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The Illocutionary Aspect of Utterances*

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The first part of this paper criticizes Austin's and Searle's claim that utterances have illocutionary force. It is shown that illocutionary force is the sense of illocutionary descriptive terms, but illocutionary verbs are not names of a definite aspect of utterances. In the second and third parts an alternative account of the illocutionary aspect of utterances is offered, an account which sees illocution as the way in which utterances meaningfully relate to the state of affairs in the world.

PART ONE: THE ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE OF UTTERANCES

This paper is concerned with Austin's (1961) and Searle's (1969, 1975b) claim that utterances have illocutionary force; that one aspect of understanding what someone is saying is to recognize the utterance's illocutionary force. This notion is expounded and criticized in the first part of the paper; in the second and third parts an alternative account of the illocutionary aspect of utterances is offered.

In Austin's and Searle's theory, illocutionary force is defined as the conjunction of two aspects of speech: its overtly communicative use and its use to perform actions.

According to Grice's (1957) analysis of the overtly communicative aspect of speech, to which Searle is heavily indebted, what is overtly communicated is the utterance's non-natural meaning, or, more specifically, that which the speaker (*S*) meant by the utterance *x*. According to Grice, to say that *S* meant something by *x* is to say that *S* intended the utterance of *x* to produce some effect in the hearer (*H*) by means of *H*'s recognition of this intention. After Strawson (1964) we might add that *S* also intended *H* to recognize that *S* intended his or her intentions to be recognized, and that *S* intended to produce the relevant effect in *H* by means of *H*'s recognition of this last intention as well.

To understand what a speaker *S* meant is, then, to identify those meanings which *S* overtly intended to communicate. This analysis is quite general; *S*-meaning and its uptake is involved in all overt use of linguistic signs for communicative purposes. For example, the meaning of each individual word that *S*

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utters is non-natural *S*-meaning; for example, to understand the meaning of the auditory string *buk* as "book" is to attribute to the auditory string a non-natural meaning which *S* intended it to have.

The second aspect of speech which is relevant for the definition of illocutionary force by Austin and Searle is the use of speech to perform actions. As Austin (1962) pointed out, speakers do not merely say something, they also, simultaneously, do various things: They ask questions, declare wars, persuade others to act, make people angry.

The conjunction of these two different aspects of speech defines illocutionary force. Illocutionary force is that element of *S*-meaning the recognition of which is the recognition of what act *S* is performing in speaking. Or, alternatively, illocutionary acts are those acts performed by speakers whose intended effect is the recognition of *S*'s intentions. Utterances which perform a given illocutionary act are said to have the force of that act.

The conjunctive definition distinguishes illocutionary force from, on the one hand, other non-natural *S*-meaning such as the meaning of individual words; and, on the other hand, from the forces of other acts performed in speaking such as convincing or showing off, which are aimed at some other effect besides (or instead of) *H*'s recognition of *S*'s intentions, that is, from perlocutionary acts.

Whereas the cutoff point between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is relatively obvious, the relation between illocutionary force and the rest of the *S*-meaning of an utterance needs some further clarification. It is immediately obvious that it cannot simply be said that illocutionary force is the meaning of the utterance as a whole, whereas that part of *S*-meaning which is not its illocutionary force is the meaning of components of the utterance. Austin claims that utterances have a meaning quite independently of having an illocutionary force. In fact, according to Austin, it is possible to recognize an utterance's meaning without recognizing its force, whereas the recognition of illocutionary force is dependent on a prior recognition of the utterance's meaning (cf. Bach & Harnish, 1979; Searle, 1969).

Although the illocutionary force of an utterance is a meaning of the utterance of a whole, it can be shown to be in fact the meaning of one element of the utterance: of the illocutionary verb which explicates (or can be made to explicate; cf. Searle, 1969) the force of the utterance. The illocutionary force of the utterance is determined by what kind of act is performed in making the utterance. Therefore, whatever discriminates between different illocutionary verbs describing different illocutionary acts has to be discriminated in order to recognize an utterance's illocutionary force. To get the illocutionary force, for example, of a promise, is to get everything that distinguishes it from other illocutionary acts, including, for instance, that *S*'s future act is to *H*'s advantage, and not, as in threats, to *H*'s disadvantage. In other words, the cutoff point between illocutionary force and the rest of *S*-meaning is that meaning ends where the description of the act begins. This, in turn, is done by the illocutionary verb which explicates

the utterance's illocutionary force. Therefore, the illocutionary force of an utterance is the meaning of its illocutionary verb, whether it is an explicit or implicit part of the utterance. Presumably, if the illocutionary verb is present in the utterance, its meaning is also part of the meaning of the utterance, as opposed to its illocutionary force. In such cases it is not quite clear (cf. Cohen, 1964) what is then the difference between meaning and force. But this is irrelevant for the present discussion.

Let us now retrace Austin's arguments for utterances having illocutionary force. The crucial argument seems to be that utterances have illocutionary force because utterances are used to perform illocutionary acts. But what does it mean to say that someone performed an action, illocutionary or otherwise? According to Davidson's (1980) analysis, what someone is doing is an action if it is possible to describe it as something done intentionally. It follows that to say that, in speaking, speakers perform actions is to assert something about the possible ways the speech event can be described. Actionhood is an aspect of the descriptions of speech events. More specifically, it is possible to say that, in speaking, speakers perform illocutionary acts because there exist illocutionary terms like *promise, request,* or *suggest,* which describe speech events as illocutionary acts. Illocutionary force is that attribute of an utterance which is referred to when the speech event is described as a promise, a request, and so forth.

