Foundations of speech act theory

Philosophical and linguistic perspectives

Edited by Savas L. Tsohatzidis

London and New York

says, and that there are a variety of distinct things to be said in saying *that*.

4 That would be so on some ideas about categories and category mistakes. But I am not out either to defend or to refute such ideas.

5 This line has been defended by Williamson 1992.

6 I am not claiming that this is the only possible understanding for 'at home' inside a 'that'-clause. I am claiming that it is the only understanding it can have where that clause is to be understood to specify some condition which obtains, or obtains according to such and such.

8 Illocution and its significance

Jennifer Hornsby

J.L. Austin thought that the study of language had been too much focused on words, and that the study of action had been too much focused on 'ordinary physical actions': he thought that *illocution* had been neglected (Austin 1962). But for all of Austin's stress on illocutionary acts, I think that he failed to appreciate the significance of his own idea. And I think that subsequent writers, having their own agenda, have not understood what underlies it. My aim in what follows is to provide an account of an idea of *illocution* which reveals the use of words to be *communicative* action. In my account, *illocution* occupies the same sort of theoretical role as it does in Austin's and Searle's.[1] But I elucidate it differently.

The true significance of *illocution* is shown when speech act theory is located in a broader, social context; and I think that a correct account of it has repercussions for certain political questions. Here I shall have space to offer only a sketchy account of the connections that I see: I do so in section 2. In section 1, I develop a conception of the divisions between locutionary and illocutionary, and between illocutionary and perlocutionary, which leads to a definition of *illocutionary act*. The definition is matched to a way of thinking about *illocution* which I claim is more satisfactory than Austin's. (I leave it to an Appendix to contrast my account with Searle's.)

Austin struggled with distinctions between acts and actions, and between acts and consequences; and he never settled on a single way of using the term 'act'. In my usage, 'acts' will denote things people do, and 'actions' will be reserved for particular doings (each one of them 'fixed and physical', as Austin put it). This means that the act–action distinction here is a distinction between properties and particulars. The usage is somewhat stipulative, of course.[2] But it accords with Austin's own principal usage: the speech *acts* of his text are the *things* done with words of his title *How to do Things with Words*. And it accords with the principal usage in recent philosophy of action, where *actions* are taken to be *events*. The absence of some definite terminological policy, and in particular the ambiguous use of 'speech act', has been a barrier to clarity about many issues. I hope that a firmer sense of the nature of the problem of 'demarcating the illocutionary' will be gained when 'act' and 'action' are both used unambiguously.[3]

1 ILLOCUTION

1.1 Language and speech acts

When there is an utterance, there is an *action* of someone's. But in the case of any one such action, there will be many things the speaker has done – many *acts* that she has performed. (For example, an action might be someone's doing (at least) these three things: *uttering the sentence 'It's raining', saying that it's raining, reminding Jane to take her umbrella.*) Each speech act corresponds to a sort of action; so that a principled way of organizing speech acts provides a framework into which the occasions on which one or another is done could be fitted so as to provide for full and fully illuminating accounts of speech actions. The classification of speech acts which Austin got started can then be thought of as a means of imposing system on to the actual data of linguistic communication.

Many writers have come to use 'speech act' more or less synonymously with 'illocutionary act'. But since there are theoretically interesting things which are done with words but which cannot be brought under the head of 'illocutionary', a broader conception of *speech act* than theirs is needed.[4] In an attempt to define 'speech act', someone might seek a class of things all and only the members of which are always, or necessarily, done using speech. But in fact there is no such class; for there are many things which are sometimes done by using words and sometimes done otherwise (example: I can warn you that there's a bull by saying 'There's a bull', and I can warn you that there's a bull by silently gesticulating). We might then think of speech acts as things that *may* be done using words. Obviously this gives an extremely permissive conception of a speech act; but it ensures that nothing that could be of interest is omitted from a classification, and an actual account of certain speech acts can reveal what is actually interesting. Austin's main classification of speech acts into types was into locutionary (which incorporates phonetic, phatic and rhetic),[5] illocutionary and perlocutionary. Each of these categories of speech act subsumes some distinctive range of acts such that a person's doing of any one of them is, typically, her using language.

