomplishing illocutionary effects indirectly could be, it said nothing about which particular **forms** could be used to do it, some of which, as Sadock had pointed out, are accompanied by grammatical peculiarities that even near paraphrases do not have. Thus while (8) and (9) comfortably accept the word *please* before the verb, neither of the following sounds nearly as good:

(10) ?I desire for you to please take out the garbage

(11) ?Are you able to please take out the garbage

The diminished acceptability of such examples cannot be due to the impossibility of their being used to get across the equivalent of a request; both of them can be so used, of course, since the illocutionary effect of any communicative speech act can be accomplished by practically any utterance, given the right external circumstances.

Several conceptually similar solutions to this grammatical problem have appeared. The approach shared by all of the opponents of the treatment of certain indirect speech acts as idioms makes use of some version of Grice's idea of conversational implicature, a type of communication that relies for its success on principles of cooperativity of a very general sort. The Gricean chain of reasoning that can lead from

the utterance of a question to the implication of a request might include something like the following steps:

- (12) a. The speaker has asked about a certain ability of mine.
- b. It is clear that I have that ability.
- c. Therefore, if the speaker is being cooperative, she must have intended something beyond a mere question concerning my abilities.
- d. My being able to pass the salt is a prerequisite (a preparatory condition) to my actually passing it.
- e. We are at the moment eating at the dinner table.
- f. People often like to add salt to their food.
- g. The speaker cannot add salt to her food unless she can reach it.
- h. I see that she cannot reach the salt at the moment.
- i. Therefore, by uttering *Can you pass the salt?* she is therefore requesting that I pass the salt to her.

Searle (1975a) suggested that, while not idioms, as Sadock (1972) claimed, the forms with special grammar are *idiomatic* ways of accomplishing a subsidiary illocutionary goal. Bach & Harnish (1979) set up a notion of illocutionary standardization for such cases, but handled the grammatical facts by drumming difficult examples out of the language. The perfectly acceptable examples (8) and (9) are taken by them to be not technically grammatical, a bold approach that has been resurrected by Bertollet (1994).

Morgan's (1978) important paper offered a synthesis of these proposals that has been taken up in one form or another by several researchers, e.g., Horn & Bayer (1984). Morgan distinguished between conventions of meaning and conventions of usage, arguing that idioms belong in the first category but standardized indirect speech acts belong in the latter. Since there is frequently a measure of conventionalization involved, even if it does not count as a convention of meaning but rather a convention about the use of the language, Morgan suggested that a pure Gricean account is inappropriate. The Gricean inference is, in his words, SHORT CIRCUITED in such a case, and the addressee is not burdened with an actual calculation to the intended effect but can jump directly to it by means of the convention of use. As for the special grammatical properties that certain conventionalized usage display, Morgan suggested that some formal features can be a function of conventional use, rather than the conventional meaning. Examples that do not present special formal properties would be treated by him as nonconventional, non-short circuited implicatures.

#### **4.1 Indirect Speech Acts and Politeness**

Most theories of indirect speech acts barely touch on the reasons for which speakers use indirect rather than direct forms, nor do they seek an explanation for which particular indirect forms will be used under which conditions. It takes little reflection, however, to notice that in most cases, some notion of politeness plays a role. Brown & Levinson (1987) include extensive investigations of how models of politeness can yield answers to

these interesting questions. They assume—following Lakoff (1977)—that a fundamental rule of politeness (deriving from a need to preserve addressee’s “face”) is: *Don’t impose*. Requests are, by definition, impositions, and the clash that they present with the rule of politeness is in need of resolution. The direct imposition can be ameliorated by avoiding a direct demand and instead asking whether the addressee is willing to or capable of carrying out the act. This gives the addressee the technical option of not carrying out the implied request without losing face. Hence *Would you pass the salt?* or *Can you pass the salt?* are more polite than *Pass the salt!* A rather similar account is offered by Leech (1976).

These studies of politeness have spawned a considerable interest in naturalistic studies of speech interaction, crosscultural comparisons of indirection strategies, and intercultural communication. See, for example, the papers in Watts et al. 1992.

