5
Speech acts

5.0 Introduction[1]

Of all the issues in the general theory of language usage,
speech act theory has probably aroused the widest interest.
Psychologists, for example, have suggested that the acquisition of the
concepts underlying speech acts may be a prerequisite for the
acquisition of language in general (see e.g. Bruner, 1975; Bates, 1976),
literary critics have looked to speech act theory for an illumination
of textual subtleties or for an understanding of the nature of literary
genres (see e.g. Ohmann, 1971; Levin, 1976), anthropologists have
hoped to find in the theory some account of the nature of magical
spells and ritual in general (see e.g. Tambiah, 1968), philosophers
have seen potential applications to, amongst other things, the status
of ethical statements (see e.g. Searle, 1969: Chapter 8), while linguists
have seen the notions of speech act theory as variously applicable to
problems in syntax (see e.g. Sadock, 1974), semantics (see e.g.
Fillmore, 1971a), second language learning (see e.g. Jakobovitz &
Gordon, 1974), and elsewhere. Meanwhile in linguistic pragmatics,
speech acts remain, along with presupposition and implicature in
particular, one of the central phenomena that any general pragmatic
theory must account for.

Given this widespread interest, there is an enormous literature on
the subject, and in this Chapter we cannot review all the work within
linguistics, let alone the large and technical literature within
philosophy, from which (like all the other concepts we have so far
reviewed) the basic theories come. Rather, what is attempted here is
a brief sketch of the philosophical origins, and a laying out of the
different positions that have been taken on the crucial issues, together

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[1] Parts of this Chapter are based on an earlier review article (Levinson, 1980).

with indications of some general problems that all theories of speech acts have to face.

5.1 Philosophical background

Issues of truth and falsity have been of central interest throughout much of the discussion of deixis, presupposition and implicature. Indeed those issues derive much of their interest from the way in which they remind us of the strict limitations to what can be captured in a truth-conditional analysis of sentence meaning. Nevertheless in the 1930s there flourished what can now be safely treated as a philosophical excess, namely the doctrine of **logical positivism**, a central tenet of which was that unless a sentence can, at least in principle, be *verified* (i.e. tested for its truth or falsity), it was strictly speaking *meaningless*. Of course it followed that most ethical, aesthetic and literary discourses, not to mention most everyday utterances, were simply meaningless. But rather than being seen as a *reductio ad absurdum*, such a conclusion was viewed by proponents of logical positivism as a positively delightful result (see the marvellously prescriptive work by Ayer (1936)), and the doctrine was pervasive in philosophical circles at the time. It was this movement (which Wittgenstein had partly stimulated in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921)) that the later Wittgenstein was actively attacking in *Philosophical Investigations* with the well known slogan "meaning is use" (1958: para. 43) and the insistence that utterances are only explicable in relation to the activities, or **language-games**, in which they play a role.

It was in this same period, when concern with verifiability and distrust of the inaccuracies and vacuities of ordinary language were paramount, that Austin launched his theory of speech acts. There are strong parallels between the later Wittgenstein's emphasis on language usage and language-games and Austin's insistence that "the total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating" (1962: 147). Nevertheless Austin appears to have been largely unaware of, and probably quite uninfluenced by, Wittgenstein's later work, and we may treat Austin's theory as autonomous.[2]

[2] See Furberg, 1971: 50ff and Passmore, 1968: 597, who trace Austin's ideas rather to a long established Aristotelian tradition of concern for ordinary language usage at Oxford, where Austin worked (Wittgenstein was at

In the set of lectures that were posthumously published as *How To Do Things With Words*,[3] Austin set about demolishing, in his mild and urbane way, the view of language that would place truth conditions as central to language understanding. His method was this.

First, he noted that some ordinary language declarative sentences, contrary to logical positivist assumptions, are not apparently used with any intention of making true or false statements. These seem to form a special class, and are illustrated below:

(1)   I bet you six pence it will rain tomorrow
        I hereby christen this ship the H.M.S. Flounder
        I declare war on Zanzibar
        I apologize
        I dub thee Sir Walter
        I object
        I sentence you to ten years of hard labour
        I bequeath you my Sansovino
        I give my word
        I warn you that trespassers will be prosecuted

The peculiar thing about these sentences, according to Austin, is that they are not used just to *say* things, i.e. describe states of affairs, but rather actively to *do* things.[4] After you've declared war on Zanzibar, or dubbed Sir Walter, or raised an objection, the world has changed in substantial ways. Further, you cannot assess such utterances as true or false – as is illustrated by the bizarre nature of the following exchanges:

Cambridge). Both philosophers worked out their later theories at about the same time, the late 1930s (judging from the claim in the introduction to Austin's basic work *How To Do Things With Words*, delivered as lectures for the last time in 1955, and not published till 1962). Wittgenstein's ideas in the late 1930s were only available in manuscript form (see Furberg, 1971: 51).

[3] This is the central source for Austin's theory of speech acts, but see also Austin, 1970b, 1971. His views on word-meaning, truth and propositional content – which do not all mesh closely with his theory of speech acts – can be found in Chapters 3, 5 and 6, respectively, of Austin, 1970a. For commentaries on Austin's work, the reader should see the collection in Fann, 1969, and the monographic treatments in Graham, 1977 and especially Furberg, 1971.

[4] Here, as so often in the literature on speech acts, it is tacitly assumed that we are not considering *metalinguistic* uses of sentences, as in linguistic examples, or other special uses in which sentences do not carry their full pragmatic force or interpretation, as in novels, plays and nursery rhymes.

(2)   A: I second the motion
        B: That's false
(3)   A: I dub thee Sir Walter
        B: Too true

Austin termed these peculiar and special sentences, and the utterances realized by them, **performatives**, and contrasted them to statements, assertions and utterances like them, which he called **constatives**.

Austin then went on to suggest that although, unlike constatives, performatives cannot be true or false (given their special nature, the question of truth and falsity simply does not arise), yet they can go wrong. He then set himself the task of cataloguing all the ways in which they can go wrong, or be 'unhappy', or **infelicitous** as he put it. For instance, suppose I say *I christen this ship the Imperial Flagship Mao*, I may not succeed in so christening the vessel if, for instance, it is already named otherwise, or I am not the appointed namer, or there are no witnesses, slipways, bottles of champagne, etc. Successfully naming a ship requires certain institutional arrangements, without which the action that the utterance attempts to perform is simply null and void. On the basis of such different ways in which a performative can fail to come off, Austin produced a typology of conditions which performatives must meet if they are to succeed or be 'happy'. He called these conditions **felicity conditions**, and he distinguished three main categories:

(4)   A. (i)   There must be a conventional procedure having a
                 conventional effect
           (ii) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate,
                 as specified in the procedure
        B. The procedure must be executed (i) correctly and (ii)
           completely
        C. Often, (i) the persons must have the requisite thoughts,
           feelings and intentions, as specified in the procedure, and
           (ii) if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant
           parties must so do

As evidence of the existence of such conditions, consider what happens when some of them are not fulfilled. For example, suppose, as a British citizen, I say to my wife:

(5)   I hereby divorce you

I will not thereby achieve a divorce, because there simply is no such procedure (as in A (i)) whereby merely by uttering (5) divorce can

be achieved. In contrast, in Muslim cultures there is such a procedure, whereby the uttering of a sentence with the import of (5) three times consecutively does thereby and *ipso facto* constitute a divorce. As an illustration of a failure of condition A (ii), consider a clergyman baptizing the wrong baby, or the right baby with the wrong name (Albert for Alfred, say), or consider the case of one head of state welcoming another, but addressing the attendant bodyguard in error. As for condition B (i), the words must be the conventionally correct ones – the response in (6) simply will not do in the Church of England marriage ceremony:

(6)   Curate: Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife
                              ... and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto
                              her, so long as ye both shall live?
      Bridegroom: Yes

The bridgegroom must say *I will*. Further, the procedure must be complete as required by B (ii): if I bet you six pence that it will rain tomorrow, then for the bet to take effect you must ratify the arrangement with *You're on* or something with like effect – or in Austin's terminology, there must be satisfactory **uptake**. Finally, violations of the C conditions are insincerities: to advise someone to do something when you really think it would be advantageous for you but not for him, or for a juror to find a defendant guilty when he knows him to be innocent, would be to violate condition C (i). And to promise to do something which one has no intention whatsoever of doing would be a straightforward violation of C (ii).

Austin notes that these violations are not all of equal stature. Violations of A and B conditions give rise to **misfires** as he puts it – i.e. the intended actions simply fail to come off. Violations of C conditions on the other hand are **abuses,** not so easily detected at the time of the utterance in question, with the consequence that the action is performed, but infelicitously or insincerely.

On the basis of these observations Austin declares that (a) some sentences, performatives, are special: uttering them *does* things, and does not merely say things (report states of affairs); and (b) these performative sentences achieve their corresponding actions because there are specific *conventions* linking the words to institutional procedures. Performatives are, if one likes, just rather special sorts of ceremony. And unlike constatives, which are assessed in terms of

truth and falsity, performatives can only be assessed as felicitous or infelicitous, according to whether their felicity conditions are met or not.

But Austin is playing cunning: given this much, he has his wedge into the theory of language and he systematically taps it home. Readers of *How To Do Things With Words* should be warned that there is an internal evolution to the argument, so that what is proposed at the beginning is rejected by the end. Indeed what starts off as a theory about some special and peculiar utterances – performatives – ends up as a general theory that pertains to all kinds of utterances. Consequently there are two crucial sliding definitions or concepts: firstly, there is a shift from the view that performatives are a special class of sentences with peculiar syntactic and pragmatic properties, to the view that there is a general class of performative utterances that includes both **explicit performatives** (the old familiar class) and **implicit performatives**, the latter including lots of other kinds of utterances, if not all.[5] Secondly, there is a shift from the dichotomy performative/constative to a general theory of **illocutionary acts** of which the various performatives and constatives are just special sub-cases. Let us take these two shifts in order, and review Austin's arguments for the theoretical "sea-change", as he puts it.

If the dichotomy between performatives and constatives is to bear the important load that Austin indicates, namely the distinction between truth-conditionally assessed utterances and those assessed in terms of felicity, then it had better be possible to tell the difference – i.e. to characterize performatives in independent terms. Austin therefore teases us with an attempt to characterize performatives in linguistic terms. He notes that the paradigm cases, as in (1) above, seem to have the following properties: they are first person indicative active sentences in the simple present tense. This is hardly surprising, since, if in uttering a performative the speaker is concurrently performing an action, we should expect just those properties. Thus we get the

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[5] Austin does not oppose the terms *sentence* and *utterance* in the way done in this book – he talks about *performative sentences* and *performative utterances* pretty much interchangeably (although he notes that not all utterances are sentences – Austin, 1962: 6). In our terminology, in so far as it is possible to characterize performative utterances as being performed by specific types of sentence it makes sense to talk about performative sentences too – this being less obviously possible for implicit performatives.

contrast between the following sentences: only the first can be uttered performatively.

(7)   a. I bet you five pounds it'll rain tomorrow
          b. I am betting you five pounds it'll rain tomorrow
          c. I betted you five pounds it'll rain tomorrow[6]
          d. He bets you five pounds it'll rain tomorrow

The progressive aspect in (7b) renders that (most probably) a reminder, as does the third person in (7d), while the past tense in (7c) indicates a report; none of these constatives seems, then, to be capable of doing betting, unlike the performative (7a). However, convincing though this paradigm is at first sight, there are plenty of other uses of first person indicative active sentences in the simple present, for example:

(8)   I now beat the eggs till fluffy

which can be said in demonstration, simply as a report of a concurrent action. So we shall need other criteria as well if we are to isolate performatives alone. Here one might fall back on a vocabulary definition – only some verbs appear to be usable in this performative syntactic frame with the special property of performing an action simply by being uttered. To distinguish the performative simple present from other kinds, one can note that only the performative usage can co-occur with the adverb *hereby*; and thus one can isolate out the **performative verbs** by seeing whether they will take *hereby*:

(9)   a. I hereby declare you Mayor of Casterbridge
          b. ?I hereby now beat the eggs till fluffy
          c. ?I hereby jog ten miles on Sundays

Declare is shown thereby to be a performative verb, while *beat* and *run* are clearly not. So now we can take all these criteria together: performative utterances are identifiable because they have the form of first person indicative active sentences in the simple present with one of a delimited set of performative verbs as the main verb, which will collocate with the adverb *hereby*.

However that won't quite do either. Consider (10) – could this performative not be expressed equally well as (11)? Or (12) as (13), or even (14)?

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[6] Some varieties of English have past tense *bet*; readers finding (7c) odd may try substituting *did bet* for *betted*.

(10)   I hereby warn you
(11)   You are hereby warned
(12)   I find you guilty of doing it
(13)   You did it
(14)   Guilty!