A complete account of the linguistic practice of any community divides into a portion special to their particular language and concerned with the significance of its sounds, and a portion dealing with the uses to which productions of significant sounds are put. I have argued elsewhere (Hornsby 1988) that this division corresponds to Austin's locutionary–illocutionary division: a theory of locution must be a theory for English or for Bulgarian or for whichever language, but a theory of illocution should have the potential to serve any language. When these two portions are thought to provide for an entire account of the use of some language, it will be apparent that some things people do with words are things that an account of language as such cannot be expected to cover. My suggestion –

to be made more precise in what follows – is that the division between illocutionary and perlocutionary marks a distinction between speech acts which are of proprietary concern to an account of language and speech acts which are not.[6]

A conception of the domain of the illocutionary as the domain of language but not of language-specific meaning fits well with Austin's view of it as of especial concern. His warnings against eliding the illocutionary, against allowing it to be swallowed up by either the locutionary or perlocutionary (Austin 1962: 103), were directed against those who believed that one dealt with language when one dealt with linguistic meaning, and that anything else to be said about language use comes into a much more general account of human behaviour: on their account, there is language-specific meaning, and there is action, but nothing, as it were, in between. But despite his emphasis on the illocutionary, and despite his struggles to 'isolate' it, and to taxonomize it, Austin had extraordinarily little to say about it. There is a curious absence from Austin's writings of any interest in the phenomenon of language in general.

An examination of Austin's treatment of the illocutionary–perlocutionary distinction will not only bear out this conception of the illocutionary (as one that he introduced), but also point us in the direction we should look for an understanding of illocution as a general linguistic phenomenon; and it will, incidentally, explain Austin's own lack of interest in such an understanding.

1.2 Austin on the illocutionary–perlocutionary divide

Austin offered many different ways of making out an illocutionary–perlocutionary distinction, of which three stand out. (a) It is a distinction between things done *in* performing a locutionary act and things done *by* performing a locutionary act (ibid.: 108). (This way of thinking about it explains the *il-* and *per-* terminology.) (b) It corresponds to a distinction between what is essentially conventional – illocutionary – and what is not – perlocutionary (ibid.: 121). (c) It corresponds to a distinction between acts which essentially introduce consequences – perlocutionary – and acts which do not – illocutionary (ibid.: 107, 114, 121).

Austin acknowledged that the 'in'/'by' test could not serve as a criterion for the distinction: he said that it was 'at best very slippery' (ibid.: 131). And although he went to considerable lengths to refine the test, what he came up with is unsatisfactory. This is hardly surprising, when one considers that in hosts of cases it is possible to think of someone *both* as having ϕ-d in ψ-ing *and* as having ϕ-d by ψ-ing.[7] The test is inherently flawed.

Yet the test may cast light on Austin's general classificatory scheme. In the case of any particular action, knowing the acts that it was of, it is possible to impose a certain kind of ordering upon those acts and see some

as *more basic than* others.[8] Usually the word 'by' is taken to define 'basic', so that it is said, for instance, that where Jane persuaded John to stay indoors by saying how cold it was outside, *saying how cold it was outside* is more basic than *persuading John to stay indoors.* But the ordering of acts for basicness seems not to be exhausted by 'by': 'in' is apt to make finer discriminations between the relative basicness of acts than 'by' does. (For example, our intuition is that *saying 'It's cold'* (phatic) is more basic than *saying that it's cold* (rhetic), and we may find 'She said that it's cold *in* saying "It's cold"' more natural than 'She said that it's cold *by* saying "It's cold"'.) When the word 'in' supplements the word 'by', allowance is made for cases where, so to speak, the distance between two acts in the ordering or basicness is smaller than what would be required for the truth of the relevant 'by'-sentence. Once 'in' is in, Austin's 'in'/'by' test can be set in the context of an ordering of acts in terms of their relative basicness. Perlocutionary acts (done by doing locutionary ones) then come out as less basic acts than illocutionary ones (done in doing locutionary ones).

If a line is to be drawn between il- and per- locutionary, then the idea of relative basicness will not get us very far: it tells us about the dimension on which we have to draw a line, rather than about where to draw it. But it may assist in understanding the curious refinements that Austin made to his test, when he distinguished a number of different senses both of 'in' and of 'by'. He spoke of two 'in the course of' senses of 'in' as well as a conventional sense (ibid.: 127–8); and he spoke of a 'criterial' as well as a 'means-to-end' sense of 'by' (ibid.: 129–30). A single theme surely underlies all these distinctions of 'senses'. When someone has done one thing in or by doing another, then her doing the one thing arises from her doing the other; and we can ask in what kind of way it arises. Suppose she does some particular thing by saying that p. Is it that in the circumstances saying that p quite simply constitutes doing the thing? Or is there a convention that saying that p counts as doing the thing? Or is it that her action of saying that p had certain consequences in virtue of which it is her doing the thing? Austin's different senses of 'in' or 'by' correspond to the different ways in which acts arise from one another – to different species of basicness, that is, including, it seems, at least *simple, conventional, consequential.*[9]