#### 4.2 Mood and Sentence Type

In most languages, perhaps even all, sentences can be classified on the basis of formal features into a small number of sentence types, with each type associated with a certain illocutionary act potential IAP. Thus in English, sentences can be classified as declarative, with IAP including acts of stating, asserting, claiming, testifying, and so on; interrogative, with IAP including asking, inquiring, querying, and so on; and imperative, with IAP including requesting, demanding, commanding, directing, and so on. To count as a type within such a system, the formal features defining the types must be mutually exclusive: A sentence cannot be simultaneously of the declarative and interrogative type, or of the interrogative and imperative type. Furthermore, every sentence should be of one or of another type according to the formal features that it displays.

Sadock & Zwicky (1985) studied sentence type systems in a typologically diverse range of languages from different linguistic stocks and found a remarkable similarity among such systems, a situation that is reminiscent of the similarities to be found in color-term vocabularies that were investigated by Berlin & Kay (1969). In general, we can expect a language to distinguish at least one declarative type, at least one interrogative type, and at least one imperative type. Within these broad types, some languages make further divisions. Thus, Hidatsa subdivides the declarative into several types depending on the source of the information: first hand (i.e., *I testify that ...*), statements of others (i.e., *I pass on the information that ...*), speaker’s beliefs (i.e., *I think that ...*), common knowledge (i.e., *It is said that ...*), and a neutral type that does not commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition (i.e., *Perhaps ...*). Some languages also have other types that are mutually exclusive with, and therefore at the same level as, the major types. Korean, for instance, has a propositive particle that occurs in the same sentence-final position as the declarative, interrogative, and imperative particles. Sentences ending with the propositive particle are used for proposing a course of action (i.e., *Let’s ...*) (Kim 1990).

Intuitive classifications of illocutionary acts and classifications based on philosophical principles often fail to jibe with the formal criteria that distinguish sentence types. Many authors agree, for example, that the interrogative should be viewed as a species of imperative—a request for information. But Sadock & Zwicky (1985), in a survey of approximately forty diverse languages, failed to find a single case in which the interrogative was clearly aligned formally with the imperative. Another example of the

divergence of philosophical and grammatical criteria is that interrogatives of all kinds would seem to belong together from an illocutionary point of view, but it is frequently the case that polarity questions, those that require a *yes* or *no* answer, form a class distinct from question-word questions, and often resemble declaratives. In German, for example, polarity questions begin with the finite verb, whereas questions with an interrogative word like *was*, *wo*, *wen*, etc., begin with that element, with the finite verb immediately following. From a formal point of view, question word questions like (13) are perfectly parallel to declarative sentences with a focal element like (14), rather than to polarity questions like (15):

- (13) Was hat er gekauft?  
‘What did he buy?’
- (14) Ein Buch hat er gekauft.  
‘(It was) a book he bought.’
- (15) Hat er ein Buch gekauft?  
‘Did he buy a book?’

Similarly, in a great many languages the polarity question has special, interrogative intonation, whereas the question-word question has the same intonation as the declarative. Bolinger (1982), however, argues that interrogative intonation has its own, quasi-illocutionary meaning. See also Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990.

There are several divergent views as to the analysis of mood. The performative analysis reduces mood to performativity. Others, e.g., Karttunen (1977) and Hintikka (1976) for questions, and Han (2000), for imperatives, sought truth-conditional models of mood. Bach & Harnish (1979) take mood as the expression of an attitude toward the truth of a proposition, and Harnish (1994) treats the moods as *sui generis*, a device that directly determines the illocutionary force potential of a sentence.

## **5. Formal Approaches**

Several attempts have been made to axiomatize aspects of speech act theory and produce an algebra of illocutionary forces, acts, etc., in which certain results can be proven concerning the relation of acts to acts, acts to intentions, acts to contexts, and so forth. Researchers in artificial intelligence have based their formalizations on the notions of plans, goals, intentions, and beliefs, hoping to derive some of the basic features of speech acts from these primitive notions. These include Perrault 1990, Cohen & Levesque 1990, and the numerous articles cited in those two works. Searle & Vanderveken (1985) and Vanderveken (1994), on the other hand, present a straightforward formalization of the informal ideas of Searle (1969, 1975b), with the idea of demonstrating the consistency and completeness of those ideas. Merin’s (1994) novel approach to formalizing speech act theory takes dialogue as the central notion, with social acts such as the making of claims and the concession to or rejection claims as primitives.

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