Chapter 2

Deconstructing Performativity

Introduction

Austin thought that his discovery of performativity could lead to an overthrow of all foundationalist epistemologies, including Frege's sense-reference distinction. If both constatives and performatives were illocutionary speech acts, then describing and stating would become types of illocution; asserting, describing, and stating would no longer be the foundational models for the analysis of language. The Fregean legacy still lurked in Austin's characterization of the "rhetic" component of locutions, however, and Austin never had the chance to develop the implications of performativity. The Searle-Derrida debates can be seen as clashes over how far to push Austin's discovery. For Searle, who was Austin's student, this has meant clarifying the various types of speech acts and specifying the conditions for their success. Searle maintains Austin's distinction between locutions and illocutions as a contrast between propositional and illocutionary acts. Referring is a propositional act, to be distinguished from other speech acts such as asserting or promising. In this respect, Searle preserves Austin's distinctions and clarifies how reference and predication (and therefore sense and reference) work within a larger theory of illocutionary acts that in turn depends on a complicated interplay between speakers' intentions and linguistic conventions.

From a literal standpoint, Searle's interpretation seems consistent with much of Austin's work. Yet from a rhetorical standpoint, it ignores the "deconstructionist" style of *How to Do Things with Words,* in which earlier distinctions are continuously undermined by later ones that both subsume and go beyond them. For Austin, performatives are not true or false. Yet if speech acts have both locutionary and illocutionary components, and if locution is tied to sense and reference, the question still remains What is the relation between truth functionality and performativity? And how are the latter related to intentions and conventions?

Derrida provides an answer to these questions that differs from Searle's. He does not see meaning as necessarily dependent on intentions and conventions, and his comments on citation and iterability evince a different understanding of how performativity works. For Derrida, Austin's discoveries point to certain fundamental properties of signs—their ability to evoke other signs through a self-reflexive semiotic process. Citation and quotation are inherently metalinguistic acts, lying at the heart of both performativity and sense and reference. Performative verbs are metalinguistic in that they characterize the ongoing event as a speech act of a certain kind; at the same time, the distinction between direct and indirect discourse is central to Frege's concept of sense.

Although he shares Austin's distrust of foundationalist epistemologies, Derrida feels that the Austin of *How to Do Things with Words* is still not radical enough. The discovery of performativity should lead to the deconstruction of the notions of intention and convention as crucial components of a theory of meaning rather than, as in Austin, to their use as key elements of analysis. Although Derrida might concur with Austin's replacement of epistemology with the philosophy of language, he pushes beyond the speech act to the rhetorical structures of language. Instead of truth functionality determining the structure of communication and interpretation, it is the interplay between reference and rhetoric, truth and trope, or constative and performative that will lie at the heart of the sign process.

Derrida

In "Signature Event Context," an article that caused a famous debate with John Searle over the implications of Austin's work on speech acts, Derrida criticizes Austin for trying to use concepts such as context, intention, and convention to stabilize the interpretation of speech acts. He opens with a quote from *How to Do Things with Words* in which Austin seems to place primacy on spoken speech, and then proceeds to question the presuppositions of the models of communication that underwrite philosophical approaches to language. Austin's move from constative to performative displaces the certainty of meaning from the timeless, decontextualized truth functionality of declaratives to the felicity conditions of "saturated" contexts, which fix the meaning of performatives. Derrida questions this trajectory, arguing that "a context is never absolutely determinable" (Derrida 1988, 3); Austin may have simply replaced the epistemic certainty of constatives with the interpretative certainty of contextual determination. Understanding what Derrida calls the "structural non-

saturation" of contexts would require rethinking the notion of context "in numerous domains of research" and reevaluating the concept of writing.

Derrida's starts with Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge,* written in 1746, which he sees as representative of both traditional and contemporary models of communication. Communication is seen as involving the intended transfer of a meaning/thought from some speaker/sender to a hearer/receiver. Writing is simply a second-order transfer system of representations whose function is to accurately express ideas, especially to those who are absent from the original communication situation.

Derrida challenges these assumptions. Writing as a translation/transfer system stands in a metalinguistic relationship to speech; even though it appears to be a supplement to spoken discourse, it makes clearer certain necessary semiotic properties of language that speech acts disguise. Writing foregrounds several properties of signs that face-to-face models of communication elide. First, writing transcends the context of its production; the referent(s) of the discourse need not be present, nor the addressee. The written sign must perdure and give rise to an iteration of interpretations "in the absence and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it" (Derrida 1988, 9). Second, a written sign is structured so that it can not only break with its context of production but also be "detached" from that context and inserted into others. Finally, writing highlights the syntagmatic spacing that structures the sign and makes possible both the formal and conceptual properties of the written sign. The linearity of word order creates an iconic representation of the syntagmatic dimensions of linguistic structure, marking the positions where citation and other forms of "grafting" can occur. Derrida insists that these properties are not restricted to written signs but are shared by all linguistic signs, including spoken ones, and that they make possible the self-identity of the linguistic sign despite empirical variations of tone, voice, and emphasis:

> This structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context) seems to me to make every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general; which is to say, as we have seen, the nonpresent *remainder* [*restance*] of a differential mark cut off from its putative "production" or origin. (Derrida 1988, 10)

The separability of the sign from its referent, its communication situation, a controlling intention, and a given syntagmatic context allows it to be grafted

onto another set of signs into another position. This possibility is one that is built into the structure of language, and perhaps most graphically indicated in the metalinguistic act of citation.

> Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be *cited,* put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring [ancrage]. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called "normal." What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way? (Derrida 1988, 12)

Citation highlights a fundamental structuring principle of language: the intersubstitutability of equivalent (paradigmatic) elements in specific (syntagmatic) places of combination.

Austin's discovery of performativity would seem to have a trajectory similar to that of Derrida's criticisms of "logocentrism," at least initially. Performatives look like a "supplement" to constatives, yet in their supplementarity reveal metalinguistic properties essential to the effective use of language. Austin also saw that the implications of performativity would threaten a whole set of foundationalist philosophical distinctions going back to the Greeks and thus would seem to be aligned with parts of Derrida's philosophical project.

