

Part 1: Speech Acts, classical views

Overview:

Classical views

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Issues of classification

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Austin
Searle
Bach and Harnish

Propositions all the way down

How does the act come about?

Summary

1. Classical views

In the first part, we will survey works by Austin (1962), Searle (1969), Searle and Vanderveken (1985) and Bach and Harnisch (1979) on speech acts. We expect that the reader is superficially acquainted with the notion “speech act” (e.g. Levinson, 1983: *Pragmatics*).

1.1. Doing Things with Words

In 1962, Austin delivered his series of lectures on “How to do Things with Words”. The research program that is laid out in these lectures promised to carry the study of semantics beyond the dullness of asserting information. The magic of speech acts seems to consist in the fact that the speaker can change the world’s course by a mere utterance. Say *Sesamy, open!* and the mountain moves.

Of course, true magic speech acts reside in fictitious worlds, but even in our own world, ritual declaratives can irrevocably change the state of the world. *I hereby declare you husband and wife*, uttered under the correct circumstances by the right person, brings about changes that, at times, were almost impossible to undo. Similarly, the magic spell *You are hereby fired* can change the economic situation of the addressee dramatically. Interestingly, we expect that speech acts should be part of communicative exchange. The following kind of effect, caused by an utterance, does not intuitively qualify as a speech act.

- (1) *A speech recognition system is connected to your front door. It is programmed to react to your voice, and opens the door iff you utter „Sesame, open!“ loudly and clearly.*

For one, someone could cheat the system with a tape recorded utterance made by you. More generally, the system can not distinguish whether the magic words are mentioned or used, used with the intention to open the door, or used in a narration of “Ali Baba”, etc. The speech recognition system is too robust, in a way. It performs its magic under circumstances where “true” utterances of “true” speakers of “real” magic words would fail to bring about a speech act. Ever since Austin, it has been clear that

saying so does not necessarily make it so. This motivates the classical distinction between *locution*, *illocution* and *perlocution*.

- (2) *locutionary act = S utters a certain string of words*
illocutionary act = all circumstances being correct, S brings about a speech act by the locutionary act
perlocutionary act = effects of the speech act on the addressee

Locutionary acts without illocutionary force occur when the speaker lacks the intention to perform the respective illocution, if the speaker or hearer are not of the right kind, or other circumstances do not meet the conventions of the act. Some examples:

S utters “I hereby dismiss you” towards her secretary, in order to practice for the upcoming event of firing an employee.

The employee responds: “What do you mean by ‘I hereby dismiss you’?”

There are, however, trickier cases in which all interlocutors firmly believe that they perform a certain illocutionary act and yet fail to do so. In the comedy “Das Haus in Montevideo” (“It’s a gift”), a marriage takes place that does not actually have the intended perlocutionary effect, because circumstances do not fit legal regulations: Marriages, according to the plot, may only be performed on *ships*, and the vessel in question, *Atlanta*, was 27cm short of being a ship, as was discovered only later. Such examples motivate Austin’s term *felicity conditions* (see below).

Perlocutionary acts are ways of the addressee to react to the speech act. For instance, if a speaker issues a command “*get me the hammer*” the addressee might go and fetch the hammer. This is a perlocutionary act intended by the speaker. However, the addressee might additionally get nervous because the speaker never does well with hammers. Hence, the command has the extra perlocutionary effect of frightening the hearer. Perlocutionary acts are particularly interesting, however, when they are intended by the speaker as a side effect of a speech act. Effects like *annoying*, *amusing*, *boring* are usually side effects of assertions. I might assert “*You are an idiot.*” with the intention that this information is suited to annoy you. I might tell you a funny story about my boss in order to amuse you. It’s important to observe that such acts don’t have corresponding explicit performatives. It is not possible to state *I hereby annoy you* and hope to cause anger. It is not possible to state *I hereby bore you* in order to bore someone—even though the intended perlocutionary effect will most likely be achieved, if you reiterate “*I hereby bore you*” long enough.

1.2. Felicitous and infelicitous acts

As we saw, not any utterance of the appropriate form causes an act to take place. In this section, we will review Austin’s list of (types of) background conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for a speech act to succeed.

(A.1) There must be an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further

(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and (B.2) completely.

(C.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(C.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

(Austin 1962: 14f.)

We will not comment on these rules extensively (though it is instructive to invent examples where exactly one rule is violated and all others fulfilled). One comment is in place, though. Rules A and B are intended to cover all linguistic and social conventions that make some act possible, and that regulate under what circumstances the act has actually taken place. To list some aspects, if there is no institution of *marriage*, persons can assert as long as they want that they marry each other without effect. If a society does not know the practice of *betting* then its members can not bet, or at least only in an explicit contract-like manner. If a marriage is interrupted in the middle, the couple still counts as unmarried, no matter whether they seriously intended to get married or not, and so on.

The Rules classed under C are of a different nature. Austin's comments amount to the view that insincere speech acts count as performed acts nevertheless. For instance, an insincere promise is still conceived as binding for the one who promises. An insincere bet will still, if accepted, be binding for the one who offered it, and the one who accepted it. Unsincere marriages, as we know, are binding marriages even if the couple secretly hates each other while uttering "*yes, I will*". Insincere acts are in danger of causing problems afterwards (because the parties do not behave as expected—violating C.2) but count as successful illocutionary acts to start with. So much for Austin.

In later years, Searle suggested that the lexical content of performative verbs and the conditions of use should be tied in a more systematic manner. We will not turn to his more definition-shaped system to talk about felicity and other context conditions. (A copy of Searle 1969, p.66+67 is useful to see some examples as he envisaged the rules to be used.) He proposes the following types of rule:

propositional content rules
preparatory rules
sincerity rules
essential rule

The **essential rule** corresponds, roughly, to Austin's observation that the language community must have a convention that such-and-such utterances, all other rules obeyed, *counts as an act to achieve such-and-such*. We will return to the question how "count as" can replace "be". As we will see below, Searle claimed—at least in his classical papers—that the act comes about because a friendly audience

understands the speaker's intentions and gracefully grants him the act. (It might be desirable to develop a better understanding of what makes the act.)

The **sincerity rules** mirror Austin's C.1 and C.2; in a full description of any specific speech act type, these rules should specify in which respect the speaker—and perhaps the addressee as well—needs to be sincere. However, Searle cherishes a somewhat more differentiated picture of sincerity rules. This becomes clear when we look at his propositional content rules, and preparatory rules. They are devised in order to ensure that e.g. a bet is about an unknown fact, not a known one; a promise is about something that the speaker believes the addressee will appreciate; a promise is moreover about something the speaker is actually able to do, etc.

The **propositional content rules** rest on the observation that many acts seem to be about a proposition that something that has happened (=e.g. *thanking, asserting, lamenting*), or that will happen in the future (*promising, ordering, betting*). Usually, the nature of the speech act limits the possible propositions that can be addressed in the speech act; examples in the literature are usually clear and convincing. Yet, the consumer of Searle's theory might ask, somewhat uneasily,

- how we know in general that each speech act is bound to have some proposition that it addresses?
- whether and how there is any systematic way in which we can recover the addressed proposition from the utterance?
- if it is possible to understand the "nature" of an act in a more elementary manner from which the propositional content rules should *follow* rather than just being listed in an instruction-like rule sheet.