But if that is so, then the grammatical properties of performatives go by the board. Nor can we just fall back on the vocabulary definition alone, for performative verbs can be used non-performatively as in (7b) above, and (14) contains no verb at all. Moreover even when all the conditions we have collected so far are met, utterances exhibiting these properties are not necessarily performative, as illustrated by (15):

(15)   A: How do you get me to throw all these parties?
          B: I promise to come

So what Austin suggests is that explicit performatives are really just relatively specialized ways of being unambiguous or specific about what act you are performing in speaking. Instead, you can employ cruder devices, less explicit and specific, like mood[7] (as in *Shut it*, instead of *I order you to shut it*), or adverbs (as in *I'll be there without fail* instead of *I promise I'll be there*), or particles (like *Therefore, X* instead of *I conclude that X*). Or you can rely on intonation to distinguish *It's going to charge* as a warning, a question or a protest; or simply allow for contextual disambiguation. Perhaps, he suggests, only "developed" literate cultures will find much use for the explicit performative.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Austin has now conceded that utterances can be performative without being in the *normal form* of explicit performatives, he suggests that performative verbs are still the best way into a systematic study of all the different kinds of performative utterance. This suggestion seems to rely on the claim that every non-explicit performative could in principle be put into the form of an explicit performative, so that by studying the latter alone we shall not be missing any special varieties of action that can be achieved only by other kinds of utterance. (A principle reified by Searle (1969: 19ff) as a general **principle of expressibility** – "anything that can be meant can be said"; Austin was, as always, more cautious (see Austin, 1962: 91).) The aim is to produce a

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[7] This is Austin's term: below we shall distinguish *mood* from *sentence-type*.

systematic classification of such acts, and Austin sees this as just a matter of "prolonged fieldwork" (1962: 148), using the *hereby* test to extract performative verbs from a dictionary. He produces a tentative five-fold classification that he implies emerges naturally, as genera might if you were collecting butterflies, into which may be sorted the many thousands of performative verbs that he estimates to be in the language. Since many other classificatory schemes have since been advanced, there appears to be little to justify his own, and we shall not recount the details here, although the taxonomic issue will recur below.

Let us now turn to the other major shift in Austin's work, from the original distinction between constatives and performatives to the view that there is a whole family of speech acts of which constatives and the various performatives are each just particular members. How this substantial change comes about is this. First, the class of performatives has been, as we have seen, slowly extended to include *implicit performatives*,[8] so that the utterance *Go!*, for example, may be variously performing the giving of advice, or an order, or doing entreating, or daring, according to context. So pretty soon the only kinds of utterances that are *not* doing actions as well as, or instead of, simply reporting facts and events, are statements or constatives. But then are statements really such special kinds of utterance? May they too not have a performative aspect?

Once the doubt is voiced, a few observations will confirm the insubstantial nature of the performative/constative dichotomy. For example, there is clearly no real incompatibility between utterances being truth-bearers, and simultaneously performing actions. For example:

(16)   I warn you the bull will charge

seems simultaneously to perform the action of warning, and to issue a prediction which can be assessed as true or false. But, most convincingly, it can be shown that statements (and constatives in general) are liable to just the infelicities that performatives have been shown to be. Indeed for each of the A, B, and C conditions in (4) above, we can find violations of the sort that rendered performatives

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[8] Austin preferred the term **primary** to **implicit**, in order to emphasize the rather specialized nature of explicit performatives (1962: 69); but the usage is no longer current.

void or insincere. For example, take the condition A (ii), requiring that the circumstances and persons must be appropriate for the relevant action to be performed. Then, just as (17) fails if I do not own a Raphael, so (18) fails if John does not in fact have any children:

(17)   I bequeath you my Raphael
(18)   All of John's children are monks

Presupposition failure is thus, in the domain of constatives, clearly paralleled in the domain of performatives, where it renders the utterance infelicitous or void. Similarly, if one offers advice or delivers a warning, one is obligated to have good grounds for the advice or warning, in just the same way as one should be able to back up an assertion or constative. If the grounds are feeble, all three kinds of utterance share the same kind of infelicity. Or, considering the C condition, requiring the appropriate feelings and intentions, one can see that just as promises require sincere intentions about future action, so statements require sincere beliefs about the factuality of what is asserted. Hence the close parallel between the infelicity of (19) and the infelicity of the statement in (20) ('Moore's paradox'):

(19)   I promise to be there, and I have no intention of being there
(20)   The cat is on the mat, and I don't believe it

The critic might hold that, nevertheless, truth and felicity are quite different kinds of thing – there may be degrees of felicity and infelicity, but there is only either true or false. But Austin points out that statements like those in (21) are not so easily thought of in such black and white terms:

(21)   France is hexagonal
         Oxford is forty miles from London

One wants to say of such statements that they are more or less, or roughly, true. Austin concludes that the dichotomy between statements, as truth-bearers, and performatives, as action-performers, can no longer be maintained. After all, is not (22) a statement in the performative normal form?

(22)   I state that I am alone responsible

The dichotomy between performatives and constatives is thus rejected in favour of a general full-blown theory of speech acts, in which statements (and constatives in general) will merely be a special case.

So it is now claimed that all utterances, in addition to meaning whatever they mean, perform specific actions (or 'do things') through having specific **forces**, as Austin was fond of saying:

> Besides the question that has been very much studied in the past as to what a certain utterance *means*, there is a further question distinct from this as to what was the *force*, as we call it, of the utterance. We may be quite clear what 'Shut the door' means, but not yet at all clear on the further point as to whether as uttered at a certain time it was an order, an entreaty or whatnot. What we need besides the old doctrine about meanings is a new doctrine about all the possible forces of utterances, towards the discovery of which our proposed list of explicit performative verbs would be a very great help. (Austin 1970a: 251)

But if this notion that, in uttering sentences, one is also doing things, is to be clear, we must first clarify in what ways in uttering a sentence one might be said to be performing actions. Austin isolates three basic senses in which in saying something one is doing something, and hence three kinds of acts that are simultaneously performed:

(i) **locutionary act**: the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference
(ii) **illocutionary act**: the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional *force* associated with it (or with its explicit performative paraphrase)
(iii) **perlocutionary act**: the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance

It is of course the second kind, the illocutionary act, that is the focus of Austin's interest, and indeed the term **speech act** has come to refer exclusively (as in the title of this Chapter) to that kind of act. Austin is careful to argue that (i) and (ii) are detachable, and therefore that the study of meaning may proceed independently, but supplemented by a theory of illocutionary acts. More troublesome, it seemed to him, was the distinction between (ii) and (iii). Some examples of his will indicate how he intended it to apply:

(23)   Shoot her!

One may say of this utterance that, in appropriate circumstances, it had the **illocutionary force** of, variously, ordering, urging, advising

the addressee to shoot her; but the **perlocutionary effect** of persuading, forcing, or frightening the addressee into shooting her. (Or, he might have added, it might have the perlocutionary effect of frightening *her*.) Similarly, the utterance of (24) may have the illocutionary force of protesting, but the perlocutionary effects of checking the addressee's action, or bringing him to his senses, or simply annoying him.

(24)   You can't do that

In sum, then, the illocutionary act is what is directly achieved by the conventional force associated with the issuance of a certain kind of utterance in accord with a conventional procedure, and is consequently determinate (in principle at least). In contrast, a perlocutionary act is specific to the circumstances of issuance, and is therefore not conventionally achieved just by uttering that particular utterance, and includes all those effects, intended or unintended, often indeterminate, that some particular utterance in a particular situation may cause. The distinction has loose boundaries, Austin admits, but as an operational test one may see whether one can paraphrase the hypothetical illocutionary force of an utterance as an explicit performative: if one can, the act performed is an illocutionary act; if not, the act performed is a perlocutionary act. One particular problem is that, while one would like to be able to identify the perlocutionary effects with the *consequences* of what has been said, illocutionary acts too have direct and in-built consequences – there is the issue of **uptake** (including the *understanding* of both the force and the content of the utterance by its addressee(s) – see Austin, 1962: 116), and the need for the ratification of, for example, a bet or an offer, while certain illocutions like promising or declaring war have consequent actions specified. This interactional emphasis (on what the recipient(s) of an illocutionary act must think or do) in Austin's work has unfortunately been neglected in later work in speech act theory (see Austin, 1962: Lecture IX).

These seem to be Austin's main contributions to the subject; his work, though, is not easy to summarize as it is rich with suggestions that are not followed up, and avoids dogmatic statements of position. Of the large amount of philosophical work that it has given rise to, two developments in particular are worth singling out. One is the very influential systematization of Austin's work by Searle, through whose

writings speech act theory has perhaps had most of its impact on linguistics, and the other is a line of thought that attempts to link up closely Grice's theory of meaning-nn (Grice, 1957; discussed in 1.2 above) with illocutionary force. We may approach the latter through a brief review of Searle's work.

In general, Searle's theory of speech acts is just Austin's systematized, in part rigidified,[9] with sallies into the general theory of meaning, and connections to other philosophical issues (see Searle, 1969, 1979b). If illocutionary force is somehow conventionally linked with explicit performatives and other illocutionary force indicating devices (let us call them IFIDs), then we should like to know exactly how. Searle appeals to a distinction by Rawls (1955) between **regulative rules** and **constitutive rules**. The first are the kind that control antecedently existing activities, e.g. traffic regulations, while the second are the kind that create or constitute the activity itself, e.g. the rules of a game. The latter have the conceptual form: 'doing X counts as Y', e.g. in soccer, kicking or heading the ball through the goal-posts counts as a goal. Essentially, the rules linking IFIDs with their corresponding illocutionary acts are just of this kind: if I warn you not to touch the dog, that counts as an undertaking that it is not in your best interests to touch that animal. Of course, as Austin points out, it will only be a felicitous warning if all the other felicity conditions are also met (Searle assimilates the 'uttering IFID X counts as doing Y' condition to the same schema, calling it the **essential condition**).

This prompts Searle to suggest that felicity conditions are not merely dimensions on which utterances can go wrong, but are actually jointly constitutive of the various illocutionary forces. For example, suppose that, by means of producing the utterance U, I promise sincerely and felicitously to come tomorrow. Then in order to perform that action it must be the case that each of the conditions below has been met:

(25)   1. The speaker said he would perform a future action

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[9] Especially in the sense that where Austin's characterizations of speech acts are in terms of loose 'family relationships', Searle prefers strict delimitations in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. There are reasons to think that Searle's treatment here is much too strong and inflexible (see e.g. sections 5.5 and 5.7 below). In general, students are well advised to turn back to Austin's often more subtle treatment of the issues.

2. He intends to do it
3. He believes he can do it
4. He thinks he wouldn't do it anyway, in the normal course of action
5. He thinks the addressee wants him to do it (rather than not to do it)
6. He intends to place himself under an obligation to do it by uttering U
7. Both speaker and addressee comprehend U
8. They are both conscious, normal human beings
9. They are both in normal circumstances – not e.g. acting in a play
10. The utterance U contains some IFID which is only properly uttered if all the appropriate conditions obtain

Now some of these are clearly general to all kinds of illocutionary act, namely 7–10. Factoring these out, we are left with the conditions specific to promising: and these (namely 1–6) are actually constitutive of promising – if one has met these conditions then (if 7–10 also obtain) one has effectively promised, and if one has effectively (and sincerely) promised then the world meets the conditions 1–6 (and also 7–10).

We can now use these felicity conditions as a kind of grid on which to compare different speech acts. To do so it will be useful to have some kind of classification of felicity conditions, like Austin's in (4) above; Searle suggests a classification into four kinds of condition, depending on how they specify **propositional content, preparatory** preconditions, conditions on **sincerity**, and the **essential** condition that we have already mentioned. An example of a comparison that can be made on these dimensions, between requests and warnings (see Table 5.1), should make the typology clear (drawn from Searle, 1969: 66–7).

But Searle is unsatisfied with this procedure as a classificatory method. For sub-types of questions, for example, can be proliferated, and there may be an indefinite number of tables like the one above that can be compared. What would be much more interesting would be to derive some overall schema that would delimit the kinds of *possible* illocutionary force on principled grounds. Now Austin thought that one could come to an interesting classification through a taxonomy of performative verbs, but Searle seeks some more abstract scheme based on felicity conditions. In fact he proposes

Table 5.1. *A comparison of felicity conditions on requests and warnings*

Conditions	REQUESTS	WARNINGS
propositional content	Future act A of H	Future event E
preparatory	1. S believes H can do A 2. It is not obvious that H would do A without being asked	1. S thinks E will occur and is not in H's interest 2. S thinks it is not obvious to H that E will occur
sincerity	S wants H to do A	S believes E is not in H's best interest
essential	Counts as an attempt to get H to do A	Counts as an undertaking that E is not in H's best interest

(Searle, 1976) that there are just five basic kinds of action that one can perform in speaking, by means of the following five types of utterance:

(i) **representatives**, which commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.)