Austin's and Searle's work on speech acts is, properly speaking, work on action descriptions of speech events. Their work consists of pointing out that there are families of descriptions of speech as intentional action, and of mapping out the characteristics of the different kinds of descriptions.

To say it in other words, Austin and Searle start off from a linguistic phenomenon: that there are certain terms in the lexicon which can be used to describe speech as action. A subset of these terms, namely illocutionary verbs, define the speech event as an intentional and overt communicative act. Such acts are called illocutionary by Austin and Searle. That is, illocutionary acts are speech events under illocutionary description. Illocutionary acts are defined partially by reference to the speaker's intentions (Gricean reflexive intentions to be taken as performing certain acts), and partly by reference to their effect on an audience (understanding, or uptake, of the speaker's intentions). Any other intentions or effects define a different kind of act, for example, perlocutionary acts or noncommunicative acts.

Illocutionary force is the sense of illocutionary descriptive terms, namely, the phenomenon that illocutionary terms describe. Each different illocutionary description, that is, verb, describes, by definition, a different illocutionary force.

However, it is misleading to conclude, as Austin and Searle seem to, that the phenomenon that illocutionary verbs describe is identical to the phenomenon of the illocutionary aspect of utterances. That is, the crucial problem in their agument is that utterances have illocutionary force, when illocutionary force is defined as the sense of illocutionary descriptive terms. As I shall attempt to

demonstrate in the following, there are two reasons why this conclusion is not justified: In the first place, utterances may have illocutionary aspects which are not referred to by a given illocutionary term. In the second place, illocutionary terms may describe other than illocutionary aspects of utterances. Thus, as long as illocutionary force is defined as the sense of illocutionary terms, it is not true that utterances possess illocutionary force.

The claim I want to make is that the semantics of illocutionary terms, while highly instrumental in directing the attention of philosophy to certain actional aspects of utterances, is an inadequate defining criterion for the nature of illocutionary phenomena. As long as the inquiry into the nature of phenomena is defined as strictly semantic, it is correct to say that certain verbs in the lexicon describe speech as intentional communicative action. Furthermore, it is a legitimate endeavor in semantics to clarify what kind of phenomena in the world is being described by each illocutionary term. However, it is a logical mistake to assume that thereby we are engaged in a definitive inquiry into the nature of the phenomena which is intentional communicative action. To say that the term *promise,* for example, describes such and such an act (or the force of such and such an act) is to be engaged in a type of description which consists of sense giving: Here a certain type of phenomena is matched to a name. To say that a certain utterance is a promise (or has the force of a promise) is to engage in a different kind of description, namely name giving. In the latter, a certain phenomenon is fitted with a name. We owe the distinction to Austin himself (1961).

In spite of ordinary-language philosophy's trust in the distinctions built into language to reflect the important dimensions of reality, it is a possibility that a given segment of the lexicon is not an adequate descriptor of a given phenomenon we happen to be interested in. Thus, if the focus of the inquiry is the overtly communicative aspect of utterances rather than the semantics of certain verbs in the language, it is unjustified to use the terms in the lexicon as names for the phenomena without checking whether they really fit.

To illustrate the kind of problems which arise in switching from sense giving to name giving, let us consider the following example. Let us say that we are interested in the phenomenon of women's kinship relations, as part of an anthropological description of a society. In the lexicon we find the terms *mother, sister, daughter, aunt, grandmother,* and so forth. Without a doubt, each term describes a different phenomenon, that is, kinship relation. However, in our hypothetical society there are very few women whose kinship relations are described by any one of these terms. Individual women have multiple kinship relations, so that they may be both mothers and daughters, mothers and sisters, or in general, all possible combinations of these. It does not make sense to ask which name fits a certain woman's kinship relations better—*mother,* or *daughter.* She may be both. The phenomena of a person's kinship relations are different in nature from the phenomena named by each kinship term.

I want to claim that, with respect to illocutionary verbs and the illocutionary

aspect of utterances, the situation is similar to the one described in the example above; namely, there is no one-to-one correspondence between names and phenomena.

First, the same utterances might be named by more than one illocutionary verb.

Consider the following example:

(1a) Will you buy me some cigarettes?
(1b) Certainly.

The speaker at (1b) might be veridically described either as having agreed to buy some cigarettes or as having promised to buy some.

The use of explicit performatives does not solve this problem. The speaker of (1b) could have said either of the following:

(1′) I promise to buy you some cigarettes.
(1″) I agree to buy you some cigarettes.

And still, both (1′) and (1″) could have been described either as a promise or an agreement.

It is interesting to note that these different utterances come to possess the illocutionary force of "agreement" and of "promise" in various different ways. Example (1b) is an agreement only because of conversational contingency and it is a promise only because of "conversational implicature" (Grice, 1975). Similarly, (1′) is an agreement only because it follows a request, whereas (1″) is a promise because in every agreement (to act) there is an element of commitment to do something to the profit of the hearer which makes it possible to describe it as a promise.

Now, agreeing and promising are two different illocutionary acts, and it is not very clear what it means to say that an utterance had both the force of a promise and that of an agreement.

First, note that these terms are not synonymous, since there are utterances, such as the second utterance in Example (2), which might be described as promises but not as agreements.

(2) (Teenager to parents:)
I am going to a party tonight. I promise to be home before midnight.

Second, the utterance at (1b) cannot be said to be ambiguous between a promise and an agreement, since it is unambiguously both.

Searle would say (1969, pp. 70–71) that this utterance constitutes the performance of two different illocutionary acts. But this would lead to the conclusion that, in making an utterance, as many different illocutionary acts are performed as there are different illocutionary verbs which can veridically describe the event.