For example, we feel that there should be a definition of what it means to *bet* from which it necessarily follows that one can not sincerely bet about *p* if both speaker and addressee know the truth value of *p*. Searle's instruction sheets look as if a different society could agree to adopt a verb *bot* which works like *bet* with the sole difference that *botting* is about past propositions of known truth value, whereas *betting* is about propositions about the future, or of otherwise unknown truth value. Of course, this is senseless—but a proper theory of speech acts should be able to predict such senselessness.

The **preparatory conditions** cover "all the rest", so to speak. They can host elaborate descriptions about ceremony, as well as speaker attitudes towards the propositional content of an act, as well as facts about the belief state of the speaker (for *asking*), the intentions of the speaker before, and after the act (would S have done *p* anyway, or has he just declared a change of mind by *promising*?) etc. In this sense, Searle's system is certainly sufficient to devise schematic descriptions for any speech act one could think of. However, his writings (up to 1989) fail to elucidate clearly why speech acts can be fully described by four types of rules rather than three, six, or eight; why it should be these exact categories and no other; and whether some of the alleged descriptive rules should follow from something more essential about an act (see above).

One final observation about Searle's use of rules seems important. Sometimes, the content of the propositional content or preparatory rules seems to interfere with the plausibility with which the hearer can assume that the speaker intends to be sincere in a speech act. This becomes clear when we look at Searle's discussion of a *advise* which is a type of act characterized (in the given system) as follows (S= speaker, H=hearer).

1. propositional content: *p* must describe a future act *a* of H.

2. preparatory rules: S has reason to believe that *a* will benefit H. It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do *a* in the normal course of events.
3. sincerity rule: S believes that *a* will benefit H.
4. essential rule: Counts as an undertaking to the effect that *a* is in H's best interest.

Obviously, if *p* describes a future act of H which looks like a stupid thing for H to do, H will not primarily object that S performed an infelicitous act of *advising* but will seriously challenge S's sincerity. Similar interactions arise in other types of acts. The net effect of propositional content conditions and preparatory conditions (where they do not involve the "proper procedure") is very often this:

- If all conditions are observed, the hearer has little reason to doubt the speaker's sincerity ("hey, are you joking?")
- If all conditions are observed, the hearer has little reason to refute or turn down the speech act, or to otherwise signal that the locutionary act failed to achieve the intended illocutionary effect.

This brings us to a point where we would like to ask:

In what sense need illocutionary acts some positive response by the hearer in order to "come about"?

If we find that, yes, they generally do require approval by the hearer, then the status of many of the above conditions might be less about "wellformedness of an act" and more about "acts that are likely to succeed in the sense that they elicit the hearer's approval".¹

Do illocutionary acts require some kind of acceptance by the audience, in addition to the speaker performing the locution with good success, and under correct circumstances? Austin encompasses a notion of speech act which can consist of several turns before the full act comes about. He requires that "the procedure must be executed by all participants correctly (and) completely" (Austin 1962:36), explicitly mentions interactional acts like a *bet* which is not established unless the addressee accepts the bet. Other failures have to do with ways in which prescribed ceremonies can go wrong (like 'opening a library' where the key snaps in the lock) and less with the world of words. Austin expresses some uncertainty as to whether speech acts like *offer* or *donate* require acceptance by the hearer in order to be an established fact. Good common sense tells us that such acts usually succeed even though the addressee does not explicitly react positively. On the other hand, all authors agree that, for instance, the act of *offering x as a present to H* requires that *x* should be something that *H* might desire. An utterance like the following (a) does not establish a felicitous offer of a gift, and (b) at least requires explicit acceptance under normal central European circumstances. It would not do for the speaker to leave the horse behind for better or worse, pointing out that the hearer *H* were responsible for the maintenance of the animal.

- (3) a. *I hereby bequest you my wrecked and unrepairable car.*
b. *I hereby bequest you my horse.*

¹ Generally, Searle's theories state much about what the audience understands about the speaker's intentions, but little about what the audience actually needs to do in order for the act to come about.

However, there *are* illocutionary acts that do not require any positive response. If we take the case of *baptizing* (a person, ship, ...) it seems unconceivable that anyone in the audience provides an answer like the following:

- (4) *Priest: I hereby baptize this baby „Sue Ellen“.*
Audience: Ok, agreed!

Still, this does not mean that the relevant parts of the audience (parents, and other relatives) have not agreed to the name beforehand. Highly ritualized acts like the one in (4) are well-prepared acts. The priest has agreed to name the child according to the parent's wish, and the parents have agreed not to change their mind during the ceremony. Hence, the speech act as such does not elicit a positive response but is performed under the earlier agreement that the priest is licensed to expect acceptance (as long as *he* sticks to plan). Another act where both Austin and Searle claim that the act comes about no matter what the audience might say (and the speaker might think) is the case of *promises*. The hearer can *release* the speaker from an obligation but once the magic words have been spoken, the obligation is installed.

In contrast to Austin, Searle does not seriously consider *acceptance* as a necessary part of speech acts. But, as we saw, he painstakingly defines the preparatory and content conditions for all kinds of speech acts. One side effect of this strategy (volitionally or unvolitionally) is that the felicitous speech acts are such that no hearer could reasonably object. Searle's strategy to deal with the issue of positive responses, hence, might be that if a speech act offers reason to object then it was not a felicitous act (i.e. conforming to scheme) in the first place. Searle, like later Bach+Harnisch, does not discuss true interactional speech acts like *bet*, *sell/buy*, etc. in detail. Maybe his notion of the ideal interactional speech act was that the speaker specifies the offer (*bet*, *sale*, ...) in all steps and the hearer needs but agree. We will turn to systems of speech act classification below, and see why interactional speech acts can give rise to ontological paradoxes.

According to our view, no speech act comes about without approval by the addressee. In later parts of the class, we will take a closer look at how utterance, comprehension of content of utterance, and update of a common ground together establish the success of a speech act. We will argue that these are independent steps and that the step *update of common ground* always rests on approval by the addressee, be it overt approval, tacit approval, or approval granted by earlier agreement.

Further reading:

Austin, 1962, lecture II and III (pp. 12-38): *Which conditions need to be fulfilled for a speech act to succeed?* Austin offers a very general system, not tailored towards specific acts.

Searle, 1969: 54 – 71. *A detailed manual for the ideal 'promise' plus generalizations to other acts.* Schemes for specific acts can be such that an act that fits to scheme will always find approval by hearer. However, specific schemes can only offer a comprehensive theory of speech acts if it is clear *how many* acts there are, and how many such schemes need to be devised in order to cover them all! Which leads us to the next section.

2. Issues of classification

Why do we want to classify speech acts? — Ontological curiosity in a more than puzzling situation

Evidence in favour of four classes of acts:

Taking sentence mood as indication for the number of speech acts, we'd count roughly four: *indicative, question, imperative, exclamative/optative*. This is what grammar tells us, and these four classes are ubiquitous in the languages of the world. However, grammatical mood and speech act do not enter a clean one-to-one relation. The same mood can be used to issue different kinds of speech acts (ex: imperatives, questions; assertion). Different moods can be used to issue the same kind of speech act. For example, many people believe that *question* counts as a *request to answer*. Similarly, *biased* and *rhetorical questions* often serve to assert something rather than asking for answers. Likewise, sentences in indicative mood can express wide varieties of speech acts, we refrain from tiring you with examples. Hence, sentence mood may be a pale grammatical fossilization of important kinds of acts, but there certainly is not a one-to-one correlation between the two.