(ii) **directives**, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning)

(iii) **commissives**, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering)

(iv) **expressives**, which express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating)

(v) **declarations**, which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment)

The typology, though perhaps an improvement on Austin's, is a disappointment in that it lacks a principled basis; contrary to Searle's claims, it is not even built in any systematic way on felicity conditions. There is no reason, then, to think that it is definitive or exhaustive. Indeed, there are now available a great many other rival classificatory

schemes (see Hancher, 1979 for a review of five of the more interesting, including Searle's; see also Allwood, 1976; Lyons, 1977a: 745ff; Bach & Harnish, 1979). Here the other main strand of post-Austinian thought, which attempts to relate illocutionary force closely to Grice's theory of meaning-nn or communicative intention, may ultimately prove helpful. Strawson (1964) claims that Austin was misled about the nature of illocutionary force by taking as his paradigm cases institutionally-based illocutions like christening, pronouncing man and wife, finding guilty and the like, which require the full panoply of the relevant social arrangements. Rather, the "fundamental part" of human communication is not carried out by such conventional and culture-bound illocutions at all, but rather by specific classes of *communicative intention*, in the special sense sketched by Grice (1957) in his theory of meaning (see 1.2 above). This view suggests that given Searle's essential condition, which generally states the relevant intention, the felicity conditions on each of the major illocutionary acts will be predictable from general considerations of rationality and co-operation of the sort represented by Grice's maxims (a point admitted by Searle (1969: 69); see also Katz, 1977). A principled classification of such possible communicative intentions may then, it is hoped, be based on the nature of such intentions themselves and the kinds of effects they are meant to achieve in recipients. An attempt at such a classification is made by Schiffer (1972: 95ff), and this makes a first cut between classes of intention similar to Searle's *directives*, and a class similar to his *representatives*, and proceeds to finer categories within each of these.[10]

However, it can be argued that the enthusiasm for this kind of classificatory exercise is in general misplaced. The lure appears to be that some general specification of all the possible *functions* of language (and thus perhaps an explication of the "limits of our language" that so intrigued Wittgenstein) may thereby be found. But if illocutions are perhaps finite in kind, perlocutions are clearly *not so* in principle, and there seems to be no clear reason why what is a perlocution in one culture may not be an illocution in another. Or alternatively, one could say that the exercise made sense if Searle's *principle of*

[10] Grice, in an unpublished paper (1973), has himself suggested such a classification under a further restriction: he hopes to achieve a motivated taxonomy by building up complex communicative intentions, or illocutionary forces, from just two primitive propositional attitudes, roughly *wanting* and *believing*.

expressibility, which holds that "anything that can be meant can be said" (Searle, 1969: 18ff), was tenable; but the distinction between illocution and perlocution seems to belie the principle (see also the critique of the principle in Gazdar, 1981). Nevertheless there are certain recurring *linguistic* categories that do need explaining; for example, it appears that the three basic **sentence-types**, *interrogative*, *imperative*, and *declarative* are universals – all languages appear to have at least two and mostly three of these (see Sadock & Zwicky, in press).[11] On the assumption (to be questioned below) that these three sentence-types express the illocutions of questioning, requesting (or ordering) and stating, respectively, then a successful typology of illocutions might be expected to predict the predominance of these three sentence-types across languages. No such theory exists.

Finally we should briefly mention that the distinction between illocutionary force and propositional content can in fact be found in another philosophical tradition stemming from Frege. Frege himself placed considerable emphasis on the distinction between the "thought" or proposition, and its assertion or "judgement" as true. To make the distinction systematically clear, Frege was careful to place a special assertion sign in front of an asserted sentence (see Dummett, 1973; Atlas, 1975a). This distinction was honoured by Russell & Whitehead (1910), and plays an essential role in Strawson's (1950) views on presupposition (see Chapter 4) and truth. Hare (1952) introduced the terms **phrastic** for propositional content (certainly preferable for WH-questions which do not, arguably, express complete propositions), and **neustic** for illocutionary force. He later went on to suggest (Hare, 1970) that illocutionary force was in fact an amalgam of *neustic* (speaker commitment) and a further element, the **tropic** (the factuality of the propositional content), and Lyons (1977a: 749ff) sees some linguistic merit in these distinctions.

Before proceeding, it is important to emphasize some distinctions essential to a clear discussion of speech acts. First, the distinction between linguistic expressions (sentences) and their use in context, on concrete occasions for particular purposes (utterances), must never be lost sight of, even though a number of theories of speech acts

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[11] These authors also draw attention to the occurrence of language-specific **minor sentence-types** – e.g. English exclamations like *How shoddy that is!*, or *Boy, can he run!* These will not be treated here, though obviously they are of substantial pragmatic interest (see Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1972: 406–14).

attempt to conflate them systematically. Secondly, the term *speech act* is often used ambiguously, or generally, to cover both a type of illocutionary act characterized by a type of illocutionary force (like requesting) and a type of illocutionary act characterized by an illocutionary force and a particular propositional content (like requesting someone to open the door). Thirdly, and most importantly, we must be careful to distinguish the set of terms *imperative*, *interrogative*, and *declarative* from the set of terms *order* (or *request*), *question* and *assertion* (or *statement*). The first set are *linguistic* categories that pertain to sentences, the second set are categories that pertain only to the *use* of sentences (i.e. to utterances and utterance-types). Now the term **mood** is often used to designate the first set, but this is inaccurate as *mood*, in traditional grammar at any rate, is a category of verbal inflection, and on this dimension *imperative* contrasts with *indicative* and *subjunctive* rather than *declarative* and *interrogative*. Lyons (1977a: 747ff) therefore proposes a change in terminology; nevertheless we shall retain the familiar terms *imperative*, *interrogative* and *declarative*, using however the cover term **sentence-types** instead of the misleading term *mood*. (Here see also the helpful discussion in Sadock & Zwicky, in press.)

5.2 Thesis: speech acts are irreducible to matters of truth and falsity

We shall here summarize, at the risk of repetition, those aspects of the philosophical work on speech acts that have had the most direct impact on linguistic theorizing. From Austin's work, and in large part through Searle's systematization of it, there has emerged a coherent theory of speech acts that demands the linguist's attention. This position, which is a judicious selection and slight abstraction from Austin and Searle's particular views, we may call the *irreducibility thesis*, or *Thesis* for short. In brief, the position can be formulated as follows. First, all utterances not only serve to express propositions, but also perform actions. Secondly, of the many ways in which one could say that in uttering some linguistic expression a speaker was *doing* something, there is one privileged level of action that can be called the illocutionary act – or, more simply, the speech act. This action is associated by convention (*pace* Strawson, 1964 and Schiffer, 1972) with the form of the utterance in question, and this distinguishes it from any perlocutionary actions that may accompany the central

illocutionary act, and be done via that central action. Thirdly, although any particular illocutionary force may be effectively conveyed in various ways, there is at least one form of utterance that (in some languages at any rate) directly and conventionally expresses it – namely, the explicit performative, which in English has the normal form of (26):

(26)   I (hereby) V_p you (that) S′

where V_p is a **performative verb** drawn from the limited and determinate set of performative verbs in the language in question, S′ is a complement sentence (the content of which is often restricted by the particular performative verb), and V_p is conjugated in the simple present indicative active. There are variations, of no great significance (but see Searle, 1976), about whether a particular performative verb takes a *that* complement (as in *I state that p*) or a *for -ing* complement (as in *I apologize for laughing*) and so on. We may also treat the three basic sentence-types in English (and most languages), namely the imperative, the interrogative and the declarative, as containing grammaticalized conventional indicators of illocutionary force, namely those associated respectively with the explicit **performative prefixes** (or phrases)[12] *I request you to, I ask you whether, I state to you that* (with the single proviso that explicit performatives, although in declarative form, have the force associated with the overt performative verb in each case). We may say that sentences in the imperative, interrogative or declarative, and perhaps other kinds of sentence format, are **implicit performatives**. Fourthly, the proper characterization of illocutionary force is provided by specifying the set of **felicity conditions** (or FCs) for each force. FCs may be classified, following Searle, into **preparatory conditions** that concern real-world prerequisites to each illocutionary act, **propositional content conditions** that specify restrictions on the content of S′ in (26), and **sincerity conditions**, that state the requisite beliefs, feelings and intentions of the speaker, as appropriate to each kind of action. (There is also in Searle's schema, as we noted, an **essential**

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[12] The term *performative prefix* is used here, as in the speech act literature, as a shorthand for 'sentence-initial performative phrase' or the like; from a linguistic point of view, of course, such a phrase is not a prefix, but the performative clause minus one argument, namely the complement of the performative verb, which expresses the propositional content (see immediately below).

condition, which is of a rather different order.) Thus to provide the *felicity conditions for some illocutionary act is to specify* exactly how the context has to be in order for a particular utterance of a sentence that is conventionally used to perform that type of act to actually perform it on an occasion of utterance. Given that felicity conditions jointly define and constitute the nature of any specific speech act, there is hope that a more abstract and principled classification of speech acts can be provided in terms of FCs than emerges (*pace* Austin) from a study of performative verbs alone.

These claims imply that the illocutionary force and the propositional content of utterances are detachable elements of meaning. Thus the following sentences, when uttered felicitously, would all share the same propositional content, namely the proposition that the addressee will go home:

(27)   a. I predict that you will go home
          b. Go home!
          c. Are you going to go home?
          d. I advise you to go home

but they would normally be used with different illocutionary forces, i.e. perform different speech acts.[13] There is a problem for this view, namely that in the case of the explicit performatives, the propositional content appears to include the force-indicating device. For if, as this version of speech act theory suggests, the propositional aspect of meaning is to be treated one way, and the illocutionary aspect another, then the meaning of *promise* in *I hereby promise to come* is different from the meaning of *promise* in *He promised to come*. In the first, it has a performative usage, in the second, a descriptive usage; in the first it is explicated by reference to FCs, in the second by appeal to the semantic concepts of sense and reference. One solution to this problem, adopted by Searle but not by Austin, is to claim that the propositional aspect of meaning is not after all so distinct in kind: one can provide **usage conditions** for the descriptive usage of *promise* in just the way that one can apply felicity conditions for the performative usage. Searle (1969, 1979b) thereby attempts to extend speech act theory into a general theory of semantics. There are many objections to such a theory (see Kempson, 1977 for discussion), and

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[13] Gazdar (1981) points to some significant difficulties with the notion of propositional content employed here (as e.g. by Katz (1977)).

we shall continue to be interested here in speech act theory solely as a theory of illocutionary force. This does, however, leave quite unsolved the issue of the way in which performative and descriptive uses of the same words are to be related. (One possible line for Thesis theorists is to claim that explicit performative prefixes are indeed treated semantically just like other non-performative clauses, but that *in addition* performative clauses have a force-indicating function irreducible to ordinary semantics.)

We are now in a position to state the central tenet of Thesis: illocutionary force is an aspect of meaning, broadly construed, that is quite irreducible to matters of truth and falsity. That is, illocutionary force constitutes an aspect of meaning that cannot be captured in a truth-conditional semantics. Rather, illocutionary acts are to be described in terms of felicity conditions, which are specifications for appropriate usage. The reason is that while propositions *describe* (or are in correspondence with) states of affairs, and may thus be plausibly characterized in terms of the conditions under which they would be true, illocutionary forces indicate how those descriptions are to be taken or what the addressee is meant to do with a particular proposition that is expressed, e.g. for an assertion the addressee may be meant to believe the proposition expressed, for an order he will be meant to make the proposition true, and so on (see Stenius, 1967). Illocutionary force belongs firmly in the realm of *action*, and the appropriate techniques for analysis are therefore to be found in the theory of action, and not in the theory of meaning, when that is narrowly construed in terms of truth-conditional semantics. Thesis is thus a theory that proposes to handle illocutionary force in an entirely pragmatic way.

5.3 Antithesis: the reduction of illocutionary force to ordinary syntax and semantics

Directly opposed to Thesis is a position that we may call *Antithesis*: according to Antithesis there is no need for a special theory of illocutionary force because the phenomena that taxed Austin are assimilable to standard theories of syntax and truth-conditional semantics.