This is clearly an absurdity. Two descriptions do not make for two numerically different acts (Davidson, 1980). The number of verbs available in a given language which are appropriately descriptive of a given action does not determine the number of actions which are thus performed. For example, although Brutus killed Caesar and Brutus also stabbed Caesar, Brutus did not perform two different actions, one of stabbing and one of killing; he performed only one action which can be described in two different ways.

There seem to be serious problems with establishing the entities called "illocutionary acts." Frege (1950) warned us not to introduce entities unless we are prepared to make sense of sentences affirming and denying identity of such entities. With respect to illocutionary acts, we seem to run into a paradox if we ask, for instance, whether the act performed in uttering (1b) was or was not identical to the act performed in uttering (2). Since both might be described as promises, the answer should be that they were identical acts. Since only (1b) might be described as an agreement, the answer should be that they were different acts.

Searle's proposal (that if two or more illocutionary verbs can be used to describe a given utterance, then that utterance constitutes the performance of two or more illocutionary acts) is unacceptable on another count. If the illocutionary force of an utterance is indeed an aspect of the understanding of that utterance by its audience, to say that an utterance had two or more different illocutionary forces is to claim that the hearer had to interpret and recognize two or more illocutionary forces on hearing the same utterance. Let us consider (3):

(3) I live in Jerusalem.

Now, assume that the speaker of (3) can be veridically described as stating, claiming, asserting, telling, reporting, alleging, indicating, maintaining, saying, submitting that she lived in Jerusalem. It is a psychologically unacceptable claim that the audience of (3) has to do a tenfold work of recognizing the ten different forces of this utterance. For one thing, this would make (3) one of the most difficult of utterances to fully understand, which is clearly not true.

The second problem with illocutionary terms as names for the illocutionary aspect of utterances is that the terms often describe aspects of utterances which have nothing to do with their overtly communicative nature. As an illustration, let us suppose that we wanted to investigate the nature of the phenomena consisting of professional roles. The terms *policeman, milkmaid, shepherdess, cowboy, king, queen, policewoman, shepherd, cowgirl,* although referring to professional roles, would mislead us in our inquiry if we took the phenomena referred to by these terms as types of professional roles. The reason is, of course, that these are not simply names of professional roles but of roles filled by persons of a particular sex. Similarly, it can be shown that illocutionary terms refer to irrelevant

aspects of utterances, irrelevant, that is, from the point of view of our interest in the overtly communicative aspect of utterances.

Consider the following examples:

(4) John reported the disappearance of his car to the police.
(5) John claimed that his car disappeared.

Report is a "factive" (Kiparsky & Kiparsky, 1970), that is, it implies the factuality of its complement in the mind of the speaker; it is correct to use (4) only if the car indeed disappeared. *Claim* does not carry this presupposition, and therefore it is correct to use (5) whether or not the speaker believes in the factuality of the disappearance.

Now, if we turn to the speech events referred to in (4) and (5) we find that both utterances refer to the same event: John's making a statement to the police to the effect that his car has disappeared, as in (6):

(6) (John to the policeman:) My car has disappeared.

For the policeman to understand (6), it is completely irrelevant whether the car has indeed disappeared or not. Moreover, the hearer (the policeman) is not in the possession of the information necessary to distinguish between a report and a claim. The factuality of the theft, which is indeed a crucial condition for (4) to be true, is thus irrelevant for the speech act performed by John and comprehended by the policeman. In order to understand what happened between John and the policeman, to ask whether the act was a report or a claim is the wrong question. It was neither: A report is what *another* speaker might call it if he or she believes the car disappeared; a claim is what *another* speaker might call it if he or she doesn't know or does not want to imply that the car has disappeared.

Some distinctions between illocutionary acts are, thus, unrelated to utterances' *S*-meaning. They represent the perspective of a different speaker, a speaker who wishes to describe or report a speech event.

The fact that many illocutionary verbs, including *report* and *claim*, have performative uses does not weaken this argument. As Lemmon (1962) pointed out long ago, explicit performative utterances are actually self-verifying statements, namely, statements to the effect that *S*'s are performing the acts that they are attributing to themselves (see also Bach & Harnish, 1979; Davidson, 1968–1969, 1979; Recanati, 1981). Although I do not concur with Recanati (1981) that explicit performative utterances are verified or falsified by the "descriptive sense" they communicate—for example, the utterance *I affirm that George has come* is not false if George has not actually arrived, since by the same measure *I order you to come here* is false if *H* does not comply—I do believe that explicit

performatives *qua* self-descriptions can be false,[1] and precisely because they represent the perspective of a person reporting on, or describing, a speech event. For instance, John could have uttered (6′):

(6′) I report that my car has disappeared.

John, as the self-descriptor, wants to name his own act a report and thereby imply the factuality of his car's disappearance. This, however, does not make (6′) into the performance of an act of reporting any more than the nonexplicit (6) is, since it is still possible that the car has not indeed disappeared.

Whereas the difference between a report and a claim may not have anything to do with *S*-meaning, there are distinctions beween illocutionary forces which concern matters that *S* intends reflexively that *H* recognize, but nevertheless it is not at all clear that they are, or are not, part of the illocutionary aspect of utterances. As we have shown, Searle (1969) treats the semantics of the illocutionary verb as definitive of the cutoff point between illocutionary force and the rest of *S*-meaning. As the following examples demonstrate, this cutoff point cannot be accounted for except by the accident of the (English) lexicon.

(7) I promise you I'll buy you some cigarettes today.
(8) If you are late for work one more time, I'll fire you.