> it might seem that Austin has shattered the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept. The performative is a "communication" which is not limited strictly to the transference of a semantic content that is already constituted and dominated by an orientation toward truth (be it the *unveiling* of what is in its being or the *adequation-congruence* between a judicative utterance and the thing itself). (Derrida 1988, 14)

But Derrida hesitates to embrace Austin's project:

> And yet — such at least is what I should like to attempt to indicate now — all the difficulties encountered by Austin in an analysis which is patient, open, aporetical, in constant transformation, often more fruitful in the

> acknowledgment of its impasses than in its positions, strike me as having a common root. Austin has not taken account of what — in the structure of *locution* (thus before any illocutionary or perlocutionary determination) — already entails that system of predicates I call *graphematic in general* and consequently blurs [*brouille*] all the oppositions which follow, oppositions whose pertinence, purity, and rigor Austin has unsuccessfully attempted to establish. (Ibid.)

Derrida's hesitations come from Austin's account of the felicity conditions for performatives, which seem to require the specification of "an exhaustively definable context" and depend on the controlling intentionality and mutual subjectivity of the participants. Infelicities occur because of the nonsatisfaction of these conditions in a given context. Austin focuses on what makes a performative successful; its utterance in a context where the felicity conditions hold produces "happy" illocutions. Derrida sees failure as a necessary and structuring possibility of performatives. If felicity conditions apply to illocutions, then the basic structuring categories of speech acts are locutionary.

> The opposition success/failure [*échec*] in illocution and in perlocution thus seems quite insufficient and extremely secondary [*dérivée*]. It presupposes a general and systematic elaboration of the structure of locution that would avoid an endless alteration of essence and accident. (Derrida 1988, 15–16)

Austin's focus on what makes illocutions successful also leads him to rule out abnormal or parasitic uses of speech such as we encounter on stage or in fiction and poetry — "our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances" (Austin 1962a, 22). To Derrida, forms of citation and quotation are internal to the structure of all signs and make performativity possible. The particular form of iterability in which performatives take part is but a specialized instance of a generalized iterability, or what might be called a contrastive metalinguistics.

In a famous reply to Derrida, the American philosopher John Searle, who studied with Austin in the late fifties, rejects Derrida's interpretation of his mentor.

> It would be a mistake, I think, to regard Derrida's discussion of Austin as a confrontation between two prominent philosophical traditions. This is not so much because Derrida has failed to discuss the central theses in

> Austin's theory of language, but rather because he has misunderstood and misstated Austin's position at several crucial points. (Searle 1977, 198)

Searle argues that Derrida has lumped under the term iterability three separate issues that explain the differences between spoken and written language. First, the repeatability of linguistic elements lies in the type-token distinction. Second, the relative permanence of a written text explains why writing makes it possible to communicate with an absent receiver. Finally, writing does not break with notions of intention and communication; Searle insists that "there is no getting away from intentionality because a *meaningful sentence is just a standing possibility of the corresponding (intentional) speech act*" (Searle 1977, 202). He then uses these points to criticize Derrida's analysis of Austin, particularly with regard to Derrida's discussion of Austin's exclusion of "parasitic" speech acts such as those performed by actors in a play or in fictional discourse.

Derrida responded with a long rebuttal, and in 1983 Searle wrote a sweeping critique of deconstructionism in a review of Jonathan Culler's 1982 book *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* in the *New York Review of Books*. Searle accorded Derrida the same status that Austin had claimed for himself, that of participant in a post-Husserlian critique of foundationalism in philosophy.

> Now, in the twentieth century, mostly under the influence of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, we have come to believe that this general search for these sorts of foundations is misguided. There aren't in the way classical metaphysicians supposed any foundations for ethics or knowledge. For example, we can't in the traditional sense found language and knowledge on "sense data" because our sense data are already infused with our linguistic and social practices. Derrida correctly sees that there aren't any such foundations, but then he makes the mistake that marks him as a classical metaphysician. (Searle 1983b, 78)

Traditional metaphysics thought that "science, language, and common sense" needed some transcendental grounding, without which they could not function. Derrida's mistake was to think that when philosophers such as Heidegger and Wittgenstein had shown that such foundations do not exist, science, language, and common sense became open to the free play of interpretation. Instead, Searle argues that nothing about these areas had changed; paraphrasing

Wittgenstein, he says that the loss of such metaphysical foundations "leaves everything as it is."

According to Searle, Derrida's mistakes arise from a fundamental misunderstanding of Saussure that Derrida incorporates into his theory of the priority of writing over speech. From Saussure's insight that phonemes are "opposing relative and negative entities" that have no positive value, Derrida reaches the conclusion that

> [n]othing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida, quoted in Searle 1983, 76)

Searle claims that Derrida's next step is to identify language, particularly writing, with this system of traces and differences. Since the "instituted trace" is "the possibility common to all systems of signification" (Derrida, quoted in Searle 1983, 76), Derrida can apply his notion of writing "pretty much all over—to experience, to the distinction between presence and absence, to the distinction between reality and representation" (ibid.). Derrida reaches a conclusion that to Searle is almost a reductio ad absurdum: everything becomes writing.

Part of the difficulty American philosophers have had in understanding Derrida's criticisms of Austin and the incomprehension evidenced in Searle's polemic lies in the post-Husserlian split in the historical trajectories of analytic and continental philosophy. Austin comes out of a tradition inspired by Frege that finally meets up with formal linguistics in the guise of transformational grammar in the sixties. The relations between analytic philosophy and linguistics have been heavily mediated by problems in quantification theory and in the logical analysis of language; structural linguistics, especially in its post-Saussurean forms such as those practiced at the Prague School, has had almost no influence on the analytic philosophy of language. The continental philosophy of language, by contrast, has always maintained close relationships with both structural linguistics and literary theory. In his first major work, Derrida used his interpretation of Saussure's notion of difference to "deconstruct" the theory of the linguistic sign elaborated in Husserl's *Logical Investigations.* Linguists inspired by Saussure such as Charles Bally and literary theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin created a tradition of narrative theory that has concerned itself with problems of narrative voicing, free indirect style, and devices that involve quotation, citation, and other types of metalinguistic framing. The

reliance on Saussure was shared by philosophers, literary critics, and anthropologists, and probably had its heyday during the development of French structuralism. With the exception of the French linguist Emile Benveniste's writings about Austin in the late fifties, French philosophers and literary critics did not pay any attention to analytic philosophy until relatively recently.

