Speech act pluralism in argumentative polylogues

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This paper addresses the following question: Can one and the same utterance token, in one unique speech situation, intentionally perform a plurality of illocutionary acts? While some of the recent pragmatic literature has defended such a possibility for speech acts in general (Sbisà, 2013; Johnson, 2019), I build a case for argumentative speech acts in particular. This case is based on a critical redefinition of a communicative context in which argumentative speech acts are exchanged.

KEYWORDS: illocutionary force, polylogue, pragmatics, speech acts

1. SIMPLE FACTS, DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

I will build my argument the inductive way. That is, rather than introducing a theoretical problem and then adducing some examples while elucidating the problem, I will start with a simple example. This example will lead me to a hard question and, thereby, to a theoretical problem I aim to discuss here.

Example 1

Imagine an argumentation scholar, Michael H., commenting on a conference paper. At a conference dinner, having a one-on-one cigarette with the author, Marcin L., H. says:

1.1 This was the best paper of ECA Groningen I've seen.

Assuming that "this" refers to L.'s paper, of all things imaginable, this is a compliment, and a felicitous one: it expresses sincere praise over the hearer's characteristics, actions, or products that are considered undeniably praiseworthy, especially if these are rare or unique (see

Aakhus & Aldrich, 2002). Sacks (1992) calls such compliments "safe" and "strong": they would make the only addressee—L.—feel good and risk hardly anything for H. We don't feel anything much peculiar about it, this is just a part of the social academic business, full of strategic niceties, etc.

Now, for contrast, imagine an argumentation scholar, Michael H., commenting on a conference paper. During his commentary in a conference room with just a few other scholars present, H. says:

1.2 This was the best paper of ECA Groningen I've seen.

So it happens that H. is member of a panel evaluating papers for a prize. He's had quite a few discussions about it with two other panel members present in the room. One of them, A, had all along claimed L's paper is weak beyond discussion, the other, B, staunchly defended it. H. was hesitant ("Let's wait and see the last version…"). Beyond this complication, H's colleague C who yesterday was a little bit too smart—arrogant, even—in discussing *his* paper is also in the room. H. knows the trade of academic diplomacy, and has the following *overt* communicative intentions:

a) Compliment L.
b) Externalize a difference of opinion with A.
c) Concede an argument (and perhaps also agree on the conclusion) of B.

He might also have the *covert* and therefore not exactly *communicative* intention, namely to:

d) Insult or otherwise put C down.

Finally, he might also *inadvertently*:

e) Denigrate or offend other audience members (whose natural reaction could be: "How about my paper you attended earlier today? You think it was dumb, huh?")

Because of possibilities d) and e), Sacks (1992) called such compliments in a multi-party conversation "unsafe": being comparative ascriptions of personal qualities or achievements, while complimenting one person, they might also insult or offend another.

The hard question announced before, is: Which *illocutionary* act has Michael H. performed?

As a first approximation of an answer, let me now organize this via a somewhat pedantic speech act analysis:

Level 1: By means of an assertion (representative): "This was the best paper of ECA Groningen I've seen."

Level 2: H. is complimenting L. (another representative), by means of which he is:

Level 3:

1) Externalizing a difference of opinion with A. (By the pragma-dialectical reading, this would be a commissive of stage I: non-acceptance of a standpoint.)
2) Conceding an argument (and perhaps also agreeing on the conclusion) of B. (Again, for pragma-dialecticians this would be a commissive of stage III or IV: acceptance of argumentation or a standpoint, respectively.)
3) Insulting C (a representative).

(Option e) would on the most standard analysis be considered a *perlocutionary* effect rather than an illocutionary act—or at most an unintended illocution taken up as such by the audience. To "insult", similarly to "threaten", are performative verbs that can have both illocutionary and perlocutionary reading. I use the illocutionary one here.)

Let me conclude this analysis of the example with two basic take-away points. In a simple utterance—*This was the best paper of ECA Groningen I've seen*—we see a plurality of speech acts, or better: illocutionary acts. This plurality spreads over two axes:

1) *Vertical:* we can distinguish at least 3 levels of by-means-of illocutionary indirectness (cf. Sbisà, 2013: 241, "It's cold here" example: level 1: assertion; level 2: complaint; level 3: suggested, weak request (e.g., to close the window) (if a complaint *to*, rather than a complaint *about*))
2) *Horizontal:* at one and the same level (here: level 3) a speaker can still intentionally and conventionally perform more than one illocutionary act (non-acceptance of a standpoint, acceptance of a standpoint, insult).