Example (7) might be described as a promise and (8) as a threat. In both cases the speaker commits herself to a future course of action, and the two cases differ only in how the speaker thinks that her future act relates to the interests of the hearer. As the illocutionary vocabulary has special verbs which encode this distinction, we tend to think that there are two different illocutionary acts, promising and threatening, and that the illocutionary aspect of (7) and of (8) includes *S*'s belief in the relation between her future act and *H*'s interest.

But let us take two utterances which differ on the very same dimension, such as (9) and (10):

(9) I have good news. Our candidate won the election.
(10) I have bad news. Our candidate lost the election.

In the absence of the appropriate vocabulary terms, we are inclined to think of both (9) and (10) as reports, although what is reported in (9) is clearly, in *S*'s

[1]There is a sense in which an explicit performative can never be false, and in that sense it has the force of a declaration, not of a description. This is the sense in which an explicit performative indicates an illocutionary point of the utterance, rather than its force. When the speaker says, *I report,* he might be false in implying the factuality of his statement, but he can never be wrong in asserting that it is a kind of constative and not, for instance, a kind of request. He can never be wrong in asserting this because in saying, for example, *I report that* . . . , he actually brings about the state of affairs that he is making an utterance with the illocutionary point of a report.

view, in the hearer's interest, while what is reported in (10) is believed by *S* to be against *H*'s interest. In the absence of appropriate terms, we relegate this distinction to that part of *S*-meaning which is exclusive of illocutionary force. Now, consider what happens if someone decides that idiomatic verb phrases are as acceptable as single-term verbs for purposes of classification of illocutionary acts. He or she turns to the dictionary and discovers the pair of phrases, *bring good tidings* and *bring bad tidings*, which serve very well as descriptions of (9) and (10), respectively. Now, they could consider the utterance of (9) and (10) as the performances of two different illocutionary acts, as the promise in (7) and the threat in (8) are seen as different acts. Consequently, the relation between the news reported and *H*'s interest would move into that category of *S*-meaning which is considered illocutionary force.

As the preceding discussion has demonstrated, utterances do not have an illocutionary force which is the force of an illocutionary act performed in making the utterance. Illocutionary acts are the phenomena which illocutionary verbs describe, but illocutionary verbs are not names of a definite aspect of utterances.

This conclusion forces us to reject Austin's and Searle's claim that one aspect of understanding what someone is saying is in recognizing the utterance's illocutionary force. The rejection of this claim seriously weakens the case for the more general notion that utterances have an illocutionary aspect which is a specific, definite component of their *S*-meaning. In fact, Cohen (1964) advocates the position that there is no separate illocutionary aspect to utterances on the basis of the weakness of the concept of illocutionary force. However, this conclusion seems too severe. The problems of Austin's and Searle's approach to illocution stem from their choice of methodology, that is, their deriving the concept of illocutionary force from the semantics of lexical items (i.e., verbs which can be used to make certain kinds of descriptions of speech events). As I shall argue in the rest of this paper, a different approach does make it possible to establish the existence of a distinct illocutionary component of *S*-meaning. Moreover, although the illocutionary component is not the utterance's illocutionary force or forces, it is systematically related to the illocutionary acts *S* can be said to have performed in making the utterance.

As the first part of this argument, I shall describe a distinct aspect of utterance's *S*-meaning which I shall call meta-meaning. Subsequently, I shall attempt to relate an utterance's meta-meaning to the illocutionary acts *S* can be said to have performed in making the utterance.

PART TWO: THE META-MEANING OF UTTERANCES

Imagine a world in which every utterance is a constative, for example, a statement. What does it take in this world to understand what someone says? Following in the footsteps of Frege (1950), Wittgenstein (1961), Ayer (1946), and Holdcroft (1978), we would say that to understand what someone says in this

world is to know which state of affairs (SOA) would make the utterance true and which, false.

Now, let us imagine a second world in which all utterances are directives, for example, requests. What does it take in this world to understand what someone says? Following Kenny (1966), Wiggins (1971), and Holdcroft (1978), we might say that to understand what someone says in this world is to know which state of affairs (SOA) would satisfy the speaker, that is, would count as compliance with his request.

Now, let us imagine a third world in which utterances are either statements or requests. Now, what does it take to understand what somebody says? As we have seen, it takes different things if the utterance is a statement or a request. It follows that to understand what someone says is first to know whether the utterance was a statement or a request, and then, according to the answer, it is either to know what SOA would make the utterance true/false or to know what SOA would satisfy it. To understand an utterance, in this third world, means a different kind of knowing, according to whether the utterance is a statement or a request. Since understanding an utterance is knowing what it means, we might say that these two classes of utterances have different methods of meaning: Statements "mean" by having truth conditions, whereas requests "mean" by having compliance conditions. To know what an utterance means we first have to know its meta-meaning, namely, by what method it conveys its meaning.

Probably, the ultimate arguments for the claim that different utterances (i.e., statements and requests) have different methods of meaning will be demonstrations that these utterances have a different kind of logic (cf. Geach, 1965; Hare, 1971; Holdcroft, 1978). I want to proceed from another point of view, which is that utterances have meaning by virtue of the fact that they are related in systematic ways to various states of affairs (SOAs) in the world. I want to claim that there are several different ways in which utterances systematically relate to SOAs, and therefore understanding an utterance is first and foremost understanding how it relates to the world.

Returning from hypothetical worlds to our own, we can now proceed to examine utterances people make, in order to find out what are the different kinds of relations they have with various SOAs. It should be clear, however, that the following taxonomy is purely exploratory and tentative, and does not purport to do more than illustrate the possibilities of this approach.