The opening move here is to attack Austin's handling of explicit performatives. Basic to Austin's theory is the claim that the utterance of *I bet you six pence* is simply not assessed, or sensibly assessable,

in terms of truth and falsity: you either did or did not manage to bet successfully, and that depends on whether the FCs were met or not. Early on there were dissenters to this (see e.g. Lemmon, 1962; Hedenius, 1963): why not claim instead that simply by uttering sentences of that sort the speaker makes them true? In this respect performatives would be similar to other sentences that are verified simply by their use, like:

(28)   I am here
         I can speak this loud
         I can speak some English

There seems to be nothing incoherent with this view held generally for explicit performatives; for example, if you say *I hereby warn you not to get in my way*, then what you have said is true – you have indeed so warned. Whatever Austin thought of as usage conditions for *bet*, *warn* and the like, are simply part of the meaning of those words.[14]

To generalize the attack on Thesis, we may then bring in the **performative analysis** (or **performative hypothesis**) to handle implicit performatives. According to this hypothesis, which we may refer to as the PH, every sentence has as its highest clause in deep or underlying syntactic structure a clause of the form in (26) – i.e. a structure that corresponds to the overt prefix in the explicit performative, whether or not it is an overt or explicit performative in surface structure. Such an analysis can be put forward on what seem to be plausible independent grounds, namely that it captures a number of syntactic generalizations that would otherwise be lost (see Ross, 1970; Sadock, 1974). The syntactic arguments are of two major kinds. The first uses anaphoric processes along the following lines: some constituent X of a subordinate clause is first shown to be acceptable only if there is another constituent Y in the matrix clause; thus

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[14] This line is more awkward for those performatives involved in illocutionary acts (like christening, declaring war, even ordering) that require specific institutional arrangements; here, perhaps, one must allow for falsification, as well as verification, by use: thus *I declare war on Wales* said by someone not so empowered may fail to be true in a way parallel to the falsity of a (non-recorded, non-relayed) utterance of *I am not here*. There are also difficulties with (metalinguistic) *mention* as opposed to (performative) *use* of such sentences, but these difficulties are shared by most theories of speech acts. Finally, there are problems with the semantic interpretation of the tense and aspect of performative utterances (which Kempson, 1977: 64–8 claims to be illusory).

without Y, X may not appear in the lower clause. We now turn to some *implicit* performatives and find, contrary to our generalization, some X in the matrix clause, unlicensed by an overt Y in a higher clause. Either our generalization about the Y-dependency of X is wrong, or there is in fact a covert Y in an underlying deleted matrix clause. We then show that if the PH is assumed, i.e. there is a higher implicit performative clause, then there would in fact be just the required Y in a higher clause, and our generalization can be preserved. For example, in (29) the reflexive pronoun *himself* seems to be licensed by the higher co-referential noun phrase, *the President*:

(29)   The President said that solar energy was invented by God and himself

But in breach of the generalization, the *myself* in (30) seems to lack any such corresponding antecedent:

(30)   Solar energy was invented by God and myself

Note that such usages are highly restricted; e.g. third person reflexives as in (31) are unacceptable (at least at the beginning of a discourse):

(31)   ?Solar energy was invented by God and herself

Therefore the acceptability of (30) seems puzzling. The puzzle disappears, according to the PH, if we note that (32) is acceptable for just the same reasons that (29) is, and if we claim that in fact (30) is derived from (32) by a regular process of performative clause deletion:

(32)   I say to you that solar energy was invented by God and myself

Using anaphoric arguments of this kind, it is possible to argue that every feature of the covert performative clause is motivated by independent syntactic requirements (see Ross, 1970). For example, on the basis of the parallelism between the following two sentences:

(33)   Herbert told Susan that people like herself are rare
(34)   People like yourself are rare

we may argue that there must in fact be an implicit second person antecedent in the second, which would be conveniently provided by the indirect object of the hypothesized performative clause. And evidence for the presence of a covert performative verb itself seems to be offered by the adverbial data to which we now turn.

Another major kind of argument is based on the fact that there appear to be adverbs that modify performative clauses appearing in sentences without such overt performative clauses, as in (35) and (36):

(35)   Frankly, I prefer the white meat
(36)   What's the time, because I've got to go out at eight?

where a natural interpretation is that in (35) *frankly* is an adverb on an implicit *I tell you* performative prefix, and in (36) the *because*-clause is an adverb on an implicit *I ask you* prefix.

There are in addition a number of minor arguments. Most of these have as a basis the claim that certain syntactic generalizations that would otherwise have exceptions manifested in the matrix clauses of implicit performatives, will be fully general if the PH is in fact assumed. For example, sentences generally require overt subjects in English and many other languages, but the imperative is an exception. If, however, we assume the PH, then (37) will have an underlying performative clause of the sort made overt in (38):

(37)   Wash the dishes!
(38)   I order you to wash the dishes
(39)   *I order you that you wash the dishes

Now (39) is ungrammatical because Equi-NP deletion must apply,[15] given that *order* requires that the subject of the complement clause be co-referential with the indirect object of the matrix clause. Therefore, on performative clause deletion, one will be left with (37), providing that Equi-NP deletion applies first. Thus we have simultaneously an explanation for the subjectless nature of imperatives, and the understanding that there is a covert second person subject in imperatives (see Sadock, 1974: 32–3). Further, if a performative clause was always available, certain morphological problems that arise with honorifics, of the sort we encountered in Chapter 2, might be solved: the subject and object of the performative verb could be assigned a syntactic feature indicating level of politeness, and honorific concord be achieved by requiring the same features on all co-referent noun phrases (see Sadock, 1974: 41ff). Indeed, the description of deixis in general might be facilitated by the presence of the crucial deictic reference points – speaker, addressee and time

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[15] Equi-NP deletion is a transformational rule that deletes subjects of subordinate clauses under identity with the subject or indirect object of the next-higher clause (see Sadock, 1974: 5, 34–5).

of utterance (encoded by the tense of the performative) – in underlying structure (see G. Lakoff, 1972, 1975).

The adoption of the PH thus seems, at first sight, to offer a significant and general improvement over the earlier suggestions for dealing with the syntax of sentence-types. Chomsky (1957) had originally suggested optional transformations to derive the subject-auxiliary inversion of English interrogatives, and the subject-deletion of English imperatives, from declaratives; while Katz & Postal (1964) had proposed two underlying morphemes, call them Q and I, that would not only trigger the necessary transformations, but also be available in deep structure for semantic interpretation. The PH achieves all that these proposals achieved, providing both triggers for the necessary adjustments in surface structure and structures for semantic interpretation, but in a much less arbitrary way (substituting natural language expressions for Q and I, for example; see Sadock, 1974: 17).

On the basis of arguments like these, we may then formulate (following Gazdar, 1979a: 18) the strongest version of the PH as follows:

(40) 1. Every sentence has a performative clause in deep or under-lying structure
  2. The subject of this clause is first person singular, the indirect object second person singular, and the verb is drawn from a delimited set of performative verbs, and is conjugated in the indicative active simple present tense (or is associated with the underlying representation thereof)
  3. This clause is always the highest clause in underlying structure, or at the very least always occurs in a determinable position in that structure
  4. There is only one such clause per sentence
  5. The performative clause is deletable, such deletion not changing the meaning of the sentence
  6. Illocutionary force is semantic (in the truth-conditional sense) and is fully specified by the meaning of the performative clause itself

In actual fact, the various proponents of the PH have usually adopted only some sub-set of these claims – for example, G. Lakoff (1972) avoids claim 2 in order to allow singular and plural speakers and addressees; Sadock (1974) has abandoned claim 4 and the first part of claim 3 for syntactic reasons; G. Lakoff (1975) abandons claim 1

for sentences not being actively asserted or expressing timeless truths; while Lewis (1972) avoids the same claim just in the case of declarative sentences (for semantic reasons which we will consider in due course). We cannot review all these distinct but closely related positions here (see Gazdar, 1979a: Chapter 2), but the very variety of them, and the general retreat from the strong version of the PH expressed by the claims in (40), reflects the considerable difficulties that each of those claims faces, as we shall see.

Armed with the PH, Antithesis theorists may now claim that they have a complete reduction of speech act theory to matters of syntax and truth-conditional semantics. That every sentence when uttered has what appears to be an 'illocutionary force' is accounted for by the guaranteed presence of an underlying or overt performative clause, which has the peculiar property of being true simply by virtue of being felicitously said – hence the intuition that it makes no sense to consider its falsity. The particular so-called 'felicity conditions' on different speech acts are simply part of the meaning of the implicit or explicit performative verbs, capturable either in terms of entailment or semantic presupposition (see e.g. Lewis, 1972, and especially G. Lakoff, 1975). The basic result is that illocutionary force is reduced to "garden variety semantics" (G. Lakoff, 1972: 655).

5.4   Collapse of Antithesis

Antithesis is clearly an elegant theory, promising to reduce what seems to be an apparently irreducibly pragmatic aspect of meaning to relatively well-understood areas of linguistic theory. However, it is now all but certain that Antithesis, at least in its full form, is untenable. For it runs into insurmountable difficulties on both the semantic and syntactic fronts. Let us take these in turn.

5.4.1   *Semantic problems*

Although a widely held belief is that truth-conditional semantics cannot deal with non-assertoric utterances, using the PH and the notion that performative sentences are verified simply by their use, such a semantics handles non-declaratives without too much difficulty. Paradoxically enough, where the problems arise is with assertions and declaratives. Consider for example:

(41)   I state to you that the world is flat

On the normal Antithesis assumption, such a sentence will have the value *true* simply by virtue of being felicitously uttered. Also by Antithesis, (42) will have as its underlying form something corresponding closely to (41):

(42)   The world is flat

By hypothesis, (41) and (42) should have the same truth conditions, so (42) will be true just in case the speaker so states. But clearly such an argument amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum*. For, whatever our intuitions about (41), (42) is, given the way the world actually is, simply false (see Lewis, 1972 for the full argument).

To this difficulty G. Lakoff (1975) had a response. Let us say that an assertion is true if, and only if, both the performative clause and its complement clause are true. However, the response lands one in further difficulties.[16] Consider:

(43)   I stated to you that the world is flat

Here it is sufficient for the truth of (43) simply that I did so state, the truth or falsity of the complement clause (*the world is flat*) playing no role in the overall truth conditions. Hence the non-performative usages (as in (43)) of performative verbs like *state* seem to have different truth conditions from the performative usages of the same verb. But in that case, we have in fact *failed* to reduce performative usages to straightforward applications of uniform semantical procedures, as Antithesis claims to be able to do.

Various attempts may be made to salvage the PH from this semantic difficulty, and it is worth considering carefully, at the risk of belabouring the point, the different options that are open to its die-hard supporters. Sadock (in preparation), for example, hopes to escape the dilemma by appealing to two distinct kinds of truth (and falsity), namely a semantic truth (call it T_1) which holds of propositions, and a pragmatic concept of truth (call it T_2) which holds only of statements or assertions. We might then say that the ordinary language use of the English word *true*, namely the pragmatic concept T_2, can only sensibly be predicated of the complements of overt or covert performative clauses. Thus we ordinarily say that (41) is true (i.e. T_2) only if we agree that (42) is true. However, technically, in the theoretical sense (i.e. T_1), the

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[16] This was pointed out to me by Gerald Gazdar.

proposition expressed by both sentences (which is identical on the assumption of PH) is T1 only if the performative clause (*I state to you that p*), and on some views the complement *p* too, is true (T1). Thus, one could claim, the view that (41) is true while (42) is false is due to predicating T1 of (41) and T2 (or rather F2) of (42) – i.e. to a conflation of the two kinds of truth (see Sadock, in preparation; also G. Lakoff, 1975). Nevertheless, although such a distinction may indeed be salutary, this will not solve the present problem. For that problem is precisely that it seems to be impossible to maintain a coherent and uniform application of the semantic notion of truth conditions to sentences if one adopts the PH. Let us restate the difficulty.

(44)   Snow is green
(45)   I state that snow is green
(46)   I stated that snow is green

To accommodate the PH we must find some way in which (44) and (45) may reasonably be held to be identical in truth conditions, as they will have identical underlying structures and semantic representations on that hypothesis. Let us adopt the following conventions: let s be the performative prefix *I state to you that* (or any of its alternatives), p be the complement clause of the overt or covert performative verb, p' be the past report of a statement (as in (46)), and $s(p)$ be the overt performative sentence (as in (45)); further, let $[p]$ mean 'the proposition expressed by p', and so on for $[p']$, etc. Then, to make (44) and (45) parallel in truth conditions, we may take one of the following lines. We can, as G. Lakoff (1975) suggested, assign truth conditions on the following basis (where *true* is always T1):

(47)   (i)   'p' is true iff $[p]$ is true and $[s(p)]$ is true
         (ii) '$s(p)$' is true iff $[p]$ is true and $[s(p)]$ is true
         (iii) 'p'' is true iff $[p']$ is true and $[s(p')]$ is true, regardless of the truth or falsity of the complement p of the verb *state* in p'

The problems then are (a), (44) can only be true if someone is in fact stating it, which seems a short road to solipsism, and (b) the solution forces us (as we noted above) into two kinds of truth conditions for *state*, those for performative usages, as in (45) (where the truth of the complement is relevant to the truth of the whole), and those for non-performative usages, as in (46) (where the truth of the complement

is irrelevant to the truth of the matrix sentence). Alternatively, finding this untenable, we could hold instead:

(48) (i) 'p' is true iff [p] is true
      (ii) '$s(p)$' is true iff [p] is true
      (iii) 'p'' is true iff [p'] is true

The problem here is that we have in effect made the performative clause, whether covert or overt, 'invisible' to truth conditions. But in that case we have failed to give a semantic characterization of the performative clause at all. Such a solution might well be congenial to Thesis theorists, leaving open a pragmatic interpretation of both explicit performatives and sentence-types, but it is hardly a route open to the proponents of Antithesis. Another alternative would be:

(49) (i) 'p' is true iff [$s(p)$] is true, regardless of the truth of p
      (ii) '$s(p)$' is true iff [$s(p)$] is true, regardless of the truth of p
      (iii) 'p'' is true iff [$s(p')$] is true, regardless of the truth of p' (or p)

i.e. the truth of the whole depends solely on the truth of the performative clause, implicit or explicit. But clearly such a view has the consequence that the truth conditions for all declaratives would be effectively the same, which would be absurd: for any declarative clause p, both *I state that p* and simply p, will be true iff the speaker does so state. But we are now full circle, for that claim, which may be tenable for explicit performatives, seems clearly wrong for sentences without the performative prefix, as we noted initially in connection with example (42).[17] Any semantic theory that for an arbitrary declarative sentence gave as its truth conditions only the conditions under which it would be successfully stated would signally fail to connect language to the world – to utter a declarative would simply be to guarantee that one was issuing correctly a string of morphemes, and not in any way to affirm the way the world is.