As promised, time to move from the empirical observations to a theoretical point. These facts about conversation will guide my basic

arguments for speech act pluralism. More in particular, while the vertical plurality has a long tradition in the speech act theory under the concept of *indirect speech acts* (see Searle, 1975b), the horizontal one doesn't. In what follows, I will try to explain why it doesn't, and to argue that it should. The argument will hinge on a redefinition of a notion of a conversational context: rather than treating dyadic conversation as an unmarked context for speech act exchange, I will argue for a polyadic exchange as a normal state of conversation. If—as originally outlined by Austin (1962/1975)—the audience's *uptake* is an essential element in determining an illocutionary force of a speech act, then (1) multiple ascription by the same respondent in a dyadic exchange (see Sbisà, 2013; Johnson, 2019) or (2) multiple ascriptions by various respondents in a polyadic exchange both open the door for pluralism.

2. PROVISO: SPEECH ACT PLURALISM AS ILLOCUTIONARY PLURALISM

It is important to clarify that the speech act pluralism discussed here amounts to illocutionary pluralism. Austin famously distinguished between three levels or aspects of "the total speech act in the total speech situation" (1962: 147): *locution* (the performance of an act *of* saying something with a certain meaning, that is, with a certain sense and reference: *She said "x"*); *illocution* (the performance of an act *in* saying something, the conventional force or function for which locution is used: *She argued that x*); and *perlocution* (the performance of an act *by* saying something, that is, "consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons": *She convinced me that x*) (Austin, 1962/1975, Lecture VIII-IX). The crucial concept is that of illocution—indeed, some followers of Austin (esp. Searle, see Searle, 1975a), straightforwardly identify speech acts with illocutionary acts. Above, I have accordingly formulated the main question of the paper as: Which *illocutionary* act has Michael H. or Barbara performed?

This sounds clear enough, but the way things are, the term "speech act pluralism" is most commonly used for *locutionary* pluralism (Cappelen & Lepore, 2005; Seymour, 2010; Cappelen, 2011). The chief idea is that the same speech act can express an indefinite number of propositions, most importantly, a minimal proposition (fixed, grounded in literal meaning of non-indexical expressions) and a maximal proposition (contextually-variant, open to contextually-relevant pragmatic enrichment, especially in the case of indexicals). This basically extends the classic discussion of semantic underdetermination (as per Quine, Davidson, and many others) and is an argument supporting semantic minimalism vs. contextualism, to the effect that it is

not the case that a specific context determines the contextually unique propositional meaning of a specific utterance.

In her commentary on Cappelen and Lepore's discussion of semantic speech act pluralism, Sbisà notices that "underdetermination invites interactional negotiation and selection by the audience, whereas plurality aims at multiple recognition and is confirmed by it" (Sbisà, 2013: 240). There is thus an additional argument to delimit specifically illocutionary aspect of speech act pluralism—it is not only central to speech act theory but also genuinely pluralistic.

Finally, one sentence on the possibility of seeing speech act pluralism in terms of perlocutionary pluralism. That is exists is trivially obvious per definition of (distal) perlocutionary effects (Austin, 1962/1975; Sbisà, 2013) and doesn't seem to need any serious discussion beyond, perhaps, empirical studies (compliments can surely please addressees, but can they also bore or enrage them, or make them blush, or laugh, or go to the bathroom? If so, when and how?).

3. *SPEECH ACT MONISM* AND *DYADIC REDUCTION*

So what's exactly the problem? Well, the problem is that the classic speech act theory doesn't seem to care much about plural, multi-functional illocutionary acts performed in the context of multi-party conversation, such as in our examples 1 and 2. Instead, it offers an image of communication reduced to two parties (speaker and hearer) which trade mono-functional illocutions:

> The speech act scenario is enacted by its two great heroes, "S" and "H"; and it works as follows: S goes up to H and cuts loose with an acoustic blast; if all goes well, if all the appropriate conditions are satisfied, if S's noise is infused with intentionality, and if all kinds of rules come into play, then the speech act is successful and [...] is concluded and S and H go their separate ways. (Searle, 1992: 7)

On this image, illocutionary acts are performed in a neat dyadic exchange built of speech act pairs (adjacency pairs): in one-on-one exchange, a Speaker "infuses" her utterance with a determined intention, which is then recognized by Hearer, who in return produces his own utterance, starting where the previous speaker finished and expecting her to start where he finishes. Questions are responded to with answers, answers with doubts, doubts with arguments, arguments with counterarguments, and, step-by-step, emerges a dialogue, where the felicity conditions for speech acts in pairs are nicely dovetailed.