Arguments in favour of infinitely many (types of?) acts:

If you start from an opposite direction and ask “How many things could in principle be achieved by words?”, an infinity of possible acts unfolds. Declarative acts of the kind ‘*I hereby declare the bridge opened*’ offer an almost endless field of actual and possible conventional acts that could be part of a language. In principle, a society could define arbitrary types of social status and assign their members that status by a ritual speech act. In principle, a society can agree on any odd type of interaction, and adopt a convention that this interaction is initiated by a speech act. Consider games which offer an illustration for the many verbal acts that can be defined and used. (German: *Skat: Ramsch erklären; MauMau: Ohne Ankündigung “Mau” bei der vorletzten Karte ist kein Gewinnen möglich; Schach: Verpflichtung, “Schach” zu erklären, wenn der gegnerische König bedroht ist; etc.*) Looking at such acts, we may feel that we face an infinite, unclassifiable, inhomogeneous large range of speech acts the inner logic of which is obscure.

Evidence in favour of five types of acts:

Luckily, the following rationale opens up a midway perspective. It starts from the interactional side — what do we achieve by speech acts? — but tries to classify actions in a more abstract sense. Basically, utterances can convey information about the world, they can officially announce the speakers feelings/attitudes, and—most importantly—they can initiate a negotiation about common joined plans for the future. This motivates the following subdivision.

Asserting: We will certainly maintain a category for the act of providing information. The speaker *S* provides information by telling the hearer how *S* believes the world to be. ‘*How the world is*’ can be about past facts and events, current facts and events, or predictions for the future. Most settled, however, are past and present facts. The speaker takes responsibility that the things in the world are like the content of his utterance states them to be. Searle used the abbreviation *word-to-world fit* to refer to this commitment.

Ways to change the future course of things: Another large class of speech acts is typically used by the speaker to cause some change in how the world will most likely develop in the future. These acts differ in who takes responsibility for these changes to come about.

Speaker responsibility: The speaker *S* can take responsibility, like in *offers, promises, threats*, to do certain things in the future.

Hearer responsibility: The speaker can express that the hearer *H* should be responsible for these changes. Typical examples are *commands, requests, begging* and the like.

Bilateral responsibilities: The change in future plans might be a joint responsibility. This is the case in bilateral acts that commit both speaker and hearer to act according to a given plan. Economic transactions might come to mind first. When speaker and hearer agree that *S* hereby sells *c* to *H* at the price of *x*, they have embarked on a joint enterprise in the course of which money and goods will be exchanged. Similar agreements are *betting, lending* where both speaker and hearer promise to comply to certain plans. However, many more speech acts might involve responsibilities on both, hearer and speaker side. Consider a command:

(5) *Go to bed now!*

Imperatives like these, at first sight, look like an attempt to establish a new obligation for the hearer, namely the obligation to bring it about that ‘*H is in bed*’ becomes true. However, the full content of the imperative is a more differentiated message about the future, something like ‘*Either you go to bed soon, or I will do something that is unpleasant for you*’. As all parents will know, no imperative like (5) will ever express a successful command unless the parent is willing and has means to come up to his or her commitment to ‘*do something unpleasant*’ within reasonable limits. In many cases, the ‘*something unpleasant*’ for imperatives like (5) may be unspecific, but the early steps in establishing a position of authority always involve working out reasonable specifications of ‘*or I will do something unpleasant*’ and live up to the commitment to *do* these things if necessary.

The example of the tacit *or* clause in imperatives takes up a more general proposal in Truckenbrodt (2009) who dubs the alternative as ‘*or something is going wrong*’. Truckenbrodt’s alternative is more flexible in that it can also capture cases where some commitment by *A* is not fulfilled for reasons beyond *A*’s power. We maintain the more specific *or*-clause here to make a point that commitments, and specifically those expressed by speech acts, are rarely unilateral.

Societal responsibilities: Finally, it can be the entire society’s responsibility to function differently as a society *after* the speech act in comparison to *before*. If a person gets sacked from his job, then that person is no longer obliged to work for the company, the company is no longer obliged to pay, but the state may be obliged to pay the dole, and the person may be obliged to call in at the job center regularly in order to earn that payment. Hence, the successful speech act ‘*I hereby fire you!*’ involves changes in a far-reaching network of obligations. Similar cases can be made for all acts which change the social or legal status of people: *Married* persons are treated differently form *singles*, *naming* changes the most likely linguistic behaviour

towards a person or thing, *opening* a building causes that access to that building will no longer be prosecuted as illegal trespassing, etc.

The simpler cases of undertaking a commitment have found a reflex in the classical terminology. Searle labeled commitments by hearer or speaker as instances of *world-to-word fit*, meaning that it is someone's duty to bring it about that the world fits a given description. In Searle's writings, this 'someone' can be either the speaker or the hearer, which yields two cases of *world-to-word fit*. However, we have tried to argue that cases of single-person responsibilities are the exception rather than the rule. Searle indeed acknowledges that societal commitments are more complex than single-person commitments and used the cover term *double direction of fit* for declarative acts like *firing*, *opening*, *baptising* and the like. This seems to capture the idea that on the one hand, the societal agreement is often ritually established by speaking the magic words under correct circumstances, but then the agreement changes the status of persons, their rights and duties, in many ways. We feel that too many different actions are packed into one term, and will later try to disentangle the steps of social acts.

Public acknowledgement of speaker's feelings or attitudes: A final kind of act that was not in focus so far: acts of expressing speaker's emotions towards persons or things. *I congratulate you to your exam* expresses that the speaker shares the addressee's good feelings about a (good) exam, *I condole you* expresses that the speaker shares the addressee's sorrow. Neither of such acts commit speaker or hearer to anything. The acts can be insincere, but can't be objected to, and often don't need acceptance. They are more than just an expression of feeling: It can be required that a speech act of a given kind is performed ("Say thank-you to Granny!") even though the feelings of the speaker were clearly visible beforehand (*child being overjoyed by some gift presented by Granny*).

There is a wide range for speakers to express feelings towards a state of affairs. Many of these public acknowledgements are necessary parts of successful social life even though their information content is minimal to nil. Greetings like *hi!* just acknowledge the presence of the addressee. Farewells like *Seeya!* publicly confirm that the speaker is leaving. Other acknowledgements do have propositional content. In congratulations like *I congratulate you to your new house!* the speaker states that the congratulation is directed to the new house, and not to the passing of an exam. If we think of speaker oriented adverbials, we find cases where the speaker can express her attitudes as an add-on to an assertion, so to speak (covered by two-dimensional semantic interpretation formats like Potts, 2003). The following list shows a full scale of ways to express speaker's attitude:

- (6) *Hallo!*
How do you do.
Congratulations!
I congratulate you to your excellent exam.
Luckily, you did well in the exam.
You did well in the exam. I am happy.

Searle diagnoses a *null direction of fit* for these cases, "because in general success of fit is presupposed by the utterance". The issue of *fit* seems to fade into a sincerity condition here. We may note at this point that speaker attitudes can be expressed

purely, but also be part of or adjuncts to a more contentful statement. This will become important in the next step when we turn to categorizations of speech acts, and the question of how many acts can be in one utterance. (Searle, on direction of fit: Searle and Vanderveken, 1985: p.52ff)

We decided to discuss the underlying rationale *before* we turn to classification systems in the literature because we feel that the underlying rationale is reflected by these in one way or another. More importantly, we think that another way to interpret the rationale might be that speech acts can not be *classified* into a limited number of types, but *are composed from limited number of aspects*. The difference between categorization and composition is that the former approach is severely challenged by hybrids whereas the latter approach would predict the existence of just that.