We are left with the conclusion that it seems simply impossible to achieve the semantical parallelism between (44) and (45) that the PH

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[17] Indeed the only thorough attempt to work out the truth conditions for performatives, namely that by Aqvist (1972), would assign to (41) (at least if it incorporated *hereby*) a meaning that we can paraphrase as: 'I communicate this sentence to you in this situation and, by doing so, I make a statement that the world is flat'. Such a paraphrase makes clear the peculiar self-referential or **token-reflexive** (see 2.2.4) nature of performative sentences, which sets them apart from non-performatives (see Lyons, 1977a: 781).

requires. One can retreat and accept the PH for all sentences other than declaratives, as Lewis (1972) does, but that is an asymmetry that few linguists would be attracted to, and indeed one which the syntactic arguments for the PH will simply not allow. One should note too that whatever the *semantic* relation of (44) to (45), there is a significant *pragmatic* difference, which will become immediately clear if the reader prefixes each of the sentences in this paragraph with *I hereby state* (R. Lakoff, 1977: 84–5). But if the PH is part of a general programme to reduce pragmatics to ordinary semantics, then appeal can hardly be made to the semantic/pragmatic distinction in order to explain the different usages of (44) and (45) (Gazdar, 1979a: 25).

Now some of the most persuasive evidence for the PH comes from adverbs like *frankly* that appear to modify performative verbs (let us call these **performative adverbs** without prejudging whether in fact they do actually modify such verbs). However, there are significant semantic difficulties here too. Firstly, it is simply not clear that the meanings of the relevant adverbs are indeed parallel in the explicit performative, the (allegedly) implicit performative and the reported performative usages:

(50)   I tell you frankly you're a swine
(51)   Frankly, you're a swine
(52)   John told Bill frankly that he was a swine

According to the PH, *frankly* should modify the verb *tell* (implicit in (51)) in each of these in just the same way. But what *frankly* seems to do in (51) is warn the addressee that a criticism is forthcoming, whereas in (52) it modifies the manner in which the telling was done (Lyons, 1977a: 783). The explicit performative in (50) perhaps allows both interpretations (though prosody, especially a pause after the adverb, can favour a reading as in (51); cf. Sadock, 1974: 38–9). The alleged symmetry here certainly does not unequivocally exist.

A second fact to note is that there are some adverbs that can *only* modify explicit performatives, notably *hereby*, as the following sentences make clear:

(53)   I hereby order you to polish your boots
(54)   ?Hereby polish your boots

Other adverbs, while they may occur with reported performatives (unlike *hereby*), nevertheless can only modify the illocutionary act concurrent with the utterance. Thus *in brief* in both (55) and (56)

modifies the current speech act, and not the reported one in the second example:

(55)   In brief, the performative analysis is untenable
(56)   Harvey claimed, in brief, that the performative analysis is untenable

Such asymmetries make it plausible that performative adverbs cannot in general be assimilated to ordinary adverbs on verbs of communication (but see Sadock, 1974: 37ff).

Thirdly, it is sometimes claimed that complex adverbial expressions like the following are evidence in favour of the PH (Davison, 1973; Sadock, 1974: 38):

(57)   John's at Sue's house, because his car's outside

However, it is clear that the *because*-clause here does not in fact modify any implicit *I state* or *I claim*, but rather an understood *I know* as made explicit in (59):

(58)   I state John's at Sue's house because his car's outside
(59)   I know John's at Sue's house because his car's outside

For if (57) had an underlying structure similar to (58), then John's car's location would have to be taken as the reason for *stating*, whereas in fact it is clearly being offered as grounds for *believing* what is stated. Now whereas it may be true that believing or knowing that p may be a FC on asserting that p, and thus true that such reason adverbials provide evidence for certain aspects of speech act theory in general, the fact that they do not always modify the implicit performative verb shows that they do not provide direct evidence for the PH. Rather, it seems to be appropriate to provide evidence in such a clause that certain pragmatic conditions on the speech act hold (see Mittwoch, 1977: 186ff). In a similar way note that *briefly* in (60) does not paraphrase as (61), but rather as (62):

(60)   Briefly, who do you think will win the gold medal?
(61)   I ask you briefly who you think will win the gold medal
(62)   Tell me briefly who will win the gold medal

but the relevant implicit performative verb must be one of asking not one of telling (though see here the theory that performatives **lexically decompose** so that asking is derived from requesting to tell, expounded in Sadock, 1974: 149ff).

Finally, performative adverbs participate in the general problem associated with the truth-conditional assessment of declaratives. The issue is this. If we argue that the adverb in (63) is evidence for an implicit performative clause, as in (64), then (63) should have the same truth conditions as (64). But as we have seen, (63) seems to be true just in case semantics is a bore, and (64) true just in case I say so.

(63)   Confidentially, semantics is a bore
(64)   I say to you confidentially that semantics is a bore

So to assimilate (63) to (64), however it may help us understand the *syntax* of performative adverbs, ultimately only clouds our understanding of their semantics. Nevertheless to reject the PH lands us equally in a quandary, for then we are left with the 'dangling' adverb in (63) – how is this to be interpreted in the absence of a verb it might modify?

Boër & Lycan (1978) term one version of this dilemma the **performadox**. Assuming for purposes of argument that the PH is syntactically correct, they argue that either (a) one takes the Thesis view, namely that the performative clause itself is not *semantically* interpreted in terms of truth conditions at all, in which case the associated adverbs (as in (63) and (64)) must also be uninterpreted, which seems quite *ad hoc,* or (b) one does interpret the performative clause, in which case one invariably gets the truth conditions wrong. Note that if we reject the PH, and allow (63) and (64) to have different truth conditions, we are still left with the dangling adverb in (63). We could claim that *confidentially* is ambiguous between a sentence-modifying reading appropriate to (63) and a predicate-modifying reading appropriate to (64), but then we would have to claim this for *all* performative adverbs that can show up without explicit performatives, including the productive adverbial modifiers with *because, since, in case,* etc., as in (65):

(65)   Semantics is a bore, since you ask
            Semantics is a bore, in case you didn't know

(see Rutherford, 1970 for further examples, and the discussion in Cresswell, 1973: 233–4). It must be confessed that the 'performadox' is ultimately a problem for Thesis theorists too. Cresswell's (1973: 234) inelegant solution is to consider (63) strictly speaking ill-formed, and pragmatically elliptical for (64). Boër & Lycan (1978) simply

propose a compromise, which is to accept the PH for implicit performatives just where one is forced to by dangling performative adverbs, and reject it elsewhere, reaping the reduced harvest of semantic incoherencies that one has then cultivated.[18]

We may conclude this discussion of performative adverbs by noting that although they seem at first sight the strongest evidence for the PH, they in fact raise a host of problems which the PH in no way solves. As such, they certainly do not constitute evidence in favour of it.

There are further difficulties for attempts to reduce illocutionary force to truth-conditional semantics. Take, for example, the attempted reduction of FCs to aspects of the meaning of the performative verbs that they are associated with. It soon becomes clear that the relevant aspects of meaning cannot be truth-conditional. Consider, for example, (66) and its corresponding implicit performative version (67):

(66)   I request you to please close the door
(67)   Please close the door

Due to the presence of an explicit or implicit verb of requesting, these would have as part of their meaning the FC in (68):

(68)   The door is not closed (or at least will not be at the time the request is to be complied with)

If (68) was an entailment from (66) or (67), simply by virtue of the meaning of *request*, then (69) should entail (70), and (71) be a contradiction.

(69)   John requested Bill to close the door
(70)   At the time the action was to be carried out, the door was not closed
(71)   John requested Bill to close the door, but it was already closed

Again, these are the wrong results, and by *reductio* we must abandon the assumption that FCs can be captured truth-conditionally as part of the semantics of the verbs in question. The properties of most FCs

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[18] Other theorists hope to escape some of these dilemmas by alternative versions of the PH. Thus Lyons (1977a: 782) and Mittwoch (1977) suggest that the associated implicit performative clause should be *paratactically* juxtaposed with, rather than superordinate to, the content of the utterance. But as Boër & Lycan (1978) show, all such suggestions flounder equally in the 'performadox'.

are in any case far too general to be attributed to the meanings of particular lexical items (Allwood, 1977). For example, the **ability conditions** (i.e. the preparatory conditions requiring that the speaker or addressee can perform the relevant actions required) on promising and offering seem to be based on the simple rational criterion that it makes no sense to commit oneself to attempting actions one knows one cannot achieve; similarly, for the ability conditions on requests, commands and suggestions: it would simply be less than rational to sincerely attempt to get other agents to do what one knows they cannot. Such constraints on rational action in general are quite independent of language, let alone part of the meaning of performative verbs. One might try to assimilate FCs to the category of pragmatic presupposition, but they can be shown to have quite different properties from core examples of presupposition, and would be better assimilated to the category of conversational implicature (see Rogers, 1978).

Finally, even if it turned out that performative sentences, implicit and explicit, could be simply handled within a truth-conditional framework (as Sadock (in preparation) continues to hope), some of the basic intuitions that underlay Austin's work would still not have been accounted for. For the notion of illocutionary force was specifically directed to the action-like properties of utterances, and these would in no way be captured by such a treatment. For, essentially, an utterance like (72) would not be treated as basically different in kind from (73); both would be reports of events, but the event reported in the first would simply be concurrent with the utterance.

(72)   I bet you six pence I'll win the race
(73)   I betted you six pence that I'd win the race

Our sense is that there is something over and above a mere concurrent report in (72), which is curiously lacking in other formats for concurrent reports like that in (74):

(74)   I am betting you six pence I'll win the race

That utterances do have action-like properties is clear from simple observations like the following. Some utterances, e.g. requests and promises, have actions as rule-governed consequences; actions can substitute for many utterances and vice versa (consider, for example,

the utterances accompanying a small purchase in a shop); some utterances do rely, as Austin insisted, on elaborate non-linguistic arrangements, and in such arrangements linguistic and non-linguistic actions are systematically inter-leaved (consider christening a ship, performing a marriage service, etc.). Finally, Austin correctly attached some importance to what he called *illocutionary uptake*; thus if I utter (72) in such a way that you fail to hear, it is fairly clear that (73) would be false as a report of what had transpired. It seems therefore that in order for a speech act to 'come off', it is ordinarily required that the addressee(s) may be supposed to have heard, registered and in some cases (like (72)) responded to what has been said (exceptions, perhaps, are things like curses, invocations and blessings).

5.4.2   *Syntactic problems*

In addition to these semantic incoherencies and in-adequacies, the PH required by Antithesis is assailed by syntactic problems. We can do no more here than indicate the scope of these (the reader is referred to Anderson, 1971, Fraser, 1974a, Leech, 1976 and Gazdar, 1979a: Chapter 2, for further details). But the following is a sample of the problems. First, as Austin himself noted, there are many cases where explicit performatives do not refer to the speaker, as in the following examples:

(75)   The company hereby undertakes to replace any can of Doggo-Meat that fails to please, with no questions asked
(76)   It is herewith disclosed that the value of the estate left by Marcus T. Bloomingdale was 4,785,758 dollars

and others where the addressee is not the *target* (see 2.2.1) as in:

(77)   Johnny is to come in now

However such examples were handled, they would considerably complicate the PH. For unless the performative clause has strictly definable properties, it will be impossible to specify it uniquely in syntactic terms; and if that cannot be done then the very special, indeed extra-ordinary, syntactic rules that apply just to performative clauses (notably, wholesale performative clause deletion) cannot be properly restricted. One such crucial defining property might be that the performative clause is always the highest clause in any sentence. However, examples like (78) seem to be clear counter-examples to such a generalization:

(78)   We regret that the company is forced by economic circumstances to hereby request you to tender your resignation at your earliest convenience

Proponents of the PH are forced by such examples either to entertain otherwise unmotivated rules of 'performative clause lowering', or to claim that the illocutionary force of (78) is in fact assertoric, and only by pragmatic implication a request.

Further problems arise from the fact that many sentences seem to involve more than one illocutionary force. For example, (79) has a non-restrictive relative clause that is clearly assertoric in force despite being embedded within a question:

(79)   Does John, who could never learn elementary calculus, really intend to do a PhD in mathematics?

If every sentence has only one performative clause, it would seem to be necessary to derive (79) from an 'amalgamation' of two distinct derivations (see G. Lakoff, 1974). Similar difficulties arise even with tag-questions like:

(80)   Wittgenstein was an Oxford philosopher, wasn't he?

where the tag carries a question force that modifies the assertoric force of the declarative clause (see Hudson, 1975 for discussion). And even where we have one unitary syntactic clause in surface structure, in order to capture the intuitive illocutionary force we may have to hypothesize a conjunction of two underlying performative clauses. Thus (81) has been analysed as having an underlying structure similar to (82) (Sadock, 1970; but see Green, 1975):

(81)   Why don't you become an astronaut?
(82)   I ask you why you don't become an astronaut and I suggest that you do

But clearly a better paraphrase would be:

(83)   I ask you why you don't become an astronaut, and if you can think of no good reasons why not, I suggest that you do

Yet clearly (83) is not *syntactically* related to (81). There therefore seem to be distinct limits to the extent to which one can hope for illocutionary force to be mirrored in syntactic structure.