These divergent histories contribute to the Anglo-American misunderstanding of Derrida's criticisms of Austin. Despite Searle's disagreements with Derrida, other philosophers, such as Richard Rorty, have found ways in which Derrida's work overlaps with that of analytic theorists such as Donald Davidson. When placed in the context of these debates, Derrida's criticisms of Austin can be seen as going to the heart of contemporary debates regarding the relations between language, metalanguage, convention, intention, and context.

Derrida's comments about Austin are in the tradition of the critique of Husserl in which Derrida originally developed ideas such as différance and iterability, a critique he briefly outlines before beginning his discussion of Austin. The Saussurean project that Derrida both invokes and criticizes provides several of the analytical tools used by Derrida to pry open the structure of Austin's treatment of the locutionary act. In Saussure's account, a sign's denotational or semantic content is the product of a system of oppositions that correlate differences in sound (signifiers) with differences in meaning (signifieds). These decontextualized meanings (described as features, intensions, senses, etc.) determine the class of objects the sign can be used to refer to. The double articulation of the linguistic sign is made possible by the paradigmatic and syntagmatic structure of language. The paradigmatic positions are those of substitution while the syntagmatic are those of combination. We can point, for instance, to the paradigmatic substitutability of /b/, /p/, /t/, /d/ before _ – /i/ – /n/ to produce the syntagmatic combinations 'bin', 'pin', 'tin', 'din'.

It is these system-internal structural properties of the linguistic sign that make possible its iterability, and its divorce from direct communication and reference. The intersubstitutability of a signifier in different contexts is already part of the definition of a phoneme. Citation and quotation allow the metalinguistic "grafting" of different levels of language at fixed syntagmatic positions preceded by framing devices such as direct quotation and indirect speech and discourse. For example, after the frame "he said" one can report the actual sounds or words uttered by the original speaker or in indirect discourse — that is, "he said that . . ." — report what he meant. Quotation thus links the phonological with the semantic.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Frege's account of sense and reference starts with the problems of quotation. The clause that follows the reporting verb contains the purest expression of sense; it is free of even assertoric force, and most of the indexical linkages to the original speech situation are translated into less indexical or nonindexical terms. The sense of an expression resides in the decontextualized conceptual role that it plays in determining the sense of the sentence it is a part of, which in turn determines the expression's and the sentence's reference. As we saw earlier, Frege also showed that the logical properties of *oratio obliqua* (indirect discourse) are shared by verbs of intentionality; verbs of speaking and thinking both introduce contexts in which terms that refer to the same objects are not truth-functionally intersubstitutable. The sentence 'Oedipus said that he loves Jocasta' does not entail the sentence 'Oedipus said that he loves his mother', even if Jocasta is his mother, because Oedipus may be unaware of the identity. Similar problems affect mental-state and -activity verbs such as "believe", "think", and "intend". The problems of quotation carry over to issues of intentionality.

Austin's concept of the locutionary act is itself based on the metalinguistics of citation in at least three ways. First, following Frege's analysis, Austin stipulates that the locutionary act has normal sense and reference, as might be revealed in *oratio obliqua,* or indirect speech. Thus "I promise that I will go" would be reported as "he promises that he will go," which would express what was meant by the former utterance. Second, all the explicitly performative verbs are metalinguistic: they refer to and describe speech events and all can be characterized as variations of the verb 'to say'. To promise is to say something plus something else, the "something else" being expressed by the difference between the felicity conditions for saying something and those specific to promising. If someone has promised to do something, he has usually said something, but saying something does not imply having promised. Within the system of metalinguistic verbs, saying seems primary, and in its explicit performative construction, "I hereby say to you that . . . ," requires minimal contextual conditions for its happiness. In comparison, the increasing semantic complexity of other performatives is correlated with the growing elaborateness of the contextual conditions needed to make them happy. Finally, Austin's examples of parasitic uses of language, lines spoken in a play and poetry, are taken from Frege's article "On Sense and Reference." Frege is discussing those circumstances in which declarative sentences lose their normal "force"; what we focus on are the senses of such sentences, not their referents. Yet the senses

of sentences are thoughts, and these are revealed in such contexts as quotation, citation, and indirect discourse, in which ordinary reference is suspended and what is talked about are the senses of sentences. Thus the so-called parasitic uses of language are integral to the whole notion of sense. If they are parasitic on ordinary speech, they can be so only in the same way that sense is parasitic on ordinary language; this line of thought would require either dispensing with the notion of locution or showing how locution derives from illocution, something Austin never does.

According to Derrida, Austin's banning of citation and nonserious speech in the analysis of speech acts is inconsistent with his account of locution, which depends on them for the distinction between sense and reference, or, as Austin puts it also, "meaning." If Frege has it right, the possibility of reference depends on there being a system of language-internal senses whose structure emerges only in contexts such as quotation and indirect discourse, in which normal reference is suspended and what is talked about are the senses of terms. Yet it is this structure of locution which determines the possibility of external reference itself; *oratio obliqua* replaces reference to external context with language-internal reference, thereby revealing a necessary structuring principle of all linguistic activity:

> For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, "non-serious," *citation* (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality — or rather, a general iterability, without which there would not even be a "successful" performative? (Derrida, 1988, 17)

Derrida then calls for a "differential typology of forms of iteration" in which the relative purity of performatives could be explained by their difference from other forms of iterability "within a general iterability" that would reach into the structure of every event of discourse or speech act.