We turn to offering a survey over categorization systems, plus brief comments. All systems more or less follow the rationale that the speaker can *state a fact*, *commit herself to do sth*, *press the hearer to do sth*, *express something very interactional and complicated*, or *express emotions*. This leads to proposals with five major classes, sometimes subdivided into smaller subclasses. We will then turn to the question whether it makes sense to assume that speech acts all fall neatly into one of these categories (even granting a rich system). Let me anticipate that the above scale of utterances with different proportions of propositional content and expressive content, as well as the interactional speech acts, shed doubt on the hypothesis that all illocutionary acts fall cleanly into one of *n* possible classes of acts (with *n* to be specified).

Austin

(Austin 1962, Lecture 12, pp. 148 -164.)

Major parts of Austin's lectures on speech acts address the question under what circumstances a locutionary act will successfully and irrevocably cause an illocutionary act. He was the first to propose that *sincerity* conditions must be met, ...

... We will later briefly recapitulate Searle's more streamlined version to have it available for further reference.

After a detailed survey of cases, conditions and examples, Austin proposes the following five general types of speech acts.

- i. *verdictives* (type assertion)
- ii. *exercitives* (type I urge you to do something)
- iii. *commissives* (type I promise to do something)
- iv. *behabitives* (all other social agreements)
- v. *expositives* (expressing emotion)

However, one gets the feeling that these classes were more defined by phenotype than by the internal structure of speech acts, that the labels are more a convenient way to refer to homogeneous subtypes of speech acts than an ultimate categorization. Indeed, Austin states: "I distinguish five very general classes: but I am far from equally happy about all of them. They are, however, quite enough to play Old Harry

with two fetishes which I admit to an inclination to play Old Harry with, viz. (i) the true/false fetish, (ii) the value/fact fetish.” (Austin 1962: 151).

We now turn to Searle, and find more or less the same five classes again.

Searle

(We mainly rely on the elaborate system proposed in Searle + Vanderveken, 1985. We do not make any claims about the appropriateness, consistency or usefulness of the logic axiomatization that is also endorsed in the monograph. For a review, see Sadock, 1989.)

Following his rationale about four directions of fit, Searle claims that there are exactly five illocutionary points.² We list them and add all examples that are classed under the respective illocutionary point in S+V (1985: chap. 9 pp. 179 – 216), to have them available.

- i. assertives (*assert, claim, affirm, state, deny, disclaim, assure, argue, rebut, inform, notify, remind, object, predict, report, retrodict, suggest insist, conjecture, hypothesize, guess, swear, testify, admit, confess, accuse, blame, criticize, praise, complain, boast, lament*)
- ii. commissives (*commit, promise, threaten, vow, pledge, swear, accept, consent, refuse, offer, bid, assure, guarantee, warrant, contract, covenant, bet*)
- iii. directives (*direct, request, ask₁, ask₂, urge, tell, require, demand, command, order, forbid, prohibit, enjoin, permit, suggest, insist, warn, advise, recommend, beg, supplicate, entreat, beseech, implore, pray*)
- iv. declaratives (*declare, resign, adjourn, appoint, nominate, approve, confirm, disapprove, endorse, renounce, disclaim, denounce, repudiate, bless, curse, excommunicate, consecrate, christen, abbreviate, name, call*)
- v. expressives (*apologize, thank, condole, congratulate, complain, lament, protest, deplore, boast, compliment, praise, welcome, greet*)

In Searle’s terminology, the illocutionary *force* is a refinement of *point*: Directives, for instance, all serve to change the addressees obligations, but can come in the form of *command, request, plea, permission, begging* etc. which all count as different illocutionary *forces* with the same illocutionary *point*. Illocutionary force is defined by the following seven parameters, in Searle’s system. Note that *illocutionary point* is one of them. We impressionistically offer examples of acts that plausibly are identical, except for different specifications in the named parameter.

- i. illocutionary point
- ii. degree of strength of the illocutionary point (*request—insist, guess—solemnly swear*)

² This mismatch in numbers evoked an exasperated comment in the review by Sadock (1989) who writes: “There are, according to the authors [ie Searle and Vanderveken, R.E.], “ five and only five fundamental types and this five and only five illocutionary ways to use language. The warrant for this claim has to do with “direction of fit,” the notion (from the 1975 paper) that words are used to fit the way the world is, or alter the world to fit the words. As to direction of fit (which incidentally plays no role whatsoever in the axiomatization), the authors say, “There are four and only four directions of fit in language.” Thus there are exactly five points because, “The five different illocutionary points exhaust the [four] different possible directions of fit...” (p. 53). I must admit to being puzzled by the logic of this argument.” Sadock, (1989: 301).

- iii. mode of achievement (facts about the speaker that might influence the degree of strength; e.g. *leave the court room!* uttered by a child, vs. the judge)
- iv. propositional content conditions (*promises* should promise agreeable things, etc.)
- v. preparatory conditions (an “everything else” basket for conditions that need to be met for an unobjected act, but which don’t feel like iv.)
- vi. sincerity conditions (which attitudes does the speaker officially commit to)
- vii. degree of strength of sincerity conditions (being insincere for *guessing* is less severe than being insincere for *testifying*)

Searle’s idea is that each speech act type (“force”) can be captured by a full specification of (at most) these seven parameters, and that any two acts that differ in at least one parameter are of different force. We will not defend the system in detail, but want to point out a number of observations.

Comment 1: Most of the observations about speech acts in i. – vii. were already made in Austin (1962). Austin, however, seems to distinguish the speech act per se, and the circumstances that need to obtain for the act to succeed. Hence, there can be such a thing as a *flawed* speech act, and in principle there could be the most flawless attempted act that still does not change the world just because the hearers are not in the mood to accept.

- (7) *S: I hereby promise to give you 100 \$ as a gift.*
H: No, I don’t accept. (H. being momentarily in the mood of „simplify your life“, refusing worldly goods.)

Of course, Searle could say that *S*’s attempt was flawed because *S* did not correctly guess the momentary preferences of *H*. However, a somewhat simpler statement might be that the promise was flawless, but refused, and hence the social act did not come about. All in all, a definition of a speech act might be overburdened if it must be so tightly knit that a speech act can never fail to cause the conventional perlocutionary act. (For example, the speaker in fact owing the hearer 100 \$).

Comment 2: It is easy to see that the seven parameters all might serve good purpose in special cases, but are far from being motivated by some more general theory of human action or communication. In part, the criteria seem to overlap (why is “degree of strength” of a directive different from “mode of achievement”—or are they linguistic and nonlinguistic sides of the same coin?) In part, the parameters seem to come as “specific + leftover category”, e.g. the requirements on propositional content plus preparatory conditions sometimes serve to jointly ensure that some locutionary act can be reasonably be taken to be intended as a certain illocutionary act, and to be accepted without objection.

Comment 3: In part, important aspects are not addressed in the parameters at all. For instance, both *permission* and *request* are a directives. However, one of them attempts to put an obligation on the hearer, the other releases the hearer from an obligation (very roughly speaking).

Searle discusses such pairs and suggests on basis of these examples that negation is a meaningful operator on speech acts. Intuitively, this proposal comes as no surprise to anyone who knows (deontic) modal logic. Permission to do *p* is

tantamount to not being obliged to *not-p*. The link to modal logic, however, is never spelled out in Searle's system, and if we go the first few steps, it is easy to see why he would not want to follow that line. Specifically, we could try and claim that all commissives were about the deontic space of the speaker, and all directives about the deontic space of the hearer. But then, it is unclear which deontic space might be affected by societal and bilateral commitments. Searle certainly did not want to suggest that societal and bilateral commitments are *made up* by individual commitments, because this entails that e.g. declaratives are composed *directives* and *commissives* rather than an extra class in their own right. On the other hand, he *does* implicitly use the ties between modal logic and (certain) speech acts—or else, he'd have to claim that he just stipulates a new use for negation (alongside with conjunction and conditional) in a logically virgin space of atomic speech acts.