But perhaps the most important syntactic objections to the PH are the following. Firstly, it would require an otherwise atypical and

unmotivated rule of performative deletion in the majority of cases (for all implicit performatives), and much more complex rules, again not independently motivated, to deal with cases like (78)–(81). Secondly, exactly the same reasoning that led to the positing of the performative clause in the first place leads to arguments that undermine it. For example, the same anaphoric arguments that were discussed above as motivations for the performative analysis, lead to the conclusion that there must in fact be a clause still higher than that, and so on ad infinitum (see Gazdar, 1979a: 21). Further, the anaphoric phenomena themselves seem to be pragmatically conditioned rather than syntactically conditioned (as indicated by the qualification we had to make about the unacceptability of (31), discourse-initially). Even the facts about the adverbs that seem to modify implicit performatives, do not in fact support the PH (Boër & Lycan, 1978). For performative adverbs unfortunately turn up in syntactic locations that are not easily reconciled with the claim that they modify the highest (performative) clause (Mittwoch, 1977). Note, for example, the following possible locations for *frankly*:

(84)   It's because, frankly, I don't trust the Conservatives that I voted for Labour
(85)   I voted for Labour because, frankly, I don't trust the Conservatives

There seems to be no independently required syntactic apparatus that can be held responsible for lowering these adverbs from their hypothetical location in the performative clause into the embedded clauses in which they in fact appear. In the case of (85), one might try to rescue the hypothesis by claiming that there are in fact two performative clauses and *frankly* modifies the second, as in (86):

(86)   I tell you that I voted for Labour because I tell you frankly I don't trust the Conservatives

But that of course gets the semantics of the *because*-clause wrong: (86) asserts that I'm telling you something because I'm telling you something else, which is not the meaning of (85) at all (see Mittwoch, 1977: 179 for further syntactic difficulties with performative adverbs). Finally, as we shall see when we come to talk of **indirect speech acts**, the syntactic mechanisms that are required to handle those phenomena are powerful enough to entirely replicate the effects of

the PH without actually having performative clauses (see Sadock, 1975).

For all these reasons, and others, Antithesis cannot be considered an adequate theory of illocutionary force. It fails both on internal grounds, because it leads to semantic and syntactic incoherencies, and on external grounds because it fails to capture the basic intuitions that led to the theory of speech acts in the first place. The collapse of Antithesis would appear to leave Thesis unassailed, though not without its own problems. For of course it inherits in part the problems with the evaluation of performative adverbs, and is obliged to offer some pragmatic account of all the distributional phenomena that prompted the PH in the first place. No such account has been worked out in detail, and in general there has been surprisingly little recent thought on how the apparent pragmatic conditioning of syntactic facts should be accommodated within a general linguistic theory (what ideas there have been will be considered in section 5.5; see also the remarks in earlier Chapters in connection with deixis (2.2), conventional implicature (3.2.3) and presupposition (4.2)). However, there are further reasons to doubt the adequacy of Thesis too, and there is at least one alternative and elegant way of thinking about speech acts. Before proceeding to it, let us discuss a pervasive phenomenon that is a serious problem for both Thesis and Antithesis as they are usually advanced.

5.5 Indirect speech acts: a problem for Thesis and Antithesis

A major problem for both Thesis and Antithesis is constituted by the phenomena known as **indirect speech acts** (or ISAs for short). The notion only makes sense if one subscribes to the notion of a **literal force**, i.e. to the view that illocutionary force is built into sentence form. Let us call this the **literal force hypothesis** (or LFH for short). As Gazdar (1981) has pointed out, LFH will amount to subscribing to the following:

(87)   (i)   Explicit performatives have the force named by the performative verb in the matrix clause

         (ii) Otherwise, the three major sentence-types in English, namely the imperative, interrogative and declarative, have the forces traditionally associated with them, namely ordering (or requesting), questioning and stating respectively

(with, of course, the exception of explicit performatives which happen to be in declarative format)

It is clear that Antithesis theorists have to subscribe to LFH by virtue of their commitment to the PH: by that hypothesis explicit performatives directly express their illocutionary forces, and the three basic sentence-types will be reflexes of underlying performative verbs of ordering, questioning and stating. However, Thesis theorists are also committed to LFH in so far as they think that they are engaged in a semantical exercise characterizing the meaning of the various IFIDs (illocutionary force indicating devices), which clearly include explicit performatives and the main sentence-types. Certainly Searle is overtly committed to LFH, and Austin's emphasis on the "conventional" nature of illocutionary force and its indicators would seem also to commit him to LFH.

Given the LFH, any sentence that fails to have the force associated with it by rule (i) or (ii) in (87) above is a problematic exception, and the standard line is to claim that, contrary to first intuitions, the sentence does in fact have the rule-associated force as its *literal* force, but simply has in addition an inferred *indirect* force. Thus any usages other than those in accordance with (i) or (ii) are *indirect speech acts*.

The basic problem that then arises is that *most* usages are indirect. For example, the imperative is very rarely used to issue requests in English; instead we tend to employ sentences that only indirectly do requesting. Moreover the kinds of sentences that are thus employed are very varied (see e.g. Ervin-Tripp, 1976 for some empirical generalizations). For example, we could construct an indefinitely long list of ways of indirectly requesting an addressee to shut the door (see also Searle, 1975):

(88)   a. I want you to close the door
               I'd be much obliged if you'd close the door
         b. Can you close the door?
               Are you able by any chance to close the door?
         c. Would you close the door?
               Won't you close the door?
         d. Would you mind closing the door?
               Would you be willing to close the door?
         e. You ought to close the door
               It might help to close the door
               Hadn't you better close the door?
         f. May I ask you to close the door?

Would you mind awfully if I was to ask you to close the door?

I am sorry to have to tell you to please close the door

g. Did you forget the door?

Do us a favour with the door, love

How about a bit less breeze?

Now Johnny, what do big people do when they come in?

Okay, Johnny, what am I going to say next?

Given that the primary function of each of these could, in the right circumstances, amount to a request to close the door, the LFH theorist has to devise some way of deriving their request force from sentence forms that, according to rule (ii) in (87) above, are prototypically assertions and questions rather than requests (since they are not, with one exception, in imperative form).

The diversity of actual usage thus constitutes a substantial challenge to LFH, the theory that there is a simple form:force correlation. On the face of it, what people *do* with sentences seems quite unrestricted by the surface form (i.e. sentence-type) of the sentences uttered. However, before we ask how Thesis and Antithesis theorists might respond to this challenge, we should first consider another but related problem that is posed by ISAs. This problem is that ISAs often have syntactic (or at least distributional) reflexes associated not only with their surface sentence-type (and thus, on LFH, with their literal force), but also with their indirect or effective illocutionary force. A few examples of this phenomenon will make the dimensions of the problem clear.

First, consider the quite restricted distribution of *please* in the pre-verbal position – it occurs in direct requests as in (89), but not in non-requests as in (90) (the ? here indicates at least pragmatic anomaly, and some would claim ungrammaticality):

(89)   Please shut the door
You please shut the door
I ask you to please shut the door

(90)   ?The sun please rises in the West
?The Battle of Hastings please took place in 1066

However, *please* also occurs pre-verbally in certain indirect requests (roughly, those that incorporate the propositional content of the direct request), as in:

(91)   Can you please close the door?
Will you please close the door?
Would you please close the door?
I want you to please close the door

Consequently, in order to describe succinctly the distribution of this English morpheme, we seem to need to refer to a single functional class, namely the set of effective requests, direct or indirect (for further discussion see Gordon & Lakoff, 1971; Sadock, 1974: 88–91, 104–8).

Similarly, consider a performative adverb like *obviously*, or a parenthetical clause like *I believe*, which seem to be restricted to assertions, as (93) makes clear:

(92)   a. The square root of a quarter is, obviously, a half
           b. The square root of a quarter is, I believe, a half
(93)   a. ?Is, obviously, the square root of a quarter a half?
           b. ?Is, I believe, the square root of a quarter a half?

However, such expressions can occur not only with direct assertions as in (92), but with assertions in the guise of interrogatives as in (94) or in the form of imperatives as in (95):

(94)   a. May I tell you that, obviously, the square root of a quarter is a half?
           b. May I tell you that, I believe, the square root of a quarter is a half?
(95)   a. Let me tell you that, obviously, the square root of a quarter is a half
           b. Let me tell you that, I believe, the square root of a quarter is a half

Again the generalization is that these modifiers seem restricted to utterances that can have the force of an assertion, whatever the sentence-type of the linguistic expression that performs the assertion (see Davison, 1975). Similar remarks can be made for certain kinds of *if*-clause that seem to mention felicity conditions on the illocutionary act being performed, as in:

(96)   Pass me the wrench, if you can

where the *if*-clause serves to lift the normally assumed ability condition on requests. Now notice that such a clause occurs happily with indirect requests, as in (97), but not with questions, whether direct or indirect, as in (98) (see Heringer, 1972):

(97) a. I want you to pass me the wrench, if you can
      b. Will you pass the wrench, if you can
      c. Let me have the wrench, if you can
(98) a. ?Have you got the wrench, if you can
      b. ?I want to know if you have the wrench, if you can
      c. ?Let me ask you if you have the wrench, if you can

Again, we seem to need to refer to the effective force of an utterance, irrespective of its form, if we are to express the restrictions on these clauses.

Another kind of distributional pattern that is associated with ISAs is the sort of contraction or deletion illustrated by the sentences below:

(99) a. Why don't you read in bed?
      b. Why not read in bed?

Here the first sentence can either be used as a genuine request for reasons, or as a suggestion, but the form with *do*-deletion in the second sentence seems only to allow the suggestion interpretation (Gordon & Lakoff, 1975). Similarly, the contraction from (100a) to (100b) forces an advice interpretation of the latter:

(100) a. You ought to pay your bills on time
      b. Oughta pay your bills on time

and this explains the oddity of:

(101)   ?Oughta pay your bills on time, and you do

since one cannot felicitously advise a course of action that has already been adopted (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 275). Such examples, of which there are many, appear at least to provide *prima facie* evidence for the systematic pragmatic conditioning of various syntactic, or at least distributional, processes.

There are many other kinds of apparent interaction between syntax and indirect illocutionary force (for further examples see Sadock, 1974: Chapter 4; Mittwoch, 1976; Gazdar, 1980a). Ross (1975) concluded, on the basis of one such putative interaction, that pragmatic constraints must be referred to during the syntactic derivation of sentences and suggested that just as Generative Semanticists have argued for a hybrid 'semantax', so these facts motivate a general 'pragmantax'. An alternative, much more in line with current thinking, is not to restrict the syntax by pragmatic

constraints at all (thus generating all the ? sentences above), but to have an additional set of pragmatic filters that screen out pragmatically anomalous collocations. But in any case, a general linguistic theory seems called upon to provide an account of the interaction between illocutionary force, both direct and indirect, and apparently syntactic processes.

The LFH is thus confronted with a two-pronged problem: on the one hand, it seems to make the wrong predictions about the assignment of *force* to sentence *form*, and on the other it needs to provide an account of how and why sentences seem able to bear the syntactic stigmata, or distributional markers, of their indirect forces. Two basic kinds of theory have been proposed to rescue LFH, which we may call **idiom theory** and **inference theory**.

According to idiom theories, the indirectness in many putative cases of ISAs is really only apparent. Forms like those in (88a)–(88d) are in fact all *idioms* for, and semantically equivalent to, 'I hereby request you to close the door'. Forms like *Can you VP?* are idioms for 'I request you to VP' in just the same way that *kick the bucket* is an idiom for 'die', i.e. they are not compositionally analysed, but merely recorded whole in the lexicon with the appropriate semantic equivalence. As a point in their favour, idiom theorists can point to lexical idiosyncrasies of ISA formats – for example *Can you VP?* seems a more standard format for indirect requests than *Are you able to VP?*; there are moreover forms like *Could you VP?* that seem difficult to interpret appropriately in a literal way at all. Further, there appear to be some ways in which the hypothesized idioms behave syntactically like their corresponding non-idiomatic direct counterparts. For example, consider again the distribution of pre-verbal *please* in direct requests and apparently indirect requests. But suppose the latter are really idioms for requests, then they will have the same underlying structure or semantic representation as direct requests (indeed, they are also direct requests, in the relevant sense of *direct*). Therefore, on the idiom theory the distributional constraint can be simply captured: pre-verbal *please* can be conditioned so that it can only occur if there is a verb of requesting in the highest clause of the underlying structure or the semantic representation (the actual mechanisms involved are dependent, of course, on views of the nature of, and the relations between, semantics and syntax).