Austin uses the notion of convention to link performatives, context, and illocutionary force. Yet, as Derrida points out, the conventional/arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign is not what Austin is talking about when he invokes convention as a way of fixing the relations between utterance, effect, and context. Instead, Austin's conventions would seem to involve some form of shared intentionality as analyzed by a colleague of Austin's, Paul Grice, in a now classic 1957 article on "nonnatural" meaning. The debates concerning convention and intention became integral parts of the work on meaning and

speech acts, especially in the writings of Searle and David Lewis. Both scholars saw some form of shared intentionality or understanding as critical for meaning. In Grice's work, a speaker means something "nonnaturally" by an utterance if he intends to produce a response in his audience that depends on the latter's recognition of his intention to produce that response. Searle revises Grice's account to incorporate into the Gricean analysis the hearer's recognition of the rules governing "illocutionary effect." Lewis, drawing on game theory, creates an elaborate model of conventions and then applies it to the structure of language. According to Lewis, conventions exist among members of a given community when people act similarly because they believe that others will. In England, people drive on the left-hand side of the road because they believe that others will do so also. Lewis captures the arbitrariness of conventions in his stipulation that there are always alternatives that would be followed if everyone believed that others would follow them; the English would drive on the right-hand side if everyone agreed to do so.

What all these accounts have in common is that there is some form of mutual intentionality that links meaning in a specific situation with type-level regularities. In his 1969 book *Speech Acts,* Searle argues that "an adequate study of speech acts is a study of *langue*" (Searle 1969, 17) and not parole, because illocutionary forces are part of the meaning of sentences.

> Since every meaningful sentence in virtue of its meaning can be used to perform a particular speech act (or range of speech acts), and since every possible speech act can in principle be given an exact formulation in a sentence or sentences (assuming an appropriate context of utterance), the study of the meanings of sentences and the study of speech acts are not two independent studies but one study from two different points of view. (Searle 1969, 18)

Every sentence has what Searle calls an "illocutionary force indicator" that shows what illocutionary force the utterance is to have. These indicators include "word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation, the mood of the verb, and the so-called performative verbs" (Searle 1969, 30). The literal utterance of a given sentence in the presence of a hearer will have a specific illocutionary force because of the speaker's intention that the hearer recognize the sentence's illocutionary force indicators and that certain contextual conditions — they vary according to the speech act involved — hold:

> The speaker intends to produce a certain illocutionary effect by means of getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect, and he also intends this recognition to be achieved in virtue of the fact that the meaning of the item he utters conventionally associates it with producing that effect. (Searle 1969, 61)

The utterance of an explicit performative has an illocutionary force because there is a rule or convention stipulating that the meaning of that utterance in a given context counts as the type of speech act specified by its performative verb.

In this and many similar accounts of meaning in the analytic tradition, intention and some form of mutual belief or knowledge are essential components of the analysis of meaning. It is the essentialness of these concepts for the analysis of meaning that Derrida questions. For many analysts, the seeming conventionality of illocutionary acts points to the arbitrariness of all interpretation. If all speech acts, including reference, are performative, then the truth functionality of referential discourse is only one of many different types of illocutionary force that can be specified only by some appeal to context, whether it be sociohistorical, cultural, or specific to a given relation between the reader and the text. Although such arguments would seem to be consistent with Derrida's criticisms of logocentrism and his antifoundationalism, the French philosopher's insistence on the role of locution as primary undermines any easy alliances.

The concept of convention is crucial for the subsequent development of speech act theory. In Saussure's account, except for onomatopoeia and interjections, the relation between linguistic sign and referent is arbitrary. This arbitrariness is a graded phenomenon, however, with words having the greatest freedom of combination and arbitrariness, and higher-level constructions constrained by language-internal oppositions, such as those making up the structure of grammatical categories. If Saussure is right, then intralinguistic categories, although they seem arbitrary from a comparative angle in the sense that there are other possible systems of expression that people could use to communicate, are hardly maintained through conventions governing their usage. The conceptual value of an expression comes from its place within a system of distinctive contrasts and not from any convention governing its specific use. Confusion can arise because conventionality seems to imply arbitrariness if

arbitrariness involves the presence of a practical alternative, but arbitrariness does not seem to imply conventionality if conventionality involves choice. To say that a group of people could have used a different language to communicate (could have done otherwise) does not imply that their use of a given language is conventional, rather, it is a species possibility that people can learn any natural language; from that standpoint, the "choice" of a language seems arbitrary, but speaking a particular one is hardly a matter of convention.

If arbitrariness and conventionality are clearly distinguished, the application of the notion of convention to the analysis of performatives faces at least two problems. First, there is a general line of argument developed by Donald Davidson that "we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions" (Davidson 1986, 446). A second objection concerns the analysis of explicit performatives, because understanding their performative effect does not seem to require any appeal to conventions linking the meaning of such utterances to their illocutionary forces. If either argument is correct, then the whole idea that there is some conventional linkage between performativity and illocutionary force may be misguided, as may be the notion that we need to appeal to forms of shared intentionality and context to understand how speech acts work.

Davidson starts with a description of widely shared but contradictory assumptions about the knowledge one needs to understand literal, or what he calls *first,* meanings.

> (1) *First meaning is systematic.* A competent speaker or interpreter is able to interpret utterances, his own or those of others, on the basis of the semantic properties of the parts, or words, in the utterance, and the structure of the utterance. For this to be possible, there must be systematic relations between the meanings of utterances.
> (2) *First meanings are shared.* For speaker and interpreter to communicate successfully and regularly, they must share a method of interpretation of the sort described in (1).
> (3) *First meanings are governed by learned conventions or regularities.* The systematic knowledge or competence of the speaker or interpreter is learned in advance of occasions of interpretation and is conventional in character. (Davidson 1986, 436)

Davidson argues that if communication involves (1) and (2), then it is impossible for language to be governed by conventions in the sense of (3). The

competence described in (1) consists of the knowledge necessary to determine the semantic roles of expressions within and across sentences, perhaps in the form of Tarski-style truth conditions for each sentence. Although that competence provides knowledge of the structure-forming devices of a language, it is not specific enough to ensure the success of any specific instance of communication. Although first meanings (point 1) may be in some sense shared, the "meanings" of words and sentences are dependent on the types of generality uncovered by the quantificational analysis of sentences. An example would be Davidson's analysis of the logical form of action sentences, in which there seems to be, at least in English, a commitment to quantifying over events. Literal or first meanings are given by logical analysis; although literal meanings may be shared with other speakers of the language, this level of general meaning is not a product of the sharedness of intentionality. Convention-based accounts of meaning, such as Lewis's or Searle's, try to correlate sentence meanings with regularities in shared uses; Davidson sees no way in which logical form can be reduced to mutual belief or knowledge.