Comment 4: All acts that require substantial interaction and agreement of two or more parties are hard to categorize. If the initial utterance is the full act, then many such acts are in fact requests, because they first and foremost require an answer. If the full interaction (*I bet that Black Beauty will win. — Accepted, I bet 10 \$ that she loses. — Agreed.*) is the act, then what are the intermediary parts? Simpler acts, or locutions without illocutionary force?

It is not plausible to claim that the intermediate utterance don't have illocutionary force—after all they together constitute the act. It is problematic to assume that they are illocutions because they would have different illocutionary points, which is unproblematic for the single turns but dangerous for the overall act (the bet, the sale, ...) because what is the point of the overall act then? The sum of points of all parts, or an independent point in its own right? Plus, is the overall action one speech act (as Austin would maybe accept) or a series of several different ones? Apart from classificatory problems, the ontology as such seems unclear at such points. (Searle + Vanderveken 1985 grant “conditional speech acts”, but they never elucidate how complex speech acts of such kind integrate in their neat 5-points system.)

Bach + Harnish

(based on Bach+Harnish, 1979: chap. 3)

We have seen above that one of the inherent dangers of Searle's theory might be that “speech act” and “successful speech act” become indistinguishable notions. Bach and Harnish devote much of their seminal monograph to separate the *description* of one or the other kind of illocutionary force, and the *communicative coming about* of an illocutionary act. We will turn to the latter presently, but for completeness sake, we will list their classificatory system at this point.

Somewhat surprisingly, the core proposal acknowledges four major categories, each subdivided into smaller classes:

- i. *Constatives*
Assertives, predictives, retrodictives, descriptives, ascriptives, informatives, confirmatives, concessives, retractives, assentives, dissentives, disputatives, responsiveness, suggestives, suppositives
- ii. *Directives*
Requestives, questions requirements, prohibitives, permissives, advisories

- iii. *Commissives*
Promises, offers
- iv. *Acknowledgements*
Apologize, condole, greet, congratulate, thank, bid, accept, reject.

What seems missing is the large and exciting class of Searle's *declaratives* with all the conventional and social wonder words that originally raised Austin's interest. All these are relegated into two extra classes which are not further subdivided.

- i. *Effectives*
- ii. *Verdictives*

These speech acts are claimed to be “conventional not communicative” (p. 40) and relegated as uninteresting cases to later chapters. *Effectives* overlap in large part with Searle's *declaratives* and could be paraphrased as “linguistic rituals by which certain social facts are established by convention”. *Verdictives* are all officially acknowledged assertions which have a special status in some (legal) interaction. Ideally, of course, these look like *assertions*, but then we all know that a verdictive like *Jones killed Sir Galahad* can have official legal effects (Jones being hanged) and later turn out as false. It certainly contributes to the sound sleep of executors that a hanging will stay a legal act, even if later evidence shows that the *verdictive* was inspired by *false belief* and hence a *wrong assertion* after all.

While we may follow Bach+Harnish's intuition that acts like *banning*, *expelling*, *resigning* and the like are all based on societal conventions of some kind, we find it surprising that all bilateral economic transactions are likewise classed as *effectives*: “As to ownership, things can be bought, sold, borrowed, lent, traded, donated, conferred, awarded, bequeathed, bid for, put up for sale, accepted or rejected.” (B+H:112). Visibly, Bach and Harnish are eager to get away from all bilateral commitments that express joint agreement of two or more parties on a plan. We follow their intuition that all these acts differ from single-party obligations in that commitments of more than one person are involved. We do not agree, however, to their claim that all these rest on idiosyncratic societal contracts. The acts of lending and borrowing, for instance, are maybe conventional in the sense that the words *lend* and *borrow* are used for a special kind of transaction by linguistic convention (just like *oak tree* is used for a special kind of tree by linguistic convention). However, there is no official binding rituals that would be necessary for, e.g. the act of lending someone an umbrella. Utterances like *just take it, do you need my umbrella, you'd better take my umbrella* are as suited, under appropriate circumstances, to bring about the lending of an umbrella, as an official “*I hereby lend you my umbrella*”. The societal regulations around lending umbrellas are not usually very well spelled out, either. One may suspect that B+H rather attempt to get away from a knotty kind of speech acts than having a good point to make here.³

³ The passage goes on uninterruptedly to conventional legal terms like “property can be appropriated, expropriated (...)” via verbs that might not refer to speech acts at all (“relegating an item to the junk heap”) to clearly symbolic conventional acts: “Uniforms, emblems, flowers and colors can be adopted as official symbols. (...)”. The sheer speed in which all these are listed seems to signal strongly that the authors do not wish to be interrupted by a listener by “hey, but this one might be a communicative rather than a conventional act, no?”.

In spite of their eagerness to avoid all statements about mixed class speech acts, they still face a small number of cases that they call *hybrids* in passing (p. 50). Hybrids lure in interactional acts which concern mutual commitments (no unique direction of fit). Another point of contact are acknowledgements (Searle: expressives) which can “ride” on other acts. We list a number of examples which have a *hybrid* feel and pose a challenge to all three systems that we reviewed so far. Where we found comments on the respective cases, we list the reference.

- (8) “*I hereby reward you with a golden watch*”
(acknowledgement + commissive; but B+H would call it *effective*)
- (9) *I hereby sell you my car for 400 €.*
(bilateral commitment; B+H *effective*)
- (10) “*I bet that Black Beauty will win!*”—“*Ok.*”

B+H class *bet* as a commissive (p.50) while admitting that several conditionals, and a commitment by the hearer are needed as well. In view of their boldness in relegating economic transactions into *effectives* one wonders why they refrained from this move for *bet*. At the same passage, similar mixes are addressed for *contract*, *swear that*, *guarantee*, *surrender* and *invite*.

- (11) “*I testify that Bob was with me all night*”
(constative; but also puts legal commitments on speaker)
- (12) “*I hereby invite you to our house tonight*”
(Bach + Harnisch, p.51: *S* requests (directive) *H*'s presence and promises acceptance of his presence.)

To sum up, the overall picture reminds of a situation where someone can't make up their mind as to whether all living creatures *are* single cells or *consist of* single cells. While the overall rhetoric favors the view that all speech acts *are* one of class i. – iv., authors admit in detail that some speech acts might only *consist of* acts in class i. – iv. It is the latter view that we support.

A worry that comes along with the classificatory enterprise arises when we think about the individuation of acts: How many acts does the following utterance (in appropriately neutral context) constitute?

- (13) “*I hereby invite you to dinner!*”

Is it a request to answer, request to accept, a request to come, or a commitment to accept the addressee in my house in a friendly manner? (Note that this is not a matter of indirect / direct SA, nor is it a matter of context). Many speech acts, and particularly those which are not declaratives (where reasons to reject are completely delegated to the “appropriate contextual conditions”), carry a serious option to be refused. Others require a non-trivial answer (like a bet where the amount of money is left unsettled in the first offer). The status of the addressee's answer, and further linguistic turns which specify the terms of the final act, are left open by authors like Searle, Austin, Bach + Harnisch. Intuitively, the full *act* only comes about after all

turns have been taken. And yet, intuitively, a sentence like (6) still is an invitation (whatever that may be) and not a request to answer. In traditional terms, we see but two possible answers here: We could attribute a double status to (6), claiming that it is *both* a request *and* an invitation. Or, we could claim that the full speech act of inviting only comes about *after* the agreement has been given. This view fits our own intuitions about when we have successfully issued an invitation — yet, we lose the appealing initial vision that the *act* is what the speaker performs in uttering (6).