First, some utterances *discuss* an SOA. Four different kinds of discussions are possible. In each, an SOA is represented in verbal form, but the subtypes of discussion differ as to the extent to which speaker (*S*) commits herself or himself to the representation. Examples (11a, b, c) and (d) demonstrate the four subtypes:

(11a) John is bringing the food.
(11b) Who is bringing the food?

(11c) Is John bringing the food?
(11d) Is or isn't John bringing the food?

Example (11a) is *full representation* of the SOA that John is bringing the food; the utterance translates to the verbal medium this state or happening in the world. Moreover, *S* fully commits herself to the representation, in two ways: The representation is hers; and the representation is complete. In cases of "serious" discourse, where the speech situation is not "framed" (Goffman, 1974) as nonserious, that is, a joke, kidding, playing a part in a play, and so on, the commitment is also to the truth of the representation. In these cases the SOA fully represented by an utterance is the truth condition of that utterance, and the operation on the SOA is one of assertion or indication.[2]

Example (11b) is a *product-incomplete representation*[3] of the SOA that John (or someone else) is bringing the food. The *S* of (11b) commits herself to representing this situation truthfully in all details except that she does not represent one missing element (there might be more than one in other utterances), namely, the identity of the person(s) bringing the food. Not only does she not warrant that she represents that element veridically, she warrants the opposite—that she is not representing that element of the situation fully. In other words, (11b) represents an SOA in the same way as an open sentence such as (11b′) which it implies.[4]

(11b′) Somebody is bringing the food.

If the hearer (*H*) indeed supplies the missing description, full representation of the SOA is achieved cooperatively by the present and the next *S*.

Example (11c) demonstrates *uncommitted representation*. The speaker represents in words that John is bringing the food, but does not commit himself to the truth of this representation. Once again, full representation is achieved cooperatively, once *H* affirms or denies example (11c). The operation of representation (i.e., translation to words) is by the first *S*, but the commitment to its truth or falsity is by the next *S*, i.e., the present *H*.

Example (11d) is similar to (11c) except that it represents two mutually exclusive possible SOAs, and therefore should be called *mutually exclusive*

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[2]The speaker's action on the world which institutes a relation of indicating between an utterance and some SOA is variously called, in ordinary language, an act of stating, describing, defining, predicting, labeling, reporting, claiming, suggesting, arguing, informing, classifying, categorizing, and so forth.

[3]The illocutionary terms *ask, inquire, interrogate, query, question, quiz* refer to a relation of product-incomplete representation (or of uncommitted or mutually exclusive representations; see following text) between the utterance and the SOA which is the topic of the question.

[4]Davidson (1979, p. 20, Note 7) suggested a similar treatment of the semantics of interrogatives as presented here and in the next two paragraphs.

representation. Here once again full representation is achieved cooperatively by the present and the next *S*.

When the *H* of a wh-question gives a satisfying answer, he or she can be said to product-complete the previous product-incomplete representation of an SOA.[5] Similarly, when the *H* of a yes-no question gives a satisfying answer, he or she either affirms or denies the uncommitted representation of an SOA. In either case, present *S* commits himself to a representation which was made by a previous *S*, and therefore the operation might be called *commitment-completion.*

Some utterances *evaluate* rather than represent some SOA. That is, they represent *S*'s value judgment of some SOA as successful or failed, correct or erroneous, commendable or blameworthy.[6] It has been claimed (cf. Geach, 1965) that all descriptions, not only evaluations, are reports of subjective categorization; in other words, to say *This is red* is really equivalent to saying *My opinion is that this is red.* Without getting into an argument about the independent existence of "reality out there," most people would agree that there is a perceived difference in the degree of objectivity of perceptual attributes and evaluative attributes, for example. But I concede that evaluation could be seen as a kind of representation without any great loss in discrimination.

The next kind of relationship between utterances and SOA is that of a *directive* and its compliance condition.[7] In uttering a directive, *S*s attempt to bring about an SOA which is not under their direct or sole control but which is under *H*'s control. We might say that *S*s exert a force on the world in order to influence the future course of events. This force is never sufficient to bring about the desired SOA. If the force exerted by an utterance *is* sufficient to call the desired SOA into being, the utterance is a *declaration.* Whereas directives attempt to bring about a desired SOA, declarations in fact create the SOA by virtue of their utterance.[8] For instance, compare (12), a directive, and (13), a declaration:

(12) Name your puppy "Pluto"!
(13) I hereby name this puppy "Pluto."

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[5]Utterances might take other utterances as arguments, in addition to SOAs. See also the text-editing operations *imitation, completion, correction,* and *paraphrase.*

[6]Evaluation is a semantic component of illocutionary verbs such as *praise, disapprove of, criticize, correct, agree/disagree with proposition, blame, judge,* and so forth. It might be necessary to distinguish between different kinds of evaluations according to the dimensions on which SOAs are evaluated, for example, on their truthfulness, correctness, or social appropriateness.

[7]The directive/compliance condition relationship is a semantic component of illocutionary verbs such as *request, order, suggest, advise, dare, warn, ask, question, inquire, invite, propose, forbid, prohibit, veto, ban, outlaw.*

[8]Illocutionary verbs such as *declare, marry, christen, assess, appoint, nominate, fire* refer to the declaration relation.