This image is grounded in two crucial and interrelated assumptions that are broadly and unreflectively accepted:

(1) *Speech act monism:* each speech act has basically a *unique* primary force or function, something to be recognized and responded to appropriately;
(2) *Dyadic reduction:* conversation or communication can be fully grasped by a model consisting of two and only two interlocutors (Speaker and Hearer), other forms of multi-party conversation are derivatives of it.

Regarding (1), a recent account of Johnson is a good illustration:

> Searle's discussion also suggests there is a unique force fact for each utterance. […] Searle is an illocutionary monist insofar as he assumes there is at most one primary force for each utterance. For indirect speech acts, admittedly, the story is more complicated than it was for direct speech acts: Searle is committed to there being at most one primary force, at most one secondary force. But he nonetheless assumes that there is a single order of illocutionary forces. For direct speech acts the force is simple and unique. For indirect speech acts, the force is more complicated but is still unique at each level. (Johnson, 2019: 1153-1154).

Regarding (2), more elaborate critiques have been furnished by a number of scholars for some time now (Goffman, 1981; Haviland, 1986; Levinson, 1988). However, the gist is that "the standard [speech act] theories say nothing about illocutionary acts directed at hearers other than the addressees" (Clark & Carlson, 1982: 341)—while such acts clearly exist, as shown in examples 1 and 2 above.

Such critiques would very well serve my argument here—if only they were somewhat more correct. More precisely: they correctly expose both the illocutionary monism and the dyadic reduction, but only at a theoretical, rather than a literal and historic sense. To see this, let me engage some early speech act work. In his 1969 monograph, Searle observes this:

> Both because there are several different dimensions of illocutionary force, and because the same utterance act may be performed with a variety of different intentions, it is important to realize that *one and the same utterance may constitute the performance of several different illocutionary acts***.** There may be several different non-synonymous illocutionary verbs that correctly characterize the utterance. For example suppose at a party a wife says "It's really quite late". That utterance may be at one level a *statement* of fact; to her interlocutor, who has just remarked on how early it was, it

> may be (and be intended as) an *objection*; to her husband it may be (and be intended as) a *suggestion* or even a *request* ("Let's go home") as well as a *warning* ("You'll feel rotten in the morning if we don't"). (Searle, 1969: 70-71; emphasis added)

As is well known, Searle later took on and meticulously analyzed the problem of "several different dimensions of illocutionary force", namely, in his discussion of the taxonomy of illocutionary acts, where no less than twelve such dimensions (or differences between various acts) are distinguished (Searle, 1975a; see Searle & Vanderveken, 1985 for further refinements). However, how a variety of speaker's intentions can be formed to perform several different illocutionary acts in the context of—or shall we rather say, for the sake of—multiple and differentiated hearers has never become an issue. Not only that, the presence of multiple and differentiated hearers—while clearly salient—is not even acknowledged as a possible explanans here (as it would be in the "for the sake of" case).

Austin's theory—earlier and in a more complex way—also clearly recognizes various forms of speech act plurality (1962/1975; for an in-depth discussion see Sbisà, 2013). As already mentioned, the very description of "the total speech act in the total speech situation" includes three levels—locution, illocution and perlocution—and further within locution itself three additional levels: phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts. Furthermore, and significantly for my argument, Clark & Carlson (1982: 340ff.) have also remarked that Austin's first and most classic examples of performatives—marrying someone, christening (a boat, a baby), or bequeathing a watch—in order to be felicitous, all necessarily require some "institutional witnesses": a public official, naval officers, a priest, notary public, etc. In other words, such acts do need hearers other than direct addressees in order to succeed (in the illocutionary sense). Consider the marriage vow:

> *I, John, take you, Mary, to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward [etc.]*

While this locution of John (Speaker) explicitly addresses Mary as its target Hearer, it can only count as a valid marriage vow—for instance in the Roman Catholic tradition—if uttered in the presence of at least two witnesses. (So the distinction between speaking *to* and speaking *before* is not so easy to make: a direct addressee might be designated merely at the superficial linguistic level, and as such be a mere means to speak to someone else, the ultimate target of the speech act; see Levinson, 1988). If performed without them, that is, in a dyadic "speech act scenario" between John and Mary, it is either:

1) An Austinian *misfire* of the type A.2 – a *misinvocation* by virtue of *misapplication*, one that violates the condition that: "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked" (1962/1975: 15; Lecture II)
   or
2) Simply a stylized marriage *proposal*, or some other linguistic practice (play-acting, perhaps)

The upshot of it is that, contrary to some critics such as Johnson, the founding figures in the speech act theory acknowledge, even if somewhat parenthetically, illocutionary pluralism. Nonetheless, they do not ever seriously pursue pluralism—and in particular pluralism related to multiplicity of participants—in their investigations. Why?

One simple argument may be that multi-party exchanges are simply *not common*. Normally, we talk dyadically—much in the way "the speech act scenario" projects—and the examples adduced here are somewhat fanciful. Indeed, empirical data amassed over the 50 years of Conversation Analysis (see, e.g., Schegloff, 1968; 2002; Mondada, 2013) seem to clearly demonstrate the predominance of dyadic conversational structures. This, of course, is an empirical question, and one hard to be decidedly answered: what the percentage of dyadic vs. polyadic conversations is in any culture requires the kind of evidence we should be very unlikely to obtain. Some argued that dyadic exchanges are only typical of individualistic Western cultures, while other, collective, cultures are clearly dominated by multi-party conversations (e.g., Haviland, 1986; Levinson, 1988; Walsh, 1997). Goffman, and others in the empirical tradition of analyzing "forms of talk", tend to make yet bolder claims: "in any society, dyadic exchanges tend, in fact, to be in the minority" (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004: 2; see also Levinson, 1988). Others might additionally point to the way one-on-one telephone conversations have been selected as the central object of research for early conversation analysts. For good methodological reasons—isolation of the auditory channel intrinsic to conversation, ease of recording—much of research has turned to telephone exchanges as chief sources of data for investigating conversations (see esp. Schegloff, 2002). In this way, methodological expediency has inadvertently turned dyadic telephone conversation into a model for a *normal conversation* writ large. Whatever the exact facts, empirical analysts pose the following challenge to model philosophical analyses of conversation in terms of a dyadic scheme of a Speaker and a Hearer: "Even if such a scheme is intended to be a model, for descriptive work it cannot be"

(Hymes, 1972: 58). This challenge should, at least, be seriously addressed with some argument, empirical or otherwise.

One possible non-empirical argument is that the multi-party complication is, in the end, *not important*. It is not important, basically, because it is a contingent feature of context or a variation that can easily be explainable from the dyadic model. As we have seen, Austin mentions "the particular persons and circumstances" as background conditions for a felicitous procedure. In this way, possible illocutionary pluralism related to multiple participants is relegated to idiosyncratic contextual circumstances. Also, as already mentioned, his acute awareness of speech act pluralism is channeled instead to the distinction of various levels or aspects of speech acts, most notably locution, illocution, and perlocution (see Sbisà, 2013).

Searle, as is well known, resorts to the concept of indirect speech acts to account for the undeniable cases of illocutionary dualism, that is, cases where one and the same utterance in one and the same context expresses two illocutionary forces: *Can you pass me the salt*?, while obviously being a question also functions as a request; obviously and, in fact, primarily so. There is thus a certain hierarchy: primary illocutionary act (here: a request) is performed "by way of" a secondary illocutionary act (here: a question), which, in turn, is performed "by way of uttering a sentence the LITERAL meaning of which is such that its literal utterance constitutes a performance of that illocutionary act" (Searle, 1975b: 62). Because of this chain of "by way of" (or "by means of", see Clark & Carlson, 1982), I call this form of illocutionary plurality *vertical* plurality.

Again, there are nuances of the indirect speech act approach directly relevant to any analysis of illocutionary pluralism (Sbisà, 2013), not least the uptake of the hearer which, typically—even in the case of most conventional, idiomatic expressions—can be non-defectively related to the literally encoded secondary force, or both forces at once:

> Can you pass me the salt?
> Yes… Ooups, well, actually, I cannot, John just took it. Sorry.

Given that this is a well-researched topic, I will not delve any further into these nuances. Instead, I will briefly discuss two extensions of the indirect speech act plurality. The first of them further complicates the *vertical* axis of plurality while the second introduces a *horizontal* axis, something that I think should be considered as the illocutionary pluralism proper.

4. VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL EXTENSIONS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

4.1 Levinson's conversational projects

We have already seen in the two opening examples that Searle's two levels might not suffice: we can conventionally and recognizably perform three levels of illocutionary forces. Levinson goes a step further, perhaps even two steps, in his concept of conversational *projects:*

> The notion of project we need for action ascription is not 'thematic thread' but 'plan of action'—that is, a course of action that at least one participant is pursuing, which may at first be opaque to others then retrospectively discernible […] and then prospectively projectable. (Levinson, 2013: 122)

The crucial point is that in conversation speakers orient to each other's projects:

> Clearly, in conversation, projects are interactionally negotiated, jointly launched, diverted or aborted. Actions then are in the service of projects, and projects are themselves actions to accomplish. That is why there is no simple answer to what action this turn is doing: it is doing something local, which governs its response types, but also part of something more global, which, as soon as it is recognizable, also plays a role in fashioning responses (as in the 'go ahead' or 'blocking' responses to pre-s). In short, there is a hierarchy of actions within a project. (Levinson, 2013: 126-127)

To demonstrate the working of conversational projects, Levinson analyzes the following exchange between a teenage daughter—Virginia —and her mom:

> (20) Virginia, p. 8.
> 12 Vir: But - you know, you have to have enough mo:ney?, I think
> 13 ten dollars ' ud be good.
> 14 (0.4)
> 15 Mom: .hhh Ten dollahs a week?
> 16 Vir: Mm hm.
> 17 Mom: Just to throw away?
> 18 (0.5)
> 19 Vir: Not to throw away, to spe:nd.
> 20 (.)
> 21 Mom: ((shrilly)) On [WHAT? That ' s what I been tryin ' a fi nd =
> 22 Pr?: [eh hih hih
> 23 Mom: = out. besides McDo:nalds?,
>
> Mom's "Ten dollahs a week?" (line 15) is ostensibly locally a clarification question (per week or per month?) to a proposal for more money; but also, querying the amount produces an

> opportunity for daughter Virginia to justify the amount, where, if those justifications prove inadequate, grounds are thereby provided for rejecting the proposal. Virginia's project, asking for more pocket money (earlier more clothes), is countered by Mom's project of holding the status quo. Other-initiated repair, an information request, a challenge to produce reasons, a pre-accusation and thus likely refusal to grant the request, are all visible in the one turn. (Levinson, 2013: 126-127)

In discussing Levinson's nuanced approach to action ascription in conversational activities (see also Levinson, 1979; 2006), Sbisà (2013: 239) identifies his speech act pluralism with "the plural potentialities of sequential positioning" for speech acts in conversation. We thus have a certain possible sequence of acts more or less rationally and recognizably linked in an overarching project, a sequence we can possibly project from any speech act utterance in conversation. This is a flexible and sophisticated approach to vertical plurality, far exceeding the limits of Searle's conventional approach in the way ascriptions are made and in their complexity (2 vs. n-levels). In this way, it goes quite some way to undermining the classical speech act theory's possible counter-argument that illocutionary pluralism is not so important, because it can be, in the end, explained away by the tools developed in the theory's salad days: chiefly, the concept of indirect illocutionary forces. However, it is still a vertical model: it is based on a projection of various illocutionary forces linked in a "by way of" or "by means of" manner to the literally uttered act through some kind of a sequential hierarchy.

4.2 Clark's lateral *speech acts*

Another approach to illocutionary pluralism, which I have already called *horizontal*, has been proposed by Clark. Clark (1992; Clark & Carlson, 1982) departs from Searle's standard concept of indirect speech acts. Examples such as this:

> *Ann to Barbara, in front of Charles*: Barbara, I insist that you tell Charles who we met at the museum today.

function much in the way described by Searle (1975b): an indirect, although function-wise primary, speech act (here: request) is performed by way of (Searle) or by means of (Goldman, Clark) a secondary, literally expressed speech act (here: assertion). Since both these illocutionary forces are directed to the same addressee (here: Barbara), Clark calls this *linear* indirectness.

However, slight, and entirely familiar, change in the addressed party, produces a wholly different type of indirectness, namely, *lateral* indirectness (Clark & Carlson, 1982):

> *Ann, to Charles, in front of Barbara*: Charles, I insist that Barbara tell you who we met at the museum today.