At the end of this section, we'd like to clarify what we mean by *hybrid* because occasionally, authors seem to allow mild forms of hybridity without tackling the core of the problem.

Sometimes, an utterance (locutionary act) can contain expressive and other elements, like in *Regrettably, I lost my keys*. which is an expression of sorrow as well as a constative. Semantic theory has successfully addressed such phenomena in recent years (eg. Potts, 2003). Undoubtedly, syntax, prosody, and semantics all suggest that utterances can have an expressive and an *at issue* level of meaning. We do not consider this a hard problem.

Sometimes, the slogan “an utterance can express more than one speech act” is tied to the observation that the same utterance can express different illocutionary acts in different contexts. This is again not what we mean by “hard cases of hybridity”. An invitation like the one above conveys a mix of commitment and request in *any* context where the speech act is successful. Therefore, we can not hope to retain a clean assignment to one or the other class by specifying suitable contexts.

3. Propositions all the way down

In this section, we want to briefly compare the different notions of *propositional content* that are around in the semantic and speech act literature. We will see that different theories have very different ways how to localize *propositional content*.

If we take semantic analysis as our starting point, we will insist that the meaning of a sentence *S* is something that comes about systematically and regularly by combination of the meanings of parts of the utterance.

- (14) *A key is under the stone.*
(15) *A key will be under the stone.*
(16) *Annabell promised John that a would be under the stone.*
(17) *I promise you that a key will be under the stone.*

If we apply this general program to the above cases, we'll specify the meanings of words like *key*, *the*, *under*, *Annabell* and their combination, the semantics of tense and sentence embedding, and compute the meaning of a sentence on this basis. An analysis of (14) in terms of truth conditional semantics will denote a proposition, modelled by the set of possible worlds where the sentence is true. The proposition will be parametrized by the time of speech. (We abstract from the problem of determining the reference of *the stone* and view it as a kind of proper name.) For any time of utterance *t*, the sentence denotes the set of worlds where there is a key under the-stone at *t*.

The sentence in (15) singles out a similar set of worlds, this time determined by the condition that there be a time point t' after the utterance time t such that there is a key under the stone at t' .

The sentence in (16) likewise denotes a proposition. Without walking through a full semantic derivation, we would get something like

{ w | there is a time t_1 before the time of utterance t such that for that time t_1 , the world w makes it true that *Annabel* stands in the *promise*-relation to *John* and the proposition q : “*a key is under the stone at t_2 ” at t_1 }*

Most importantly, the verb *promise* will be assumed to denote a relation between subject, object and proposition q . Like for all other verbs that denote relations, we will not be too much concerned about a lexical decomposition of that verb, a full semantic specification of the content, paraphrases etc. Truth conditional semantics has worked successfully under the assumption that semantic models model what speakers are able to do, at such points, namely *somehow* determine the extension of *key*, *stone*, *promise* in a given world.

If we continue to follow this strategy, then (17) will primarily give us a proposition along the same lines. (I ignore the issue of simple present vs. progressive here; it will become important later.)

[[(17)]] = { w | at the time of utterance t , the world w makes it true that *speaker* stands in the *promise*-relation to *addressee* and the proposition q : “*a key is under the stone at t_2 ” at t }*

Clearly, the proposition in (17) is as descriptive as the one in (16). The set of worlds to be collected is a set of worlds that can be characterized in a specific way. Reasonably, the addressee can hence just compute this set from the meanings of the words, and then?

On the one hand, (17) is not self-fulfilling the the (funnier) sense of “*I am here now*” or “*I am just talking to you*”. Authors since Austin, as we have seen, have spend much energy on demonstrating that uttering the words does not make the act true. Hence, the addressee has reason to be sceptic about the truth of (17).

On the other hand, it appears to be in the hands of the addressee whether an utterance of (17) will denote a set of worlds which contains the world of utterance w_o or not. The addressee not only has to compute the meaning of the utterance (like he’d do in (14), (15) and (16)) and then make up his mind about truth and falsity. There moreover needs to happen that little *snap!* in the addressee’s mind which is *necessary* before hat very addressee (or anyone else) can decide on the truth or falsity of (17). The little *snap!* is where the act happens. The little *snap!* is not part of the meaning of the sentence in (17) in terms of a truth conditional semantics. Still, truth conditional semantics *will* compute a very decent semantic representation of the content of (17). It is the gap between [[(17)]] and the *snap!* that we’d like to understand.

In explicit performative sentences like (17), it is quite obvious that truth conditional semantics offers a full analysis of the propositional content of the sentence, and the *snap!* must be captured as an extra. Other types of act are not equally transparent.

Sentence mood is often mistaken as that linguistic building block of a sentence which *means* the speech act. Analyses of imperatives, notably, often take the

structural presence of a feature *+imp* (reflected by the syntax of the sentence, and the morphological form of the verb) to be *that* element to which all interactional consequences of an imperative speech act are tied in semantic interpretation. This type of hard-wired analysis is mistaken, we believe. Sentences in the imperative mood can serve to establish speech acts of very different kinds, as has often be reiterated in the literature. For instance:

(18) *Drink that liquid, and you will see that it doesn’t do you good.*

This sentence uses a clause in the imperative mood which does serve as part of a warning, and in any case, the speaker does not request the listener to drink anything. Therefore, we will minimally need a semantic interpretation mechanism that can interpret sentences and clauses in the imperative mood—including a step in which the addressee is somehow localized as the subject of the verbal predicate—and add the *snap!* component for the speech act in addition. There are several ways in which this could be implemented. If you still believe that imperative *mood* is the abstract feature in the clause where speech act things should be located (however we may achieve *that*) you might opt for a range of *mood homonyms* and use the syntax and semantics of *imperative mood* combined with several speech act types. For English, this might look something like this:

imp 1: syntax: no overt subject, V1 word order, imperative morphology
 semantics: use addressee as subject of verbal predicate,
 future tense interpretation
 speech act: *request, order*

imp 2: syntax: no overt subject, V1 word order, imperative morphology
 used as the first of two conjoined sentences, second one an assertion
 semantics: use addressee as subject of verbal predicate,
 future tense interpretation
 speech act: *warning*

...

However, V1 order can also be used with an overt subject (notably indefinites) to issue an *order*.

(19) *Get someone a doctor, please!*
Mach doch mal jemand das Fenster auf.

In such cases, addressee, subject and speech act specification have to be organized anew. Finally, *orders* and *requests* can be issued by sentences which share the syntax of assertions, as we all know.

(20) *You must open the door now.*
I order you to open the door.

It appears cleanest, hence, to use the grammatical structure of the sentence—including mood and word order—to derive some suitable propositional content which is

independent of any particular speech act, but can serve to define the correct range of observed speech acts.

This strategy has, by the way, been followed for the question mood for a very long time. We take it for granted that the semantic content of a question sentence consists in a set of propositions (following Hamblin) or an equivalence relation on sets of possible worlds (following Groenendijk, Stokhof) or something along these lines. Whatever else is needed in order to bring about an actual act of questioning, it will certainly have to come as an extra semantic/pragmatic part of the sentence.