In any instance of communication, what is shared between speaker and interpreter, addressed in Davidson's point (2), is geared to the specific situation. Davidson argues that there is no way to go from the specificity of whatever is shared in a given instance of communication to a more general theory of conventions governing individual uses of language. His account depends on breaking the linkage between token, or situation-specific, shared intentionality and type-level regularities linking context, utterance, and users of language. We are to imagine two people talking to one another. The speaker and hearer have *prior* theories about how to interpret each other, which they update and change as they talk. The speaker's theory consists of how he thinks the hearer will interpret him; in speaking he creates a *passing* theory that he intends the interpreter to use to understand him. The hearer's prior theory is how he is prepared to interpret the speaker; his passing theory is how he actually interprets the utterances. In a case of successful communication, the passing theories coincide; what the speaker intends and the hearer interprets overlap and there is a Gricean loop of shared intentionality.

It looks like there is just a short step from here to type-level regularities maintained by mutual knowledge that would count as conventions of language use and that could guide instances of communication. Davidson points out, however, that what is shared in any successful communication are the passing theories. Yet these include every malapropism, nonstandard usage, metaphor,

and so on that the participants happen to hit upon and could hardly be the basis for any generalizable mutual belief or knowledge. Prior theories, by contrast, do not have to be shared, since they are geared to the participants of the communication situation. People have different prior theories for different people in different situations. Davidson concludes:

> what interpreter and speaker share, to the extent that communication succeeds, is not learned and so is not a language governed by rules or conventions known to speaker and interpreter in advance; but what the speaker and interpreter know in advance is not (necessarily) shared, and so is not a language governed by shared rules or conventions. What is shared, is, as before, the passing theory; what is given in advance is the prior theory, or anything on which it may in turn be based. (Davidson 1986, 445)

The notion of convention also seems to play no role in explaining the illocutionary force of explicit performances or nonexplicit speech acts. For certain of Austin's examples, such as the wedding ceremony or a christening, there does seem to exist "an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances" (Austin 1962a, 26). Other ritualized procedures could be substituted as long as there was a shared belief in their efficacy, thereby satisfying the arbitrariness condition for conventions. Yet if the explicit performative "I hereby promise you that I will be there tomorrow" is uttered seriously and literally, there does not seem to be any other function it could serve besides that of making a promise. Since a convention needs some notion of an alternative regularity that can be chosen, and since no such choice is possible here, convention cannot be seen as providing the basis for meaning or illocutionary force in this instance.

Dennis Stampe (1975) has offered an alternative account of how performatives work that relies on their-truth functional and self-referential properties. He points out that the "illocutionary force indicating devices" of explicit performative constructions make explicit what kind of speech act is being performed; a formula such as "hereby" indicates something along the lines of "what the speaker means by these very words." Making clear what kind of speech act is being performed is different from determining its illocutionary force, however; the former assumes there is already some such force that the devices make explicit. In Searle's account, convention endows the utterance of

the explicit performative with its illocutionary force; for example, convention would state that the utterance of the explicit performative in a specified context counts as making a promise. An alternative account would assert that the literal and serious utterance of an explicit performative creates some of the conditions necessary for it to be true that a specific type of speech act has been performed; there is simply no need to appeal to intermediary conventions or rules.

Austin himself pointed out the asymmetries associated with the first-person present indicative nonprogressive form of the explicit performative:

> In particular we must notice that there is an asymmetry of a systematic kind between it and other persons and tenses of the *very same verb.* The fact is, *this* asymmetry is precisely the mark of the performative verb. (Austin 1962a, 63)

The following set of examples highlights the differences:

(1) Mary promised that she would be there.
(2) I promised that I would be there.
(3) Mary thereby promises that she will be there.
(4) I hereby promise that I will be there.

Only in uttering (4) has someone made a promise. At the same time, in uttering (1), (2), or (3), the speaker has not said that someone will be there, whereas in uttering (4), she has said that she will be there.

Yet, as Austin himself points out, the conditions that make all four utterances "happy" are the same; "it seems clear . . . that for a certain performative utterance to be happy, certain statements have *to be true*" (Austin 1962a, 45). Explicit performatives differ from statements in that their very utterance brings about some of the felicity conditions they require and indicates that the others hold or will hold; this performative effect does not rely on conventions linking meanings and illocutionary-force indicators to illocutionary forces. Stampe argues that the literal and serious utterance of an explicit performative directly determines its illocutionary force by indicating that the truth conditions for the proposition expressed have been satisfied. What makes the literal and serious utterance of sentence (4) the making of a promise are the states of affairs constituting the truth conditions of the proposition that the speaker is articulating; in uttering (4), the speaker indicates that those conditions are satisfied. The tense, aspect, and self-reflexive demonstrative "hereby" all indicate that a promise is being made. For example, the speaker has said that she is making a

promise and that she will be there, thereby indicating that she intends to be making a promise. If this intention is one of the felicity conditions essential to making such a promise, Mary's utterance constitutes a representation of the requisite intention, thereby creating the state of affairs without which no promise can be made. The utterance of an explicit performative thus indicates that the conditions for its fulfillment hold. There is no need for an additional convention, or constitutive rule, linking the token situation to some type-level regularity. Stampe's analysis overlaps with Davidson's discussions of the relations between passing theories and any account of conventions that govern language use; any convention will be too general to explain specific uses, and specific uses will be too particular to be generalized and mutually believed.