Another kind of relationship is that of a *commitment* to its commitment condition. In uttering a commitment, the speaker undertakes to bring about an SOA which is under *S*'s own direct and sole control.[9]

The next relationship is between a *compliance* and the directive which it satisfies. Answers, for example, are related to their questions through this relationship, since the questions were directives attempting to bring about the SOA which is the uttering of the answer.[10]

Some utterances signal or *acknowledge* the occurrence of an event. We might say that they mark the SOA that the event has occurred. For instance, the utterance of *Good morning!*, in appropriate circumstances, acknowledges the meeting of speaker and hearer. An utterance which is an acknowledgement is necessarily contingent on the SOA which it marks, and therefore carries the presupposition that the SOA has truly occurred; but an acknowledgement does not indicate that SOA because the SOA is not represented verbally by the utterance. For example, in uttering *Thank you! S*s are publicly committing themselves to such a framing or definition of a past event as to place it in the category of acts done by *H* to *S*'s benefit,[11] but they do so without actually describing the event.

Some utterances are related to meaning games other than language games. These are *performatives* in the strict sense, which count as moves in rule-bound activities. That is, the making of an utterance creates a meaningful unit of the immediate social situation which is embedded in a higher structural unit, the activity. Bidding in bridge, announcing *checkmate* in chess, uttering *peek-a-boo* in a hiding game, giving a verdict in court, are examples of performatives.[12] The meaning of these utterances is describable only in reference to the relevant nonlinguistic game and its rules.

Finally, some utterances fulfill a *text-editing* function in discourse. The present *S* might imitate, paraphrase, complete, or correct a previous utterance, either his own or some other *S*'s. If the edited text is another *S*'s, the present *S* does not commit himself to the "force" of the utterance he is editing. For

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[9]Illocutionary verbs such as *promise, threaten, agree, consent, refuse, disagree, reject,* and so forth refer to the commitment relation. Other verbs refer to a conditional commitment, for example, *invite, offer, propose, permit, forbid, order, command,* and so on. This treatment of commands follows Bohnert (1945).

[10]Other illocutionary verbs referring to the compliance relation are *reply, affirm, deny, accept, agree, assent, concur,* and so on.

[11]Other illocutionary verbs referring to an acknowledging relation are *apologize, greet, part, congratulate,* and *commiserate.*

[12]All illocutionary verbs describing institutionally defined conventional speech acts refer to a performative relationship between the utterance and the move in the institutional context, for example, *veto a proposal in the UN, marry, find a defendant guilty, assess the value of a diamond,* and so on.

example, if the utterance is an assertion, he does not warrant its truth; if it is a directive, he is not thereby issuing an order.

The first text-editing operation is *imitation.* I do not mean here all cases where an utterance is a phonetical reproduction of someone else's utterance. All that means is that the present *S* is making use of the same means (i.e., signs) to say something as a previous *S* did; this leaves it undetermined as to how his utterance is to be understood. I mean those cases where understanding what someone said is to know that he is imitating some previous speech and not, for example, asserting or requesting some SOA. For instance, when a teacher of English as a foreign language labels an object by uttering *ball* and the students repeat the word *ball,* they are imitating their teacher's uttering of *ball* rather than saying anything at all about balls, or about their teacher's uttering of *ball,* for that matter. Obviously, a repetition of a previous locution is often not a text-editing imitation, or not merely that, as in cases of confirmation requests or of ironic challenge.

Some utterances are *completions* of a previous *S*'s unfinished utterance (cf., Streeck, 1980). The complete utterance has a certain meaning which it achieved by a cooperative effort of the two consequent *S*s, although it is questionable if in a dyadic conversation the second *S* thereby assumes responsibility for the utterance's meaning. Whether he or she does or not probably depends on further factors, such as intonation. In any case, that part of the utterance which is uttered by the second *S* takes the first *S*'s (partial) utterance as its argument and operates on it by the operation of completion. That is, in order to understand the second *S*'s utterance, *H* has to know not only that it is a completion of some unfinished utterance; but also which unfinished utterance.[13]

Some utterances *correct* a previous *S*'s utterance, that is, substitute a correction for an erroneous element (or elements) of the utterance. For example, one might correct an error of pronunciation, vocabulary choice, or of grammar. Similar to imitations and completion, correction of other *S*'s utterances does not imply that the correcting *S* is taking responsibility for the meaning of the utterance corrected; for example, he or she cannot be said to warrant the truth of an assertion. When the correction is of a previous utterance of the same *S* obviously *S* does take responsiblity for the meaning of the present utterance, that is, it also counts as a new assertion or request.

Some utterances *paraphrase* a previous utterance of some *S,* once again without necessarily committing the present *S* to, for example, the truth of what is asserted by the utterance.

Having tentatively identified the different ways in which utterances are related

[13]Illocutionary verbs describing correction are *correct, renounce, retract, withdraw,* and so forth.

to various SOAs,[14] it is now possible to proceed to the next point, which is that any given utterance might be related in more than one way to more than one SOA. Take the following utterance:

(14) I would like to invite you to my birthday party.

In the appropriate circumstances, (14) means that *S* both attempts to bring about the SOA that *H* will come to the party, and commits himself or herself to bring about the SOA that *S* receive *H* at the party.

Similarly, a wh-question used interrogatively is both an attempt to bring about the SOA that *H* will answer it and a product-incomplete representation of the SOA which is its topic. See for example (11b):

(11b) Who is bringing the food?

Example (1b) is both a commitment to buy some cigarettes and a compliance to a request to reply.

(1a) Will you buy me some cigarettes?
(b) Certainly.

The next example, (15), is both an attempt to ensure that *H* will not leave the house and a commitment to impose sanctions on *H* in case he does:

(15) I forbid you to leave the house!

The same analysis applies to (15′):

(15′) I command you not to leave the house!