We'd like to take the occasion to comment on the notion of *propositional content* in the sense that was used in Austin and, more importantly, Searle. This notion of *propositional content* is, emphatically, not the propositional content that we derive in semantic analysis.

Sometimes, but not always, the syntax of a performative reflects the "*propositional content*" in the speech act sense in that the content of an embedded clause denotes Searle's propositional content, as in the following example.

(21) *I promise you that a key will be under the stone.*

Sometimes, content of the sentence and Searle's pc are so hard to disentangle that they seem almost identical, as we have seen for imperatives. Sometimes, Searle's pc can only be reconstructed from sparse material in the sentence, or context:

(22) *I thank you for that pumpkin.*

Searle's pc: *You gave me that pumpkin (?)*

(23) *Thanks!*

Searle's pc: Suitable proposition in context such that addressee is responsible for its being true, its content being agreeable for the speaker, etc.

Sometimes in interactional acts, we find several tied propositions that define parts of plans—it is unclear whether we'd have one proposition for Searle's pc or several of them. Consider a bet, once again. The syntactic structure of (24) seems to suggest that it is a prediction-like act about the proposition *that Black Beauty will win*. However, if we compare it with other cases of agreements about future action, we notice that the content of a promise like 'S passes 20 \$ to H under certain circumstances' or the content of an obligation like 'H gives 20\$ to S under other circumstances' count as propositional content (Searle's) elsewhere—so why not in this case?

(24) *I bet 20 \$ with you that Black Beauty will win.*

We found no clear statement that would help us to decide which of two-three equally plausible propositions should count as the propositional content in Searle's sense in (24). There is a one-page passage in Searle+Vanderveken 1985; p. 197f. which contains their view about *bet*. They give a nice paraphrase of *bet* in terms of conditional promises. They even address conditional bets—as if that were of any help. But they fail to answer the simple question "what is the propositional content of *bet*?" at that place. Admittedly, they say on page 16 of the same monograph that "We have seen that the form of *most* illocutionary act is F(P)" (F(P) = force F for proposition P; our emphasis, R.E.). But then, *betting* does not seem void of propositional content in the usual sense in which an expressive like "*hallo!*" lacks propositional content.

Searle's description of questions likewise deserves some deliberation: "*ask*. (...) Questions are always directives, for they are attempts to get the hearer to perform a speech act. In the simple directive sense, *ask* names the same illocutionary force as *request*. In the sense of "ask a question", it means request that the hearer perform a speech act to the speaker, the form of which is already determined by *the propositional content of the question*." (S+V 1985: 199; my emphasis, R.E.) At that point, at latest, it is clear that the authors do not possess a consistent definition of "propositional content". The pc (Searle) of requests in general is of the form $p = H$ *does a in the future* and specifies the action of the hearer. Hence, we'd expect something like the following for questions Q

q = Hearer utters u, where [[u]] ∈ [[Q]] and hearer believes [[u]] to be true.

as Searle's propositional content of question Q. (We have helped him out a bit with notation here). But then, the quoted passage suggests that Searle himself rather thought of something like our semantics [[Q]] as the propositional content of the question. We do not dare to speculate about the circular definition that results if we plug in the underlined passage above for our [[Q]] in order to reflect the paradox that the propositional content of a question consists in the hearer uttering something true about the propositional content of a question.

4. How does the act come about?

This part is added in order to get a feeling how clear—or unclear—traditional literature is about the coming-about of speech acts, and whether the proposed analyses can tell anything about what, in general, can come about by speech acting. The result will be dark, to say the least.

The magic of speech acts seems to consist in the fact that a speaker makes an utterance which, unlike in other cases, does not only inform the listeners about facts in the world, but which brings about new facts in the world. What exactly is the *act*? Searle proposed a fine analysis of speech acts which derive the *act* from inferences that are drawn by an audience and bring them to believe that some new state of affairs is installed. Here is how he unpacks the act of *bequesting*:

Searle (1989: 553):

1. S uttered the sentence "I hereby bequest you my golden watch."
2. The literary meaning of the sentence is such that by very utterance, the speaker intends to make it the case that he bequests me his watch
3. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to make it the case by that utterance to bequest me his watch.
4. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to *bequest* me his watch me by that very utterance.
5. Bequests are a class of actions where the manifestation of the intention to perform the action is sufficient for its performance, given that certain other conditions are satisfied.
6. We assume that those other conditions are satisfied.

7. S bequested me his watch by that utterance.
8. S both said that he bequested me his watch and made it the case that he bequested me his watch. Therefore, he made a true statement.

(quoted after Jary 2007:231)

We find step 2. and 5. most puzzling. The literary meaning of a sentence is usually given by truth conditions. Naively thinking, “I bequest you my golden watch” is true iff the speaker bequests the hearer a watch, and is false otherwise. Manifesting an intention should rather look like “I want to bequest you my watch”, or “I plan to bequest you my watch”. These intentions do not count as speech acts, though.

Worse, one could utter other things and express the intention that the content becomes true without these counting as speech acts. Hence, “Die!” could be uttered with the clear intention that the listener become dead, but it isn’t a speech act but a childish wish. “Love me!” has been tried often as a speech act to make it the case that the listener loves the speaker, but without lasting success. Likewise, some perlocutionary acts do not possible come about by an explicit performative. “I hereby insult you!” does not count as an attempt of the speaker to insult the hearer.

Nothing in the 8 step program in Searle’s paraphrase would suggest why it can not be.

Searle (1989: 553) rephrased for an attempted insult:

1. S uttered the sentence “I hereby insult you”.
2. The literary meaning of the sentence is such that by very utterance, the speaker intends to make it the case that he insults me. [*which seems not to hold true—but why couldn’t that be?*]
3. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to make it the case by that utterance to insult me. [*S certainly manifested an intention to insult me; why not possibly be that utterance?*]
4. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to insult me by that very utterance.
5. Insults are a class of actions where the manifestation of the intention to perform the action is sufficient for its performance, given that certain other conditions are satisfied. [*this condition seems to fail for insults: but isn’t it a bit lame to state that “insults are just simply not the kind of action”? After all, showing an intention to insult me is very often already sufficient for me to be insulted. An utterance like “Hey piglet” can certainly be an insult if the speaker shows an intention to insult me.*]
6. We assume that those other conditions are satisfied. [*whatever they may be*]
7. S insulted me by that utterance. [*somehow didn’t go off because conditions 2 and 5 did not hold true, for reasons that are hard to see.*]
8. S said that he insulted me, but did not make it the case that he insulted me. Therefore, he made a false statement. (*why?*)

Speech acts, and specifically explicit performatives, admittedly involve conventions (about meaning, about the proper execution of acts, in part about the other conditions). However, the 8 point program gives no clue why certain intentions of the speaker to bring about things *can* be conventionally wrapped into a verbal act, but other intentions of the speaker can not be — even if they might be achievable with words (like *insulting, entertaining, boring, impressing* and the like). Likewise, it

remains a mystery what role speech plays when the audience is guessing the speaker’s intentions and possibly complying to it.

Bach and Harnish propose similar steps of listeners’ inferences about the speaker’s plans. We list the more recent brief version rather than the more elaborate steps in B+H (1979). Their earlier lists included conditions about a shared language, felicitous language use and semantic evaluation etc. that we feel should be relegated to a general semantic theory. Once more, we will use the contrast between a felicitous expressive and an infelicitous act to evaluate the insightfulness of the proposal. Let us start with the felicitous case.