Here, the primary speech act is performed to a non-addressee hearer Y (Barbara) by means of / by way of the secondary speech act performed to the addressee hearer X (Charles). While it is Charles who is linguistically addressed, it is Barbara who is expected to produce the conventional uptake (that is, to understand she is requested to tell the story and react accordingly) to the conventional request (please tell the story). Importantly, Ann is openly exhibiting her recursive communicative intention (see Grice, 1989): while ostensibly addressing Charles, she wants Barbara to recognize her intention that she wants to communicate her request to Barbara by means of Barbara's recognition of that intention, etc.

The consequences of such lateral indirectness for understanding speech acts in actual conversations are wide-ranging:

> With ordinary linear indirectness, utterances can become very complicated; but with lateral indirectness, the possibilities almost defy imagination. For a relatively simple example, consider this:
>
> (67) *Ann, to Barbara, in front of Charles, David, and Ewan*: Barbara, I insist that Charles tell you the joke about the two Irishmen. (Clark & Carlson, 1982: 364)

According to Clark & Carlson's analysis, Ann performs a direct but secondary assertive to Barbara, indirect but primary request to Charles, as well as possibly indirect but primary warning to David (who hates jokes about Irishmen or Charles's jokes, and is duly warned, e.g., *you don't want to hear this, so you better go get a beer now, David*). We can further imagine that due to a particular agreement between Ann and Ewan (*you go and prepare the birthday cake when I ask Charles to tell a joke*), this can be a command to Ewan. While for Searlean speech act heroes this can indeed defy imagination, it seems natural enough for actual communicators who tend to be competent in such plural speech act performance from a very young age (see Tomasello, 2008).

Clark's idea to bridge the gap between such conversational complexities and the classic speech act theory—beyond defining lateral indirectness—is to stipulate *the speech act of informative*: "an informative is an act by the speaker to make it known to the

participants what illocutionary act he is performing for the addressees" (Clark & Carlson, 1982: 350; see p. 351 for a proper definition of the informative in terms of felicity conditions). The most obvious—and most striking—consequence of this additional type of an illocutionary act can be briefly summarized as follows:

> In our proposal, the speaker performs two types of illocutionary act with each utterance. One is the traditional kind, such as an assertion, promise, or apology; this is directed at the addressees. The other, called an informative, is directed at all the participants in the conversation—the addressees and third parties alike. It is intended to inform all of them jointly of the assertion, promise, or apology being directed at the addressees. We present evidence that every traditional illocutionary act is performed by means of an informative. (Clark & Carlson, 1982: 332)

Therefore, every speech act, even a simple request uttered by A to B in a one-on-one exchange would have the form:

> I, the Speaker, hereby *inform* you, all the Participants to the current conversation (= the Addressee and, potentially, other non-addressed Hearers), that I hereby perform an illocutionary act I_1 to the Addressee.

Two critical points on that. First, Clark (see also Clark, 1992) unduly limits the primary illocutionary acts to the Addressee. As could be seen in Clark's own examples, such acts might just as well be performed to the non-addressed participants. Second, the solution seems too complex, too unwieldy and, simply, too Occam razor's prone. While it does reveal speech act pluralism in multi-participant conversations, it resorts to a disposable layer of illocutionary force. Do we really need to read: *I hereby inform that I ask you what the time is?*

Instead, in what follows, I would suggest a solution too hastily dismissed by Clark & Carlson (1982: 336), namely, "a drastic revision of the notion of addressee" grounded in a more fundamental redefinition of the conversational context.

5. PLURAL SPEECH ACTS IN A POLYLOGUE

The argument so far runs as follows:

> Speech act pluralism = locutionary, illocutionary, or perlocutionary pluralism

Focus here is on *illocutionary pluralism* (locutionary pluralism belongs to a semantic debate over underdetermination and contextualism; perlocutionary pluralism is obvious and trivial per definition of perlocution)

Illocutionary pluralism = vertical or horizontal pluralism

Focus here in on *horizontal* illocutionary pluralism (vertical pluralism is well-established via the notion of indirect speech acts and also conversational projects)

Horizontal illocutionary pluralism = 1) multiple ascription of illocutionary forces by the speaker and the hearer or by the same hearer or 2) by multiple hearers

1) = *illocutionary ambiguity* (force ambiguity) possibly leading to a metalinguistic negotiation (Ludlow, 2014; Plunkett & Sundell, 2013, 2019; Plunkett, 2015) over force between the speaker and the hearer (see Johnson, 2019; Kukla, 2014; Lance & Kulka, 2013; for good examples)
2) =