We encounter the very same difficulties in dealing with nonexplicit illocutionary acts. The argument is that there is a rule that links the illocutionary force of such utterances with their more explicit counterparts. The utterance of "I'll be there tomorrow," if it is a promise, has the same force as "I hereby promise you that I will be there tomorrow." If the nonexplicit form is indeterminate in its illocutionary force, the rule specifying its illocutionary force could only articulate and distinguish among all the explicit illocutions that might disambiguate the utterance. If "I'll be there tomorrow" could also have the force of a threat or prediction, then the rule could take the form "one should utter sentence *s* only if one means either $force_1$ or $force_2$ or $force_3$ . . . ," with each iteration indicating the corresponding disambiguating force. But as Stampe points out, such a rule could never determine the specificity of any nonexplicit illocution. Since the sentence is supposed to be indeterminate with respect to its force, the disambiguating rule or convention must be narrow enough so that it does not apply to every utterance of the nonexplicit form; yet if the form does have some determinate force, the rule must be broad enough that the sentence falls under its scope. These conditions could hold only if all indeterminacy were eliminated by such nonsemantic factors as the tone, intonation, and suprasegmental characteristics of an utterance; but such a lack of ambiguity seems empirically impossible. If this line of reasoning is valid, then, except for a few highly ritualized "performatives," neither explicit nor nonexplicit performatives are governed by conventions, nor do conventions play any role in linking the meaning of such utterances to their purported illocutionary forces.

Austin made explicit performatives a key to his analysis of illocutionary forces and speech acts. He and others have thought that by isolating what made those forms effective, they could generalize the results to speech acts that were

not so explicitly marked, creating a general doctrine of illocutionary forces. It now seems more likely, however, that explicit performatives are actually quite different from other forms in their linguistic properties. They are effective because of their "(un)marked" position in a system of metalinguistic relationships, as a form of locutionary "citation" functioning within a more generalized iterability that underlies all linguistic functioning. As Benveniste pointed out, their uniqueness lies in their creative self-reference. Benveniste recognizes

> in the performative a peculiar quality, that of being *self-referential,* of referring to a reality that it itself constitutes by the fact that it is actually uttered in conditions that it make it an act. As a result of this it is both a linguistic manifestation, since it must be spoken, and a real fact, insofar as it is the performing of an act. The act is thus identical with the utterance of the act. The signified is identical to the referent. This is evidenced by the word "hereby." The utterance that takes itself as a referent is indeed self-referential. (Benveniste 1971, 236)

The explicit performative marks in the most extreme way possible grammatically the contrast between the decontextualized and contextualized functions of language. In the explicit formula, the verb is in its most "unmarked" grammatical form, which would normally give it a nomic, or habitual, interpretation: simple present tense, nonprogressive aspect, indicative mood. The indexical elements consist of the semantically maximally marked first-person subject, the second-person indirect object, with a complement clause as object, and the self-reflexive demonstrative "hereby." The explicit performative thus opens a window between the most unmarked, timeless grammatical structures that be, as exemplified in the predicate/verb, and the maximally marked indexical categories of the first and second persons. The unmarked verbal categories are those which would remain least changed by *oratio obliqua* and thus point to the world of timeless senses. The indexical categories, by contrast, point to a context outside of the speech event, one whose relevance it indexes through the specific felicity conditions signaled by the performative verb. To the extent that performatives are creatively self-referential, that they bring about the event they seem to refer to, they embody the maximal contrast between the creativity of linguistic reference and the presupposed nature of the contextual conditions that make such reference effective. The creative indexical properties of performatives bring about the conditions that make the utterances true; their referen-

tial and predicational structures seem to classify the actualized token as an instance of the speech act named by the predicate.

The trajectory of Austin's text, its hesitations, retractions, and regroupings, reflects the nature of the problem he started with. Performativity is the product of a particular set of language-internal relationships located in the structure of constatives and locutions that organize linguistic forms. Performatives point to how language structures itself around its own performance, in each moment combining a reference to the ongoing context of speaking with a reference to language itself. From the internal, creative self-reference of performativity, context looks like merely an enabling set of presupposed felicity conditions; from the standpoint of contextualized use, performatives look like a lacuna within linguistic and logical structure. Austin's analysis of performativity externalizes in the form of conventions of use and felicity conditions the relationships between intentionality, the conventionality/arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, context, and singularity/iterability that are part of the structure of citation and *oratio obliqua* in the locutionary act.

Because of their special grammatical and referential properties, explicit performatives create a special vision of how speech and context might interact. The "internality" of a performative's self-reference contrasts with the "externality" of the contextual conditions the utterance creates, thereby making it seem that explicit performatives make clear the relations between speaking and context. Given the utterance of an explicit performative, it seems clear what contextual conditions need to obtain for the illocution to be happy. Yet it is exactly this interpretive clarity that nonexplicit forms lack, and it is this interpretive gap between explicit performativity and context that the notions of intention and convention are designed to fill.

If Davidson and Stampe have it right, then conventions and rules of use cannot bridge this gap. For nonexplicit speech acts, the possibility of failure is built into the relations between linguistic structure, use, and context. Explicit performatives, however, not only make clear what kind of speech act is being performed but create some of the conditions necessary for their success. They are able to do so because of some of their particular grammatical properties. Rather than providing the basis for a more general theory of speech acts, they are a special case that instead provides insights on how language and metalanguage work.

The way verbs of speaking and thinking relate to one another provides the bridge for the belief that the gap between truth conditions and performativity

can be bridged by conventions. Explicit performatives share a reluctance for the present progressive with their mental-state counterparts ('believe', 'intend', 'know'). They also share the ability to take propositional complements that introduce the distinction between sense and reference. The thought that the speaker is entertaining is expressed by the complement clause of indirect discourse framed by a given mental-state verb; these clauses are identical to those framed by verbs of speaking. The unmarked status of verbs used in explicit performative constructions links them to the realm of abstract senses; such verbs have the same unmarked status as the propositional complements of indirect discourse. The speaker has to put his or her thoughts into forms the hearer will understand within the context of a given interaction. The speaker's communicative intention calibrates the difference between the decontextualized sense expressed in the subordinate construction and the ongoing context, adding the indexical elements that will enable the hearer to interpret the utterance. If communication is successful both speaker and hearer know or believe the same thought. Explicit performatives make clear what speech act is occurring; their features underlie the basis for the conventions that will determine the illocutionary force of nonexplicit utterances. But if explicit performatives do bring about some of the contextual conditions that make them true, it is by what they represent the speaker as doing; in uttering such statements, the speaker represents himself as fulfilling some of the conditions required by the act described. The only regularities of meaning he needs to appeal to are those implicit in the grammatical categories and the literal meanings of words. To the extent that linguistic communication succeeds, its very context specificity guarantees that no conventions can explain its success. To the extent that it fails, conventions are moot.