(25) *I hereby congratulate you.*

1. He is saying “I hereby congratulate you”.
2. He is stating that he is congratulating me.
3. If his statement is true, then he must be congratulating me.
4. If he is congratulating me, then it must be his utterance that constitutes the congratulation (what else could be ?)
5. Presumably, he is speaking the truth.
6. Therefore, in stating that he is congratulating me, he is congratulating me.

Bach + Harnish 1982, quoted after Jary (2007:221)

We can construct a strikingly analogous case for *insult*. Yet, unlike in the previous case, the last conclusion somehow does not come off.

(26) *I hereby insult you.*

1. He is saying “I hereby insult you”.
2. He is stating that he is insulting me.
3. If his statement is true, then he must be insulting me.
4. If he is insulting me, then it must be his utterance that constitutes the insult (what else could be ?)
5. Presumably, he is speaking the truth.
6. *Therefore, in stating that he is insulting me, he is insulting me.

In some sense, the reasons why (14) works out but (15) does not are even more mysterious than in Searle’s proposal. While Searle could still resort to the observation that “insulting is just not the kind of action where this works”—even though without further reason—Bach and Harnish could at best claim that 4. does not go through. But, as a puzzled reader, I could submit to the exasperated “what else could be?” in either case with equal sincerity. In one case, however, I am right and in the other case, I am wrong. The analysis can not predict this.

Another, linguistic worry about both accounts is constituted by the progressive puzzle: Speech acts in the progressive are usually ill-formed. This holds true for English progressive, as well as for other languages. German provides very clear intuitions for analytic progressives.

- (27) #I am bequesting you my golden watch.
#I am welcoming you.
- (28) #Ich bin daran, Ihnen meine goldene Uhr zu vermachen.
#Ich begrüße Sie gerade.

In view of the fact that native speakers of English have voiced varying intuitions about the appropriateness of the progressive, and given that the progressive aspect in English shows derivative uses like *greater emotional involvement* which might indeed be appropriate for certain acts, we will stick to the very clear case in German to make our point here. We will be happy to get input about other progressive forms in other languages.

An utterance like (17.b) is only felicitous if the speaker is in the middle of a more elaborate welcome of the addressee, takes a pause, and *describes* his actual act with the progressive sentence. Now, Bach and Harnish's analysis would go along the following lines:

- (29) *Ich begrüße Sie gerade* (‘I am welcoming you.’)
1. Speaker is saying “I am welcoming you”.
 2. S is stating that he is just welcoming me.
 3. If his statement is true, then he must be welcoming me.
 4. If he is just welcoming me, then it must be his utterance that constitutes the welcome (what else could be ?)
 5. Presumably, he is speaking the truth.
 6. Therefore, in stating that he is welcoming me, he is welcoming me.

It is unclear at what point we could predict a failure for the progressive sentence. Each of the considerations in 1. – 5. sounds correct, justified, rational and appropriate. Even step 4. (the one that might most likely offer an emergency exit for failing speech acts) should be beyond doubt in this case, given that the analogous *nonprogressive* version is crucial to establish an analysis of (felicitous) *welcome* in the non-progressive.

A similar worry holds for Searle. We have added one negative qualification of the original scheme (1. – 8.) which could be conceived of to block the prediction of a felicitous speech act. Steps 3. to 8. would else predict that (17.b) is as good a speech act of welcoming as its non-progressive counterpart is.

1. S uttered the sentence “Ich bin dabei, Sie zu begrüßen” (= ‘I am just welcoming you’)
2. The literary meaning of the sentence *happens not to be* such that by very utterance, the speaker intends to make it the case that he welcomes me. *Else, we'd go on as follows:*
3. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to make it the case by that utterance to welcome me. (*certainly true for the progressive utterance as good as the non-progressive*)
4. Therefore, in making the utterance S manifested an intention to *welcome* me by that very utterance.
5. Welcomes are a class of actions where the manifestation of the intention to perform the action is sufficient for its performance, given that certain other

conditions are satisfied. (*true, as witnessed by felicitous welcomes in the non-progressive!*)

6. We assume that those other conditions are satisfied.
7. S welcomed me by that utterance.
8. S both said that he welcomed me and made it the case that he welcomed me. Therefore, he made a true statement.

How plausible is the negative qualification of 2. which is, as far as we can see, the only point where Searle could block the (false) prediction that (17b) is a good speech act of welcoming? Not very plausible, we feel. After all, the non-progressive version of the same sentence *is* such that by certain utterances, the speaker *may* intend to make it the case that he welcomes me. Moreover, the act of welcoming is pretty robust and can often come about by quite improvised utterances (*Hi, old bean! Humpf! Yohoo!*). It is not plausible that the mere use of a different aspect should pervert the expression of the speaker's intentions to welcome the hearer to a degree which makes the sentence unsuited to perform an act of welcoming.

In survey, the classical proposals to somehow relate the content of a sentence (in the sense of a rigid semantic evaluation [[.]]) and the act that comes about look like impressionistic paraphrases of aspects of the utterance situation which can neither tightly relate the semantics of the utterance to the act (progressive vs non-progressive) nor explicate which acts can be performed verbally and which ones can't (insult vs. bequest).

5. Summary

We find that the classical approaches to speech acts offer useful terms to describe and differentiate various kinds of acts, to separate the utterance, the meaning of the utterance, the coming-about of the act, and further consecutive effects (perlocutions). What is missing, to our feeling, are good answers to the following questions:

What is the relation between the meaning of a performative utterance [[S]] in the sense of truth conditional semantics, and the speech act?

How does the linguistic form of the utterance (e.g. progressive / simple tense) interact with the success or non-success of an illocutionary act?

What is the status of felicity and propositional content conditions in terms of usual semantic and pragmatic theory?

Do classifications really offer exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of speech acts, or should they be viewed as dimensions of speech acts which can be instantiated by single acts in different mixes? I.e. are hybrids the norm, or the exception?

At present, the vast majority of theories on speech acts views acts as unanalysed simple entities. They are part of a larger ontology of human action, and play certain roles in this ontological domain. We do not want to challenge the fruitfulness, usefulness, or appropriateness of such approaches. However, we feel puzzled by the fact that these theories never need to refer to the underlying level of compositional semantics at all. (Notable exceptions are posed by attempts to spell out the meanings of

logical connectives like *and*, *if*, *not* in the domain of acts, see e.g. Krifka, 2001, part of the Searle and Vanderveken program, and similars).

There are some laudable exceptions, strands of research that try to reconcile semantic interpretation with speech acts in a meaningful way. Potts 2003, and subsequent authors, propose that utterances contribute to two strands of meaning, the *at issue* meaning and the *expressive* meaning. We may speculate that expressive content belongs to that second strand. Note that this view supports a multi-dimensional model of illocutionary force of the utterance, rather than a classification into different types.

The semantics of imperatives has been a hot topic of debate in recent years (Portner, 2007 and subsequent; Schwager 2005 and following; van Rooij 2001; ao.) Many of these explore the evident link between speech acts as plans about the future, speech acts as means to establish new obligations, and modal logic as a way to model the standing obligations of subjects. If one attempts to capture imperatives as a special type of assertion, one needs to address the question as to why these assertions don't seem to *inform* the addressee about new obligations but can serve to *establish* such new obligations.

This aspect has, to our knowledge, only been in focus in Truckenbrodt 2009 who draws a line from a consensual update of the common ground to the coming-about of new social contracts.

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