Austin's other main criteria for making the illocutionary–perlocutionary distinction may seem to come into their own now. According to (b), illocutionary acts are 'essentially conventional'; and according to (c), perlocutionary acts 'bring in consequences'. So we might wrap up all three criteria in one package, and say that Austin thought of illocutionary acts as those that are conventionally less basic than locutionary ones, and of perlocutionary acts as those that are consequentially less basic than locutionary ones. But the idea takes us no further if the project is to carve out the illocutionary. For if we hope to use the notion of consequence to separate the perlocutionary from the illocutionary, we shall now have to say that illocutionary acts do not import consequences at all. Yet Austin

himself saw that consequences were not out of the picture where illocution is concerned: he thought that warning was an illocutionary act and persuading a perlocutionary one, but he appreciated that just as one's action would have to have had a certain effect on x for one to have persuaded of something, so apparently one's action would have to have had some effect on x for one to have warned her of something. It may be that the consequence which an action is seen to have when it is viewed as of an illocutionary act is less remote from the action than that which it is seen to have when it is viewed as of a perlocutionary act. So we could always say that a perlocutionary act is consequentially less basic than an illocutionary one (just as each is less basic than a locutionary one). But in order to be in a position actually to locate the boundary between illocutionary and perlocutionary, we should then need a way to distinguish between two different kinds of consequences of actions.[10]

This is where convention might be supposed to come in. Austin seems to have allowed that effects are on the scene whether we see someone as doing an illocutionary thing or as doing a perlocutionary thing, but to have thought that the effect a person's action has which is relevant to its being of an illocutionary act is a *conventional* matter. An audience's arriving in a state of having been warned is, in appropriate circumstances, supposedly, a conventional consequence of a speech action, whereas an audience's coming to be persuaded is a consequence but not a conventional one. Well, if we are in the habit of thinking that language use is a conventional matter, then it may seem fitting to employ convention in demarcating the illocutionary. But we need to be careful about our habitual thought. We may remark that it is a matter of convention that sounds have the significance that they do among the populations of speakers who share a language. The remark brings out the 'non-naturalness' of linguistic meaning. But as it stands, it can be a remark about the domain of the locutionary; it tells us nothing at all about how illocutionary acts arise, which is a question about how people can do what they do do in using sounds having the meanings which (perhaps conventionally) they have. When an English speaker uses the words 'There's a bull', then, arguably at least, she relies on the conventional significance round here that those words have in order to get into the open the thought that a bull is present. But what convention could she rely on in order to warn someone that there's a bull by expressing that thought? It is obviously wrong to say that there is a convention that one expresses the thought that something F is present to warn of the presence of something that is F. And a convention pertaining to thoughts about bulls in particular can hardly be in operation. (Exactly how many conventions would one then have to introduce?) No doubt there is a great deal to be said about the exact role of convention in language use.[11] Perhaps conventions determine locutionary acts, and perhaps some speech acts are indeed related to others by conventional basicness. The point here is only that the illocutionary consequences of speaking require no specific

conventions beyond those of the locutionary acts which (arguably) they exploit.[12] Whereas we may isolate a particular causal transaction in explaining how one act arose from another where it was consequentially less basic than the other, there is no convention we can isolate in the cases where Austin seems to say that a convention determines one act to arise from another.

It could be that Austin thought that convention serves in defining the illocutionary because of his initial preoccupation with what is actually a very special class of illocutionary acts. Early on in *How to do Things with Words* (1962), Austin confined his attention to such acts as christening ships and getting married, where particular forms of words are used to carry out some ceremonial or ritual procedure. Perhaps his focus on tailored, conventionalized utterances combined with the vague enough idea that language is 'used in conformity with conventions' to make it appear to Austin that convention could characterize the broad notion of illocution that he later sought to explicate.[13] If so, that would explain in turn why Austin had nothing to say about illocution as such: he wrongly thought that convention said it all. But if it is indeed a mistake to accord to convention the role of marking out what is illocutionary, then we will need to know how illocutionary acts arise from locutionary ones. The absence from Austin's writings of any interest in the phenomenon of language is due to his having missed this question, I think.

1.3 Communication and reciprocity

We saw that illocutionary acts require consequences of a sort, but that they require no specific conventions beyond the locutionary ones which (arguably) are presupposed to them. Consider again the particular case. A person who, in suitable circumstances, expresses the thought that a bull is present may do the less basic thing of warning that a bull is present. There is no convention which ensures that expressing this thought gives rise to a warning; and if we want to speak of a consequence that her action must have had to have been a warning, then the only way is to use the same illocutionary term over again – the audience must have been warned. It seems that the speaker relies only on a certain receptiveness on her audience's part for her utterance to work for her as illocutionarily meant: the audience takes her to have done what she meant to. The audience's being warned appears to depend on nothing more than the audience and the speaker being parties of a normal linguistic exchange.