The second utterance in (16) takes three different arguments:

(16a) Will you buy me some cigarettes tonight?
(16b) I'll buy you some tomorrow.

First, it complies with the preceding directive to give an answer. Second, it commits the speaker not to buy cigarettes that evening. Third, it commits the speaker to buy cigarettes the next day.

In conclusion, utterances possess a level of meta-meaning which are specifications of the ways an utterance is related to various SOAs. Each utterance might

[14]Conditions and conditionals are not treated in this paper for the sake of simplicity of presentation.

possess several different meta-meanings, each representing a different operation on a different SOA.

PART THREE: META-MEANING AND ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS

In the preceding chapter I have suggested an extension of the verification theory of meaning to account for the different ways in which utterances are meaningful. I have proposed that utterances possess a meta-meaning component which is the kind of systematic relationship the utterance has with various SOAs. Now, I would like to make a connection between an utterance's meta-meaning and the illocutionary act or acts *S* performed in uttering that utterance.

To say that *S* made a promise, asked a question, or issued a statement is to apply a certain kind of description to the speech event consisting of *S*'s uttering a certain string of words. This is only one of many different possible descriptions of the same event. At its most irreducible, a speaker can be said to have done nothing more than make a bodily movement resulting in a string of sounds. The same single event can also be variously described as an intentional action (e.g., a promising; a persuading); as an unintentional doing (e.g., a slip of the tongue; a mispronunciation); and sometimes not even something of *S*'s own doing at all but something that happened to him or her (as in, *An exclamation of surprise escaped his lips.*). That there are different possible descriptions of the same event does not mean that speakers, in speaking, perform several numerically distinct actions. There is only one action which is the single descriptum of its different descriptions (cf. Anscombe, 1959; Davidson, 1980; Searle, 1969).

Ordinary language, then, allows for a multiplicity of descriptions of the same speech event. Alternative descriptions of the same event differ from each other because they define the speech event in reference to different aspects of this event. The class of all possible descriptions of speech events divides into distinct families according to which aspect of a speech event the descriptions refer. One of these families is illocutionary descriptions. They describe speech events as illocutionary acts. I now want to claim that illocutionary descriptions define the speech event partially by reference to the meta-meaning component of the utterance. It is well known (cf. Vendler, 1972) that, syntactically, performative verbs in particular and illocutionary verbs in general, are container verbs, namely, they have nominalized sentences as their objects. I want to claim that, semantically, the action described by the illocutionary verb has the SOA referred to in the nominalized sentence as its object.

The illocutionary act is not only an act on the hearer, but also on the world or on various states of affairs in the world. Whereas the force exerted on the hearer in different illocutionary acts is always the same—to get *H* to understand the utterance—the force exerted on the world differs across types of illocutionary action. In declarations, a new SOA is created; in statements, an SOA is repre-

sented in words; in directives, an attempt is made to bring about a new SOA; in acknowledgements, an SOA is marked as having occurred; in imitations, an SOA is reproduced; in performances, a move in a game is performed, and so forth. In speaking, speakers act on the world; illocutionary descriptions make reference to this action.

That the relation of utterances to the world is talked about as a kind of action of the speaker is an interesting feature of human language and cognition (that is, if the phenomenon is indeed universal). In some sense, however, this fact is irrelevant and actually misleading as a component of a theory of speech comprehension.

Illocutionary terms are complex linguistic phenomena. Although reference to a meta-meaning component of an utterance is a criterion for being an illocutionary term, these terms, as I have shown previously, primarily serve as an action-event reportative lexicon. This accounts for the existence of various semantic features of these verbs which encode information relevant to reporting on an event but irrelevant to the description of the utterance's meta-meaning components. For example, *allege* is used to report on statements for which the present speaker disclaims responsibility; *beg* refers to the inferiority in the status of the person who had issued the directive; *complain* marks that the speaker was unhappy about the SOA that he or she was describing, and so forth. These pieces of information about the action-event are not normally part of the reported utterance's *S*-meaning but rather convey the present speaker's perception of the social situation in which the utterance was uttered.

Moreover, the illocutionary lexicon is not geared to provide a complete description of the meta-meaning component of utterances. Whereas utterances possess one of a potentially infinite combination of different meta-meanings, illocutionary terms form a finite class of descriptive terms. Most illocutionary terms refer to a single meta-meaning component (e.g., *state, answer, demand, promise*) even though single-component utterances are rare in discourse. A few of the most frequent combinations of meta-meanings have distinct terms describing them; for example, *ask (a question)* refers to a descriptive and a directive component, *agree* refers to a commitment and a compliance component; *order* refers to a directive component as well as to a conditional commitment to impose sanctions in the event of noncompliance. Other equally frequent combinations do not possess a special descriptive term, for example, a commitment to do-in-the-future which is also a refusal to do-now-as-demanded [see (16b)]; or answering a question with a question; or complying with the demand to reply without providing the missing piece of information (i.e., product completing) as when someone says *he or she does not know* the answer.

These features of the illocutionary lexicon explain the fact I noted earlier: that the same speech event can be described as the performance of different illocutionary acts. This point is worth spelling out in detail. In the first place, two different illocutionary verbs might refer to the same meta-meaning component of

the utterance. Thus, *state, assert, affirm, report, claim, tell, say, maintain,* and so forth, are synonymous as far as the meta-meaning aspect is concerned; they can all be used to describe an utterance like (3).

In the second place, two different illocutionary verbs might refer to two different meta-meaning components of the same utterance. For instance, John, accused of robbing a bank, might say:

(17) I was in Europe at that time.

Example (17) might be validly described by either (18) or (19):

(18) John denied the accusation that he robbed the bank.
(19) John claimed that he had an alibi.