Conclusion

If these criticisms of Austin are founded, then both the clarification of speech act theory by philosophers such as John Searle[1] and its extension to "nonserious" discourses by literary critics such as Richard Ohmann are misguided. For Ohmann, literary speech acts violate the Austinian felicity conditions for

1. In a 1989 article, Searle presents an analysis of performativity that is similar to the one proposed here. He explicitly repudiates his earlier positions, leaving the reader to wonder what influences these changes would have on his criticisms of Derrida.

illocutions, so that their illocutionary force can be only "mimetic." Searle takes a similar line, arguing that fictional discourses are series of pretended illocutions intentionally produced by their author, thereby tethering fiction to both author's intention and real uses of language. In Searle's view, the status of fictional discourse seems to have led to a professional deformation among literary theorists, who seem especially susceptible to the illusions of deconstructive philosophy.

> One last question: granted that deconstruction has rather obvious and manifest intellectual weaknesses, granted that it should be fairly obvious to the careful reader that the emperor has no clothes, why has it proved so influential among literary theorists? . . . No doubt all of these [philosophical] theories are in their various ways, mistaken, defective, and provisional, but for clarity, rigor, precision, and above all, intellectual content, they are written at a level that is vastly superior to that at which deconstructive philosophy is written. How then are we to account to the popularity and influence of deconstructionism among literary theorists? (Searle 1983b, 78)

Some of the appeal is due to misplaced positivist presuppositions about language that are "of a piece with Derrida's assumption that without foundations we are left with nothing but the free play of signifiers" (Searle 1983b, 79). But there are even "cruder" appeals.

> It is apparently very congenial for some people who are professionally concerned with fictional texts to be told that all texts are really fictional anyway, and that claims that fiction differs significantly from science and philosophy can be deconstructed as a logocentric prejudice, and it seems positively exhilarating to be told that what we call "reality" is just more textuality. Furthermore, the lives of such people are made much easier than they had previously supposed, because now they don't have to worry about an author's intention, about precisely what a text means, or about distinctions within a text between the metaphorical and the literal, or about the distinction between texts and the world because everything is just a free play of signifiers. (Searle 1983b, 79)

Despite John Searle's protestations, there are overlapping issues in the works of Austin and Derrida. In each case, there is a concern for the problems of metalanguage, whether it be in the structure of Austin's locutionary act or the

relations between iterability and citation in Derrida's work. Oratio obliqua, quotation, and direct and indirect discourse are at the heart of the Fregean tradition that Austin invokes, being central to Frege's theory of sense and reference and his theory of knowledge. In the Saussurean tradition, the double articulation of the linguistic sign relies on the systematic interweaving of different levels of metalinguistic functioning, a process made most explicit perhaps by the Prague School's development of marking theory. As we shall see later, Peirce's semiotic theory treats propositions, and reference and predication as inherently metalinguistic; subject terms are indices and predicates are icons, and a proposition is a meta-indexical expression that represents the latter as connected to the former.

Instead of showing the conventionality of all speech acts, Austin can be interpreted as showing how metalanguage is important for any theory of speech acts or linguistic functioning. The locutionary act and meaning are defined in terms of sense and reference whose relationship is uncovered in the framing contexts of direct and indirect discourse. The various performative verbs are all metalinguistic — they refer to and describe speech events — and all are forms of "saying." The use of an explicit performative presupposes that something has been said, both at the level of phonology (direct quotation) and at the propositional level (indirect discourse). Explicit performatives have illocutionary force because they make that force explicit, not because there is some convention, or constitutive rule, linking the meaning of the utterance with the conditions that need to hold for a specific speech act to have been "happily" performed.

Austin's discovery of performativity points to the importance of the metalinguistic structuring of indexicality; it does not establish a theory of conventions and speech acts. As we shall see later, the inability of Frege's sense-reference distinction to deal adequately with indexicality has major epistemological consequences. In chapter 4 we shall see how Peirce's theory of the proposition provides an alternative to Frege in which the quantifiers are kinds of indices. Peirce's analysis leads to a social theory of the constitution of reality and knowledge quite different from Frege's but more consonant with recent work in analytic philosophy done by Hilary Putnam and others. Austin thought that his discovery of performativity and illocutionary forces would revolutionize philosophy. Research in analytic philosophy continues to make it increasingly clear that performativity does touch issues of indexicality and meta-indexicality having profound implications for epistemology and the analysis of meaning; but it is still far from clear whether these recent insights depend on

the conventional nature of illocutionary forces and speech acts or will instead change our perceptions of them.

Metalinguistic issues are also at the core of Derrida's discussions of iterability and, of course, citation and quotation. The Saussurean discovery of the double articulation of the linguistic sign—how linguistic structure correlates levels of sound and meaning via systematic oppositions—contains within it an implicit metalinguistics. The latter's implications for phonology would first be clearly articulated by members of the Prague School in their notions of the phoneme and archiphoneme and in their analysis of the marking relations between phonological, grammatical, and semantic categories. It is the double structure of the sign that makes possible both iterability and grafting, whether it be at the level of paradigmatic substitution of phonemes in different syntagmatic contexts or at that of citation, quotation, and direct or indirect discourse.

If we look at performatives from the standpoint of a general iterability or, more specifically, from that of a contrastive metalinguistics, we discover that there is no need to appeal to notions of convention to explain how performatives work. To the extent that grammatical categories can be identified with Fregean senses or Saussurean signifieds, the key question would be how to incorporate indexical categories within Frege's and Saussure's accounts of linguistic functioning. In neither author is there any direct route from the system of language-internal concepts to external reference; yet indexical terms are part of language at the same time they point beyond it. Derrida's criticisms of Austin suggest that the locutionary structure of performatives creates a form of self-reference that produces an objectified version of an external context that must then be coordinated with intentions and conventions. This saturated performativity then becomes the basis for a theory of illocutionary forces, indirect speech acts, and even fictional discourse.