2a) *illocutionary relativism* grounded in various ascriptions by various audience members (see Johnson, 2019 and Sbisà, 2013 who both deny this label but eventually furnish arguments to this effect)—this, again, can lead to a metalinguistic dispute

2b) *illocutionary pluralism proper*, where different communicatively intended and conventionally recognized illocutionary forces are directed to different audience members

Focus here is on 2b: *illocutionary pluralism proper*

Following different paths than I do, Clark and Carlson, in their discussion of lateral indirectness via informatives, get as far as to 2b. However, the limitations of informatives discussed above prevent them from producing a comprehensive account of illocutionary pluralism. To this end, a different notion of the basic context of conversation is needed.

I see this notion in the concept of *polylogue*. For the basic understanding of the concept it suffices to unpack its Greek etymology—*poly-logos* signifies discourse (λόγος) between many (πολύ). For the current purposes, let's divide all verbal activities into either mono-logues or dia-logues. *Dia-logues* comprise all interactive uses of language (to be precise: *actual* or *explicit* dialogues; *internal* or

implicit dialogues are monological renderings of actual interactions). Based on the number of speakers, dia-logues are a genus that can be, quite straightforwardly, divided into the species of: *di-logues* (2 speakers), *tri-logues* (3 speakers), *tetra-logues* (4 speakers), etc. *Poly-logues* are thus all dia-logues which are not di-logues, that is, those that involve three or more speakers.[1]

While the numbers of speakers are significant for how conversation—and argumentation in particular—develops, many further characteristics define the concept, occasionally used by others who analyze many-to-many communication.[2] From a traditional perspective of the speech act theory or conversation analysis, conversation goes wild. The very basic notions—relevance, coherence, sequential organization, adjacency pairs—are challenged. Instead of even briefly describing the empirical results of conversational characteristics of polylogues, let me provide a list of basic features of polylogues, and then focus on three of them directly relevant to the study of illocutionary pluralism.

Basic features of a polylogue:[3]

(1) Much increased complexity of exchanges (multiple responses, parallel sub-discussions which might criss-cross, overlap, and reunite)
(2) Problems in determining the relevance and completeness of exchanges
(3) Distributed or delegated responsibility for talking (who of the addressed is to answer a difficult question?)
(4) Different sequential patterns, e.g., for coherence management
(5) Multiple-recipient design (conveying different, even inconsistent, messages to different participants)

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[1] It's important to stress the distinction between dia-logues and di-logues. They are often confused due to: 1) the easily overlooked difference in Greek terms (*dia*-logue: 'through' discourse; *di*-logue: discourse between 'two'); 2) the practice, deeply entrenched in both ordinary and academic parlance, of limiting a dia-logue to a di-logue.

[2] See Sylvan, 1985; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004; Wimmer, 2007; Bou-Franch & Blitvich, 2014. Others simply speak of multi-party, multi-participant, or n-party conversations.

[3] See Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017; Bou-Franch & Blitvich, 2014; Bruxelles & Kerbrat-Orecchionni, 2004; Clark, 1992; Clark & Carlson, 1982; Egan, 2009; Goffman, 1981; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1990; Haviland, 1986; Kerbrat-Orecchionni, 1997, 2004; Lewiński, 2013, 2014, 2017; Lewiński & Aakhus, 2014; Levinson, 1988; Marcoccia, 2004; Maynard, 1986; Sacks, 1992; Simmel, 1910/1951; Sylvan, 1985; Traverso, 2004.

(6) Various forms of co-production of discourse that may lead to strategic coalition-building
(7) Majority-minority divisions
(8) Continuation possible after one party departs (so the real collective begins at three)
(9) Various forms of mediation, arbitration, etc.
(10) Difficulties in gauging and establishing the common ground among all the participants

For feature (2) consider a simple question of A asked to B, C, and D.

Example 2 A: What time is it?
B: Three thirty.

Example 3 A: What would you like to drink?
B: Red wine.