Idiom theory has been seriously and energetically maintained,

especially by Sadock (1974, 1975; see also Green, 1975). However, there are overwhelming problems for it. First, responses to utterances can attend to both the literal force (i.e. that associated by rule (i) or (ii) in (87) above with the syntactic form in question) and the alleged idiomatic force, as in (102):

(102)   A: Can you please lift that suitcase down for me?
           B: Sure I can; here you are

This suggests at least that both readings are simultaneously available and utilized, but not in the way that they might be in a pun. Secondly, the argument that idiom theory is the only way to get the syntactic or distributional facts right for phenomena like pre-verbal *please* has the embarrassment that whenever there's a grammatical reflex of indirect force, idiom theorists must claim an idiom. It follows that every sentence (other than direct requests) with pre-verbal *please* must be an idiom with requesting force, e.g. the sentences in (103):

(103)   I'd like you to please X
           May I remind you to please X
           Would you mind if I was to ask you to please X
           I am sorry that I have to tell you to please X

Unfortunately this list seems to be of indefinite length, so if we are to treat these forms as idioms for 'I request you to X', the lexicon will have to contain an indefinite number of such forms. But lexicons are strictly finite, and this suggests that forms like those in (103) are not really idioms at all.[19]

Thirdly, idiom theory suggests that there should be a considerable comprehension problem: forms like *Can you VP?, Will you VP?* and so on will each be *n*-ways ambiguous. How does a listener know what's meant? Although prosodic, and particularly intonational, factors may clearly help, they do not seem to fully 'disambiguate' the forces with which sentences are being used (Liberman & Sag, 1974). In effect, idiom theory will need to be complemented by a powerful pragmatic theory that will account for which interpretation will be taken in which context, i.e. a theory that will bridge the gap

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[19] A corollary of this point is that the set of ISAs that allows the syntactic or distributional marking of their indirect force is not coincident with the set of idiomatic ISAs (see Brown & Levinson, 1978: 144ff); in which case the attempt to solve the distributional problems of ISAs by appeal to idiom theory fails in any case.

between what is said and what is meant (intended). But if such a theory is required anyway, then we don't need idiom theory at all, because we will in effect have need of an *inference* theory in any case (see below). Similarly, since idiom theory could at most handle cases like (88a)–(88d) (and not (88e)–(88g)), we would need an independent inference theory to get the rest of the ISAs which are based on the inventive use of hints and the like, in which case again we could use such a theory to do what idiom theory does.

Finally, idioms are by definition non-compositional, and are therefore likely to be as idiosyncratic to speech communities as the arbitrary sound–meaning correspondences of lexical items. However, most of the basic ISA structures translate across languages, and where they don't it is usually for good semantic or cultural reasons (see Brown & Levinson, 1978: 143–7). Such strong parallels across languages and cultures in the details of the construction of ISAs constitute good *prima facie* evidence that ISAs are not, or not primarily, idioms.

We are left with inference theories as the only way of maintaining LFH. The basic move here is to claim that ISAs have the literal force associated with the surface form of the relevant sentence by rules (i) and (ii) in (87) above. So, *Can you VP?* has the literal force of a question; it may also in addition have the conveyed or indirect force of a request, by virtue of an inference that is made taking contextual conditions into account. One can think of the additional indirect force as, variously, a perlocution, a Gricean implicature, or an additional conventionally specified illocution. There are, therefore, a number of distinct inference theories, but they share the following essential properties:

(i) The literal meaning and the literal force of an utterance is computed by, and available to, participants

(ii) For an utterance to be an *indirect* speech act, there must be an inference-trigger, i.e. some indication that the literal meaning and/or literal force is conversationally inadequate in the context and must be 'repaired' by some inference

(iii) There must be specific principles or rules of inference that will derive, from the literal meaning and force and the context, the relevant indirect force

(iv) There must be pragmatically sensitive linguistic rules or constraints, which will govern the occurrence of, for example, pre-verbal *please* in both direct and indirect requests

The first such inference theory was that proposed by Gordon & Lakoff (1971, 1975). In that theory, property (i) was met by assuming the PH; while the trigger in (ii) was provided whenever the literal force of an utterance was blocked by the context. For property (iii), some specific inference rules were offered, **conversational postulates**, modelled on Carnap's **meaning postulates** (which state analytic equivalences not captured elsewhere in a semantical system – see Allwood, Andersson & Dahl, 1977: 144), but with additional reference to contextual factors. Thus, an inference rule was suggested that stated that if a speaker says *Can you VP?* (or any other expression of the same concepts) in a context in which a question reading could not be intended, then his utterance would be equivalent to his having said *I request you to VP*. Similar rules were proposed for *Will you VP?*, *I want you to VP*, and so on. So far this was merely a descriptive enterprise, but Gordon & Lakoff went on to note a compact generalization behind such inference rules, namely that to state or question a felicity condition on a speech act (with some restrictions), where the literal force of such a statement or question is blocked by context, counts as performing that specific speech act. More specifically, Gordon & Lakoff suggested that one can state a *speaker-based* FC as in (104), and question a *hearer-based* FC as in (105):

(104)　　I want more ice-cream
(105)　　Can you pass me the ice-cream please?

although a more accurate description would be that one can only state speaker-based FCs, as in (104) (Forman, 1974), while one can state or question all other FCs, although to state them may be less than polite,[20] as in (106):

(106)　　You will do the washing up
　　　　You can pass me the salt

Such a general principle elegantly captures the kinds of examples of ISAs illustrated in (88a)–(88d). Thus the examples in (88a) are statements of the sincerity condition on requests, that one sincerely wants what one requests; the (88b) examples are questionings of the ability (preparatory) condition on requests, to the effect that one believes that the addressee has the ability to do the thing requested;

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[20] For some general predictions of what makes speech acts more, or less, polite see Leech, 1977; Brown & Levinson, 1978: 140–1.

the (88c) examples are questionings of the propositional content condition on requests, namely that the propositional content be a specific future act of the addressee's; and the (88d) examples can be claimed to be questionings of the FC that distinguishes requests from orders or demands, namely that the speaker believes that the addressee might not mind doing the act requested (here see Heringer, 1972; cf. Lyons, 1977a: 748–9).

The account is not limited to requests and extends naturally to offers for example, as readers may verify for themselves. Moreover this general principle, that by questioning or asserting a FC on an act one can indirectly perform that act itself, successfully predicts ISAs across quite unrelated languages and cultures (see Brown & Levinson, 1978: 141ff). In fact, the general principle makes the specific *conversational postulates* redundant, for there will be no need, given the general principle, for a language user to learn such specific rules of inference.

Finally, to handle property (iv), Gordon & Lakoff suggested the use of **context-sensitive transderivational constraints**. Transderivational constraints were rules already proposed within the theory of generative semantics that allowed one derivation to be governed by reference to another, and could thus be used to block, for example, certain structural ambiguities (see G. Lakoff, 1973). These could now be used to govern processes like *please*-insertion in indirect requests by reference to the parallel derivation of the explicit performative or direct request. Such rules allowed one to state that the *please* in (107) is acceptable, just because it can also occur in this pre-verbal position in (108), a sentence related to (107) by a conversational postulate – that is, a context-sensitive rule of interpretation.

(107)   Can you please pass the salt?
(108)   I request you to please pass the salt

However, there appear to be serious problems with such rules thought of as syntactic operations. In the first place they belong to the now defunct framework of Generative Semantics. Secondly, syntactic processes are generally thought of as being strictly intra-derivational. But such rules can be equally well stated as pragmatic filtering conditions on syntactic strings (as shown by Gazdar & Klein, 1977). More problematic, perhaps, is a methodological objection:

transderivational rules are so powerful that they undermine, for example, all the arguments for the PH (as Sadock (1975) points out). For, given such rules, the troublesome reflexive pronoun in (30) above could be governed by reference to the parallel derivation of (32), without hypostatizing a covert performative clause in (30) to govern the pronoun instead. However, it is arguable that the elimination of the PH is in fact a desirable result (as argued in section 5.4 above), in which case such rules (or pragmatic filters) provide an alternative account of whatever genuine observations survive the collapse of Antithesis.

Another version of inference theory is suggested by Searle (1975). Property (i) will be handled by his version of speech act theory; property (ii), the trigger requirement, will be provided by Grice's theory of conversational co-operation (Grice, 1975), although on this account the literal force will not be blocked,[21] but rather judged conversationally inadequate alone; and property (iii), the inference principles, will be provided by Grice's general theory of conversational implicature. Since the latter is a general theory of pragmatic inference, this approach, unlike Gordon & Lakoff's, proposes to assimilate ISAs to a broad range of other phenomena that includes metaphor, irony and all other cases where speaker's intent and sentence-meaning are seriously at variance. Such an approach has the great advantage of promising to explain ISAs that are not directly based on FCs, as in (88e)–(88g) above, and thus seems to offer, at least potentially, more than a mere partial solution to the ISA problem. It then becomes necessary, though, to explain why those ISAs based on FCs are so prevalent and successful, and this Searle fails to do satisfactorily (here see an alternative inference theory sketched in Brown & Levinson, 1978: 143).

Incidentally, both these inference approaches fail to attend to the motivation for ISAs: why, for example, do speakers so often prefer the contortions of (110) to the simplicity and directness of (109)? Clearly, on the assumption of Gricean co-operation there must be reason to depart from the direct expression of the relevant speech act.

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[21] Searle has a problem here which he does not address: he has to claim that, for example, (107) is *literally* a question, and only by additional inference a request, yet (107) used in this way will fail to meet just about all of his FCs on questions (Gazdar, 1981).

(109)   Please lend me some cash

(110)   I don't suppose that you would by any chance be able to lend
me some cash, would you?

Labov & Fanshel (1977) suggest that (110) is simply (109) with a
bundle of "mitigators", or arbitrary politeness markers, tacked on
in front. But this does nothing to explain why the mitigators do the
job they do, and besides will not explain the verbal inflection (here
-ing) in such examples as (111):

(111)   Would you mind lending me some cash, by any chance?

Attempts to explain the rationale behind the **interactional pessi-
mism** in (110), and elsewhere, appeal to the systematic pressures of
strategies of politeness (see Brown & Levinson, 1978; also R. Lakoff,
1973b and Leech, 1977). By deviating from the simple and direct
(109), one can then communicate by conversational implicature that
these omnipresent considerations of politeness are being taken into
account in performing the relevant speech act.

However, there is a third solution, more radical than idiom or
inference theory, to the problem of ISAs, and that is to reject the
fundamental assumption (LFH) that sentences have literal forces at
all (see Gazdar, 1981). It will follow that there are no ISAs, and thus
no ISA problem, but merely a general problem of mapping speech
act force onto sentences in context. Illocutionary force is then entirely
pragmatic and moreover has no direct and simple correlation with
sentence-form or -meaning. But what would such a radical theorist
say about explicit performatives and the major sentence-types, for
these seem to embody the corresponding illocutionary forces? What
he must say is something along the following lines. The three major
sentence-types in English must be given a distinguishing truth-
conditional characterization of a very general (and relatively uninfor-
mative) sort. For example, the meaning of the interrogative
sentence-type can be thought of as an open proposition, closed by the
set of appropriate answers (see Hull, 1975), or a particular interrogative
may be held to denote the set of its true answers (see Karttunen, 1977;
and see Schmerling, 1978 for a similar approach to imperatives). Such
meanings are intendedly general, and are consistent with quite
different illocutionary forces. Thus interrogatives can be used with
the illocutionary forces of 'real' questions, 'exam' questions,
rhetorical questions, requests, offers, suggestions, threats and for

many other functions, without over-riding some 'literal force' (which concept has been abandoned). Such an approach will fit well with the demonstration that there are no isolable necessary and sufficient conditions on, for example, questionhood, but rather that the nature of the use to which interrogatives are put can vary subtly with the nature of the *language-games* or contexts in which they are used (see Levinson, 1979a for the arguments here). In a similar way, explicit performatives can be assigned truth conditions that are as general as is consistent with their actual use. Contrast this approach with the long-standing tradition, supported by Hare (1949), Lewis (1969: 186), Hintikka (1974), Gordon & Lakoff (1975), and in part by Sadock (1974: 120ff), to the effect that questions in interrogative form are in fact *requests to tell*. Such a view simply does not fit with all the usages of questions, and predicts wrongly, for example, that *no* as a response to a *yes/no* question might be interpretable as a refusal to comply (see Lyons (1977a: 753–68), who suggests that interrogatives simply "grammaticalize the feature of doubt").

Such a radical solution is obviously more than just a way of handling the problem of ISAs; it is also a general approach to speech acts in which semantics plays only a minimal role, by assigning very broad meanings to sentence-types, and also, where appropriate, to explicit performatives. What evidence can be adduced in favour of it? Firstly, it is consistent with the very general use to which the three basic sentence-types are put in English and other languages. For example, imperatives are rarely used to command or request in conversational English (see Ervin-Tripp, 1976), but occur regularly in recipes and instructions, offers (*Have another drink*), welcomings (*Come in*), wishes (*Have a good time*), curses and swearings (*Shut up*), and so on (see Bolinger, 1967). On the alternative set of theories that subscribe to LFH, just about all the actual usages of imperatives in English will therefore have to be considered ISAs, whose understanding is routed through a determination of a literal order or request, usually quite irrelevantly. Even sentences in explicit performative form can be used with different illocutionary forces from those named in the performative verb, as illustrated by (15) above.