If conventions are not needed to explain the illocutionary force of explicit performatives, then Derrida's worries about the status of infelicity become even more pressing. For it seems that even if the structure of locution is modified to incorporate indexical categories, there will always be an aporia between the language-internal sense system and the context of a given utterance. If communication occurs when passing theories coincide, there is no reason to invoke the notion of shared conventions. The guarantee of a context-specific, shared intentionality precludes the possibility of generalized conventions, and failure and success are *both* structural possibilities even for explicit performatives; if explicit performatives are always subject to a structurally induced

possibility of undecidability, then so are all other speech acts that presuppose the performative derivation of illocution.

Derrida's position should give little comfort to the many poststructuralist critics who see in the conventionality of speech acts the possibility of a radical interpretivism and relativism. If speech acts were conventional, and referring simply another speech act, then, so the argument goes, truth is merely relative to an interpretive scheme. Derrida's criticisms of Austin suggest something quite different. Iterability, whether localized within the locutionary act as part of the metalinguistic structure of citation/quotation or considered as a structural and structuring necessity of linguistic signs, works under the sign of truth to uncover the structure of the oppositions and asymmetries that grounds the possibility of any reference whatsoever.

In *Of Grammatology,* Derrida appeals to Peirce's theory of the sign to show that logic and rhetoric cannot be collapsed into one another and are part of an iterability that constitutes the sign process itself. Peirce, like Derrida, defines signs as part of a potentially infinite process of semiosis that creates the possibility of human cognition. As we shall see later, Peirce considers his references to face-to-face communication as a "sop to Cerebrus"; they are ways to simplify his sign theory to make it more accessible. Although sign processes make possible human communication, signs themselves are forms of mediation that can be defined independently of any such references, as in Peirce's mathematical logic of relations. Yet no matter what perspective one takes on the nature of the sign, for Peirce the aporias between logic, grammar, and rhetoric remain and are built into all sign processes.

As we shall see in chapter 4, Peirce's theory of the proposition incorporates different levels of indexicality and meta-indexicality into his larger sign theory. Unlike Frege, Peirce maintains that all propositions have an irreducible indexical component. Indeed, several of the linguistic forms that Frege analyzes to develop his theory of sense and reference, such as reported speech and indirect discourse, are metalinguistic. Frege uses these metalinguistic devices as an avenue to the timeless, non-indexical thoughts that sentences, in his view, convey. Peirce's location of propositions within his larger theory of signs suggests another dimension of metalanguage: its role in creating linkages between signs as part of a semiotic textuality inherent to the sign process itself.

Metalinguistic devices, such as quotation, citation, direct and indirect discourse, also contribute to the textual functions of language. The very devices that Frege isolates in "On Sense and Reference" are the same ones writers use

to create narrative voicing in novels and other literary forms. Studies of the metalinguistic properties of printed genres (Fleischman 1990) show the development of text-internal structures that provide the semiotic foundations for notions of the "autonomy of the text" and the literariness of specific genres. In one area alone, that of the temporal structure of texts, the rise of narrated fiction has produced figurations of time that contrast with those used previously. New ways of narrating subjectivity, such as the "style indirect libre," break with earlier narrative styles by creating an unmarked past tense as the temporal focus of narration that replaces the unmarked present tense used in earlier texts, such as epics. Historical narration shares the temporal structure of narrated fiction but removes the indexicality of the first and second persons to create a notion of objective, historical time. Philosophy is differentiated from other genres not only by its subject matter but by its tendency to use a nomic, timeless present tense in which the indexical present is just a temporary inflection of timeless categories. Intersecting all of these discourses are the complicated metalinguistic relationships between verbs of speaking, thinking, and intending. From these large-scale patterns of speaking and thinking, speech acts emerge as the unmarked residual category of the intersections between the linguistic and metalinguistic functioning of different institutionalized genres rather than as the constitutive units of discursive practice.

Perhaps the linguistic practices of deconstructionism could be pushed one step further to deconstruct the very idea of speech acts. Performatives seem to present us with a model of how language and context could work together. Through an explicit signaling of linguistic and metalinguistic functioning, they appear to be the natural starting point for an analysis of the relations between linguistic form, pragmatic effect, intention, convention, and context that could then be used to analyze less explicit speech acts, and even the status of fictional and literary discourse. The self-referentiality of performatives creates a dichotomy between language-internal structure and context of use. The context can be specified in terms of felicity conditions that make the performative work, including the requisite intentions on the part of speaker and hearer. The meaning of the illocutionary act is linked to its illocutionary force by conventions. If illocutions are conventional and discourses are made up of speech acts, then the status of nonreferential, nonfelicitous discourses can be specified as in some way derived from the force of "everyday" speech acts. It is as if from a window on individual speech events, we could project its structure onto all discourse and narration.

Yet if the structure of language is not governed by conventions and there are no constitutive rules that link meanings to illocutionary forces, then the appropriateness of such a projection is highly questionable; each supposed link in the analogical chain is instead an ideological gloss over an inherent aporia in the semiotic process. Genres are not just concatenations of speech acts, and no intentionalist or conventionalist approach will be adequate for analyzing linguistic phenomena. Instead, the cultural practices associated with modern bourgeois reading — the silent, nonenacted experience of a standardized printed text, ideally partaken of "in private" — interact with the metalinguistics of narration to create an objectified vision of speech that is itself the basis for speech act theory. Narration creates a continuum for the characterization of the speech and intentionalities of fictional characters, ranging from the objectivity of narrated histories to the subjectivity of stream of consciousness prose. Modern reading practices disengage the reader from any direct social action; perlocutionary effects are bracketed as attention is paid to the text. The unmarked past tense of narration treats speech and thought as reported speech or indirect discourse situated within narratively described contexts. Instead of the individual speech act being the basic, minimal unit out of which narration and discourse are constructed, narrated discourse provides a window on the functioning of speech acts, revealing them as the residual products of the interactions between linguistic and metalinguistic functioning.