Similarly, (16b) can be described either as a refusal to buy cigarettes that evening or as a promise to buy cigaretttes the next day.

Another example is (20b):

(20a) What is your name?
(20b) Sarah.

Example (20b) can be described either by (21) or by (22):

(21) Sarah replied to my question.
(22) Sarah told me her name.

In none of these examples are the pairs of illocutionary verbs synonymous to any extent; rather, they refer to two different meta-meaning components of the same utterance.

In the third place, some illocutionary verbs, for example, *agree to do,* describe more than one meta-meaning component of utterances. Such terms behave like subordinate categories of other illocutionary verbs which describe one of their components, for example, *agree* of *promise.*

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the meta-meaning component of utterances is not their "illocutionary force," as the concept is defined in Speech Act Theory. The most similar concept to meta-meaning in Searle's theory is that of the illocutionary point or purpose of the utterance. Searle (1975b) writes:

> The point or purpose of an order can be specified by saying that it is an attempt to get the hearer to do something. The point or purpose of a description is that it is a representation (true or false, accurate or inaccurate) of how something is. The point or purpose of a promise is that it is an undertaking of an obligation by the speaker to do something. (p. 345)

Illocutionary point is an undefined concept in Speech Act Theory. Certainly Searle (1975b) does not define illocutionary point as the kind of relation the

utterance has with the world. On the contrary, he lists illocutionary point and "direction of fit between the words and the world" as two different dimensions along which illocutionary acts differ. Nevertheless, Searle's categories of illocutionary point are in essence identical to, or else can be extended to cover, our suggested categories of methods of meaning. Clearly, illocutionary point refers to the meta-meaning level, and cuts across irrelevant distinctions which exist between illocutionary forces.

Nevertheless, illocutionary point is but a component of illocutionary force. As it is indeterminable what was *the* force of an utterance, it is indeterminable what is its point. Illocutionary point is still a lexicon-derived notion, and as long as the same speech event can be described as the performance of two different illocutionary acts, there is always a possibility that these acts will have a different illocutionary point. The obvious solution is that utterances do not necessarily have a single illocutionary point but might have a compound meta-meaning component which corresponds to several different illocutionary points.

Now, we are in a position to give a definition of the relation between an utterance's meta-meaning component and the illocutionary act or acts *S* performed in making that utterance. The meta-meaning component of an utterance is the sum total of the illocutionary points of the acts *S* can be said to have performed in making that utterance.[15]

Although there is a systematic relationship between the meta-meaning component of an utterance and all the illocutionary acts that *S* can be said to have performed in making the utterance, it is absurd to claim that speech interpretation, at any stage, consists of matching all possible illocutionary act labels to an utterance. Speech interpretation is not a metalinguistic process and it does not consist of the naming of names. Hearers can and do interpret the meaning and force of utterances correctly even if they are ignorant of the lexical terms for illocutionary acts; and certainly if no appropriate terms exist in the lexicon.

The model of speech interpretation suggested by our approach is as follows:

A. Utterances are meaningful by virtue of their systematic relationship to various states of affairs (SOAs).
B. Each utterance might be related to several different SOAs, to each by a different kind of relationship.
C. In order to understand what an utterance means, it is first necessary to understand what kind of systematic relationship(s) the utterance has with possible SOA(s); namely, by what method(s) it does its meaning. Then, the utterance's meaning is arrived at by specifying the SOA(s) that the utterance is related to in each of its meaning-relations.

[15]It is possible that there are meta-meanings which are not referred to by any illocutionary term, and therefore the complete meta-meaning level of an utterance might be greater then the sum total of the illocutionary points of the acts *S* performed in making that utterance.

D. Speech interpretation does not consist, at any stage, of matching all possible illocutionary act labels to the utterance.

An important issue neglected in this paper is the structure of organization of the different meta-meanings. For purposes of the exposition, the several different meta-meaning components of an utterance were simply assumed to be on the same level. However, Searle's work on indirect speech acts (1975a) as well as Labov and Fanshel's (1977) brilliant account of the hierarchical organization of speech acts makes it clear that a comprehensive theory of the illocutionary aspect of utterances will need to deal with the organizational features of meanings as well.

This model emphasizes the hierarchical primacy of meta-meaning or illocutionary point over other kinds of meaning that an utterance has. This is an inversion of Searle's conception of the relationship between the meaning and the illocutionary force of an utterance, where the latter is an extra feature determined on the basis of the former (see also Bach & Harnish's model of speech interpretation, 1979). According to my view, utterances do not have a propositional core which is a constant under different illocutionary uses. An utterance's meaning is impossible to get at unless the hearer recognizes the utterance's meta-meaning, that is, its illocutionary point. What a hearer might be able to comprehend without identifying the illocutionary point is that there are certain states of affairs which the utterance relates to—but not *how* the utterance relates to them. But this is no different from other cases of partial understanding (see also Austin, 1962, pp. 114–115). It is perfectly possible to understand the meaning of one word out of an utterance without the whole utterance being understood. It is also possible for such partial understanding to be wrong; as it is possible to misunderstand what the "proposition" in an utterance is when the illocutionary point has not been comprehended.

Finally, the approach advocated here is congruent with interactionalist, context-dependent analyses of talk in general (e.g., Goffman, 1976, 1981; Rommetveit, 1974) and of speech acts in particular (e.g., Dore & McDermott, 1982; Streeck, 1980). When performances, rather than names, are made the focus of analysis, talk is revealed as the connective tissue of reality, weaving a net of relationships between the present speech event and other events and states in the world.

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