Secondly, theorists who hold LFH will find themselves subscribing to an inference theory of ISAs (since the idiom theory has the difficulties outlined above). They therefore hold that the indirect force of an ISA is calculated on the basis of the literal force. But there

are a number of cases where this seems not only implausible (as with the use of imperatives in English), but quite untenable. For example, the following would have to have the literal force of a request for permission to remind:

(112)   May I remind you that jackets and ties are required if you wish
          to use the bar on the 107th floor, sir

Yet (112) cannot felicitously have that force, because reminding is done simply by uttering (112) without such permission being granted. LFH lands one in an awkward position on a number of such examples (see Gazdar, 1981).

Proponents of LFH may perhaps point to the reliable appearance of the three basic sentence-types in the world's languages (see Sadock & Zwicky, in press) as evidence that some such form:force correlation does exist. But it is important to see that a mere approximate correlation of the three sentence-types with their traditional corresponding forces (questions, orders and statements) is not sufficient evidence for LFH. Such a correlation can be accounted for, in so far as it has a firm basis, by assigning truth-conditional meanings to each sentence-type in such a way that rational language users would find them generally useful for the associated purpose. Nevertheless, one may hope that more cross-linguistic work can be brought to bear on the tenability of LFH.

For these and many other reasons, a very good case can be made for abandoning LFH. We are then thrown back on the need for an adequate pragmatic theory of speech acts, or at least a theory that subsumes whatever is valid in the intuitions that lay behind speech act theory in the first place.

5.6   The context-change theory of speech acts

One candidate for such a pragmatic theory of speech acts is a view that treats speech acts as operations (in the set-theoretic sense) on context, i.e. as functions from contexts into contexts. A context must be understood here to be a set of propositions, describing the beliefs, knowledge, commitments and so on of the participants in a discourse. The basic intuition is very simple: when a sentence is uttered more has taken place than merely the expression of its meaning; in addition, the set of background assumptions has been altered. The contribution that an utterance makes to this change in

the context is its speech act force or potential. Thus if I assert that p, I add to the context that I am committed to p.

On this view, most speech acts add some propositions to the context, e.g. assertions, promises and orders work in this way. We may express each of these as functions from contexts into contexts very roughly along the following lines:

(i) An *assertion* that p is a function from a context where the speaker S is not committed to p (and perhaps, on a strong theory of assertion, where H the addressee does not know that p), into a context in which S is committed to the justified true belief that p (and, on the strong version, into one in which H does know that p)

(ii) A *promise* that p is a function from a context where S is not committed to bringing about the state of affairs described in p, into one in which S is so committed

(iii) An *order* that p is a function from a context in which H is not required by S to bring about the state of affairs described by p, into one in which H is so required

Such analyses are capable of considerable refinement, and the reader is directed to work by Hamblin (1971), Ballmer (1978), Stalnaker (1978) and Gazdar (1981) for sophisticated treatments.

One should note that not all speech acts add propositions to the context; some remove them – e.g. permissions, recantations, abolitions, disavowals. Thus, for example, we could characterize the giving of permission as follows:

(iv) A *permission* that (or for) p is a function from a context in which the state of affairs described by p is prohibited, into one in which that state of affairs is not prohibited

thus capturing the intuition that it makes *no sense* (at least in some systems of deontic logic – see Hilpinen, 1971) to permit what is not prohibited.

One of the main attractions of the context-change theory is that it can be rigorously expressed using set-theoretic concepts. There is no appeal, as there is in most versions of Thesis, to matters of intention and other concepts that resist formalization. The theory is only now becoming generally considered, and it is too early to assess its prospects with any confidence.[22] Important questions that arise, though, are the following:

[22] One may, though, have initial reservations – there are doubts about defining contexts wholly as sets of propositions, and there is also a real possibility that

(i)   How general a theory is it? Can exhortations, curses, expletives, reminders and the like all be adequately expressed in such a framework?

(ii)   Can the full range of speech acts be accommodated with reasonable economy, i.e. how large is the set of primitive concepts, like *commitment, obligation* and so on, that have to be marshalled in definitions like those above? The real interest of the theory depends in part on just how few of these are actually required

(iii)   Can such a theory capture the intuitive relations that we feel to exist between some pairs of closely related speech acts, like requests and orders, suggestions and advice, questions and requests, promises and threats?

We await the full-scale theories that would provide answers to these questions. Meanwhile the approach offers hope of systematic formalization in an area of pragmatics that has long resisted it. There are, however, a number of reasons, to which we now turn, why one might be sceptical that any such theory of speech acts will be viable in the long run.

5.7   Beyond theories of speech acts

There are some compelling reasons to think that speech act theory may slowly be superseded by much more complex multi-faceted pragmatic approaches to the functions that utterances perform. The first set of these have to do with the internal difficulties that any speech act theory faces, of which the most intractable is probably the set of problems posed by ISAs. Note that any theory of speech acts is basically concerned with mapping utterances into speech act categories, however those are conceived. The problem then is that either this is a trivial enterprise done by *fiat* (as by LFH), or an attempt is made to predict accurately the functions of sentences in context. But if the latter is attempted, it soon becomes clear that the contextual sources that give rise to the assignment of function or purpose are of such complexity and of such interest in their own right, that little will be left to the theory of speech acts. In the next Chapter we shall review extensive work in conversation analysis that shows

full characterizations of speech acts in terms of deontic, epistemic and other complex propositions will only shift the problems of analysis to another level. Finally, the difficulties associated with the attempt to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for particular illocutionary acts will recur here, albeit in a different form.

how the functions that utterances perform are in large part due to the place they occupy within specific conversational (or interactional) sequences.

In this way, speech act theory is being currently undermined from the outside by the growth of disciplines concerned with the empirical study of natural language use (as Austin indeed foresaw). Apart from the important work in conversation analysis dealt with in Chapter 6, there are two major traditions that concern themselves with the details of actual language use in a way pertinent to theories of speech acts. One is the **ethnography of speaking**, which has been concerned with the cross-cultural study of language usage (see the representative collection in Bauman & Sherzer, 1974). A central concept in this work is the notion of a **speech event**, or culturally recognized social activity in which language plays a specific, and often rather specialized, role (like teaching in the classroom, participating in a church service, etc.; see Hymes, 1972). Now given that such cultural events constrain the use of language, there seem to be (as corollaries of such constraints) corresponding inference rules that operate to assign functions to utterances partly on the basis of the social situation that the talk is conducted within (Levinson, 1979a). Thus, in a classroom, the following exchange may have a natural interpretation significantly divergent from the content of what is said:

(113)   Teacher: What are you laughing at?
         Child: Nothing

- roughly, as a command to stop laughing issued by the teacher, and an acceptance of that command, this by virtue of the assumption that laughing (unless invoked by the teacher) is a restricted activity in the classroom (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975: 30ff). Or consider the following said towards the end of a job interview:

(114)   Interviewer: Would you like to tell us, Mr Khan, why you have
         applied to Middleton College in particular?

where such a leading question does not anticipate replies like "There weren't any other jobs going", but rather, by reference to interview conventions, fishes for compliments on the institution's behalf (see Gumperz, Jupp & Roberts, 1979 for the cross-cultural misunderstandings that can result from not knowing such conventions). Some further examples should serve to indicate just how general such activity-specific inferences seem to be. Thus, the following sentence,

delivered in a grocer's shop, and accompanied by a gesture at a lettuce,

(115)   That's a nice one

may count as a request to supply the selected vegetable, and an undertaking to purchase it in due course (Levinson, 1979a). Similarly, utterances that initiate certain kinds of proceedings achieve their effectiveness through assumptions about the nature of those proceedings: hence (116) may serve to constitute the beginning of a committee meeting, of the sort that awaits the arrival of a full complement of personnel:

(116)   Well, we seem to all be here

while some scheduled activity, like a lecture, may be begun by reference to the appropriate schedule:

(117)   It's five past twelve

(see Turner, 1972). All these utterances seem to owe their decisive function in large part to the framework of expectations about the nature of the speech event to which they are contributions. Not only are expectations about the purpose and conduct of the proceedings relevant to this attribution of function, but also, it can be argued, knowledge of social roles. Thus, the following utterance said by one of a pair of students to their landlady may serve as a request for permission, but said by the landlady to the students may be a request for action (Ervin-Tripp, 1981; see also Goody, 1978):[23]

(118)   Can we move the fridge?

Such examples point to the efficacy of Wittgenstein's notion of *language-game*.[24] He denied that there is any small set of functions or speech acts that language may perform; rather, there are as many such acts as there are roles in the indefinite variety of language-games (or speech events) that humans can invent (Wittgenstein, 1958: 10–11). Some support for such a view is offered by the failure of attempts to match up the actual usage of utterances with the felicity conditions proposed by Searle, i.e. with the sets of necessary and sufficient conditions constitutive of specific speech acts. For example,

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[23] This particular example relies, of course, on the absence of an inclusive/exclusive distinction in the English first person plural pronoun.

[24] Or the Firthian notion of restricted languages: see e.g. Mitchell, 1975.

questions in actual usage are just too variable and situation-dependent in nature to be captured by any set (or indeed many different sets) of felicity conditions (see Levinson, 1979a), and the same can be shown even for such apparently 'ritualized' speech acts as apologies (see Owen, 1980).

The interpretive corollary of the notion of language-game is the notion of inferential schema, or **frame**, now widely current in artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology (Minsky, 1977; Tannen, 1979). A frame, in this sense, is a body of knowledge that is evoked in order to provide an inferential base for the understanding of an utterance (see e.g. Charniak, 1972), and we may suggest that in the comprehension and the attribution of force or function to utterances like (113)–(118) above, reference is made, as relevant, to the frames for teaching, shopping, participating in committee meetings, lecturing, and other speech events (see e.g. Gumperz, 1977).[25]

The second major empirical tradition that takes us well beyond speech acts narrowly conceived, is the study of language acquisition. Significant advances were achieved here recently when, instead of the emphasis on the grammatical systems lying behind the child's early utterances, attention was shifted to the functions that those utterances perform, and the interactional context they contribute to. It was then seen that, in a sense, the acquisition of speech acts precedes, and systematically pre-figures, the acquisition of speech (Bruner, 1975; Bates, 1976); that is to say that children's gestures and pre-verbal vocalizations play a role in interaction with their caretakers closely similar to the requests and calls for attention that manifest themselves verbally later in development. Thus, with the onset of the child's first use of pre-syntactic utterances (traditionally called *holophrases*), these initial speech functions are already well developed – it seems indeed as if holophrases simply replace gestural indicators of force (Dore, 1975; Griffiths, 1979: 110).[26] An important suggestion that emerges

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[25] However, there is a significant danger in this line of theorizing, namely that appeal will be made to implicit aspects of context before the full significance of explicit aspects of context – notably prosody and discourse location – have been taken properly into account.

[26] It is interesting that in the holophrase period – from 9–18 months or so – such forces seem very restricted, namely to requests, summonses, greetings and acts of reference. Utterances analysable as unequivocal statements and questions do not seem to appear until the child is nearer 2 (Griffiths, 1979).

is that the acquisition of illocutionary concepts is a precondition for the acquisition of language itself.

However, despite much use of the terms *speech act* and *performative*, this recent work on language acquisition does not really support the importance of the concept of speech act at all; rather it emphasizes the essential roles that communicative intention, utterance function and the interactive context play in the acquisition of language. Indeed the Gricean intentional view of speech acts (as in Strawson, 1964; Schiffer, 1972) seems much more relevant to the description of language acquisition than the convention-based accounts that we have reviewed in such detail in this Chapter. Further, recent work (in part reviewed in Snow, 1979) has stressed the interaction between mother and child that jointly produces discourse. The role of adult interpretations of child utterances, whether those adults are participants or analysts, is thus acknowledged: it is through the responses that adults make on the basis of such interpretations that children "learn how to mean" (Halliday, 1975). Here the other two traditions we have mentioned seem to have promising application. First, conversation analysis is likely to tell us a great deal more than theories of speech acts about the ways in which language is acquired and used by children (see Drew, 1981; Wootton, in press). Secondly, the idea of the speech event and its associated interpretive frame seems very relevant: child-minding is seen as a specific kind of activity in most cultures, associated with a special style of talk by adults ('baby talk' or 'motherese'; see Snow, 1979 for a review of recent work). In such a language-game, expressions of want by the child are not interpreted as requests by virtue of any conversational postulates or the like, but simply because minders tend to see themselves as general want satisfiers (Griffiths, 1979: 109). Further, progress in acquisition can be seen as the acquisition of additional language-games and interpretive frames, extending in a sequence well into adulthood (Keenan, 1976a). Again, then, the study of language acquisition, where the attribution of intent and purpose is often so problematic for both adult participants and analysts, while addressing the issues that lie at the heart of speech act theory, takes us well beyond it.

In conclusion, the future of speech act theory probably rests on the tenability of the LFH. If some version of a strict form:force correlation can be maintained in such a way that the predicted forces

match actual usages, then a theory of speech acts is likely to continue to play a role (though not necessarily a central one) in general theories of language usage. If, on the other hand, no such version of LFH can be found (and certainly none now exists), then there is little reason to isolate out a level of illocutionary force that is distinct from all the other facets of an utterance's function, purpose or intent. In that case, we can expect speech act theory to give way to more empirical lines of investigation of the sort briefly reviewed here, and dealt with more extensively in the next Chapter.