In a dyadic exchange these are entirely analogous, and in this case felicitous and complete exchanges. However, in a polylogical context we clearly see the difference: Example 2 is a *collective question/request*, where one collective action or even one individual action of whichever hearer (B, C, D) constitutes a satisfying and complete response. By contrast, 3 is a *distributive question/request*, where an individual action of *each* hearer is needed to complete the exchange (unless, of course, B is the group's spokesperson authorized to speak on behalf of C and D, or C and D are already standing with glasses of caipirinha, etc.). In the distributive case, de facto three individual requests to three different individuals are thus performed—which constitutes the simplest form of illocutionary pluralism as delimited above.[4]

To see how features (5) and (10) are interrelated in enabling illocutionary pluralism, consider the following case:

Example 4

> A group of friends in a restaurant, about to order desserts after dinner:
> *Ann, to Barbara, Chiara, Daniel, and Edward, after consulting the waiters:*
> At this hour, they only have chocolate mousse!

[4] See Egan, 2009, for a semantically-focused discussion of similar cases, which brings him to the concept of *utterance-proliferation*, also with respect to speech acts other than assertives (see Egan, 2009: 269-271).

Ann's simple *assertion* obviously becomes part of the public conversational score (Lewis, 1979) in this five-participant polylogue. However, we can also easily imagine that this assertion is merely a secondary speech act, which serves as a vehicle to convey a number of indirect but primary speech acts. For instance, considering that:

- A, B, and C also shared their love of chocolate mousse before, so that it's their *shared* ground—A performs a *recommendation*, or perhaps some joyful expressive;
- A and D discussed D's chocolate allergy: in their *shared* ground, this would be a *warning* or even an *apology*;
- A had an argument with E in which E claimed the restaurant never serves chocolate mousse at a late hour: in their shared ground, this is a *refutation.*

So, we have a conversational score *common* to all participants, and conversational scores *shared* by subsets of participants.[5] The former is linked to an evolving common ground, while the latter to what can better be called a shared ground, limited to a sub-set of participants.[6] These shared sub-scores have two varieties: they can either be 1) *inclusive sub-scores* shared with others as proper subsets of public conversational score: so everybody can know that Daniel is allergic to chocolate and aware that Ann's assertion is primarily a warning or apology to him; or 2) *exclusive sub-scores* limited to a subgroup of participants—so in the joke example it should be only David who's warned of Charles's bad jokes and, here, it could only be known to Ann and Edward that he was refuted (and further, as the one who lost the bet, needs to buy Ann a stash of chocolate for the coming week).

Now, the crucial argument to be made here is the following: *It is this multiplicity of simultaneously evolving scores that allows for illocutionary pluralism proper in a polylogue: with one and the same locution we can advance different illocutionary moves in different scores kept with different participants*. Further, the crucial condition here, already hinted at, is that in all these scores the speaker intends his intention to do *x, y, z* to different speakers to be recognized as intended. These plural illocutionary forces are not only conventionally recognized but also intentionally performed—in the sense of recursive communicative intentions (Grice, 1989; Strawson, 1964). This is different from intending to deceive an eavesdropping spy or concealing

[5] Cf. Goffman's (1981) description of *byplay*: "subordinated communication of a subset of ratified participants".
[6] See Camp (2018) for a distinction between Lewis-type (1979) *conversational score or record* and Stalnaker-type (2002) *common ground*.

some information from a child: in such cases, our intention works only in cases where our intention is *not* recognized.

6. CONCLUSION

As I have shown before in a number of places (Lewiński, 2013, 2014, 2017; Lewiński & Aakhus, 2014; Aakhus & Lewiński, 2017), specifically *argumentative* polylogues have particular properties directly observable in the reality of multi-party argumentation. These properties can be described from various interlinked perspectives. Here, I endeavoured to drill to the very bottom of it, and present polylogical properties as speech act properties. The crucial message is: there exists *illocutionary pluralism proper*, where different communicatively intended and conventionally recognized illocutionary forces are directed to different audience members.

If this message holds, this is very significant for argumentation theory. Speech act theory is a widely accepted conceptual background in the discipline: from rudimentary understanding of speech acts in formal models of argumentation (e.g., Prakken, 2000, 2009) to elaborate proposals of pragma-dialecticians (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984, 2004). If speech act theory is challenged and extended—for instance by embracing the illocutionary pluralism advocated here[7]—then the theories of argumentation which are built of speech act blocks need to be challenged and extended too. Perhaps there is a world of argumentative speech acts dynamics yet to be seen, understood, and evaluated?

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[7] See Fogal, Harris, & Moss (ed., 2018), for current challenges, updates and extensions of the speech act theory. See Jacobs (1989) for specific challenges to the argumentative treatment of speech acts.

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