Let us give the name 'reciprocity' to the condition which provides for the particular way, just illustrated, in which one speech act can arise from another, more basic one. When reciprocity obtains between people, they are such as to recognize one another's speech as it is meant to be taken. That there is reciprocity is a fact exactly as ordinary, and exactly as mysterious, as the fact that speakers have the ability not only to voice

meaningful thoughts, but also to be heard, by those who share the language, as doing some of the things that they do when they voice them.

Searle was quite explicit about the crucial element of what is going on here, which he illustrated for the speech act of *telling A that p*. 'If I am trying to tell someone something ..., as soon as he recognizes [that I am trying to tell it to him], I have succeeded ... Unless he recognizes that I am trying to tell him [it], I do not fully succeed in telling it to him' (Searle 1969: 47). So what a person relies on to tell A something is A's being open to the idea that she might be telling him what in fact she means to tell him: unless A can readily entertain the idea that she might be doing this, A could hardly take her to be doing it;[14] when A does take her so, he is in a state of mind sufficient, with her utterance, for her to have done it. What reciprocity provides for on this account is the success of attempts to do certain speech acts. It allows there to be things that speakers can do simply by being heard as (attempting to and thus) doing them.

If reciprocity replaces convention as the key to illocution, illocution can assume its proper place in an account of language use. Communication by words requires that speakers should produce recognizable sounds: a language, or system of locution, needs to be in place; and an audience must rely upon knowing what thought a speaker is expressing (determined, perhaps, by conventional relations between sounds and thoughts). But communication, which is a relation between people, requires more than common ways of interpreting patterns of sounds: it requires understanding on an audience's part which is attuned, not only to sounds' significance, but also to speakers' attempted performances of acts like telling. Whatever the particular language, it is a condition of its normal successful use – of speakers' intended communicative acts actually being done – that people be sufficiently in harmony, as it were, to provide for recognition of what speakers are up to. Speakers can exploit, in addition to their knowledge of a language, the existence of reciprocity.

1.4 Illocution

When reciprocity is seen to underlie illocution, we understand what is right in thinking of the illocutionary as within the domain of language (though not of language-specific meaning). And we thereby gain a sense of what is meant by saying that illocutionary acts are 'essentially linguistic': some features of speech actions flow from something in the nature of linguistic communication itself, and those features, which are illocutionary ones, constitute the actions as of certain specifically communicative acts.

Allowing ourselves a background of reciprocity, illocutionary acts might be circumscribed thus:

ϕ-ing is an illocutionary act iff a sufficient condition of a person's ϕ-ing

that p[15] is that an attempt on her part at ϕ-ing that p causes an audience to take her to be ϕ-ing that p.

Illocutionary acts are characterized here by reference to certain types of effects (or results, or consequences, or upshots[16]) that actions may have. Just as it is sufficient for an action's being someone's killing someone (i.e. its being of the *killing* sort) that it have as effect someone's death, so it is sufficient for an action's being of some sort which is an illocutionary sort that it have as effect an audience's taking it some way. But the relevant effect, where an act is illocutionary, is very special, being the effect of being taken to be of the act that it is (thereby) of.

Illocutionary effects are especially immediate. And we see now why some have found it tempting to say (what Austin vacillated around saying) that only perlocutionary effects are genuine effects. Some philosophers under the influence of Hume will find it difficult to accept that we have an effect at all where illocution is in question: in order to be content to call something an effect of someone's doing something, they will want to be told more about it than that it is a piece of recognition that can only be specified by reference to its cause. Yet there is an obvious sense in which an audience's recognizing what someone who makes sounds is doing is, like anything else that ensues from those sounds' being made, distinct empirically from the making of them. What is special about illocutionary effects is that our concepts for them are just the concepts of the actions whose effects there are. We need a view about causation which, unlike any Humean one, allows for phenomena that partake of reciprocity, and which can accommodate communication in a causal world, which is, in part, a world of interacting persons.[17] Illocutionary acts are constituents of social practices, and they are sustained by the practices of which they are themselves a part. Actions which are of illocutionary acts work (causally) by virtue of that.

We can see now what truth underlies the idea of those who have wanted to equate the notions of *speech act* and *illocutionary act*. 'Speech act' is sometimes supposed to have application whenever there is an action which counts as a genuine piece of language use. Well, where an illocutionary act is in question, there is, as it were, no distance between doing it and doing it intentionally: the effect characteristic of a piece of illocution just is the effect of a successful attempt at it. So assuming that there is an action only when someone does something or other intentionally,[18] we know that when someone does an illocutionary thing, there is an action. Locutionary things are done intentionally as well, of course. But in the illocutionary case, it is the satisfaction of the very condition which ensures that there is an action which ensures also, via reciprocity, that the action has its own communicative point. If we wanted a definition of speech action, we could say that there is a speech action if, and only if, something illocutionary is done in using the words of some language. *Illocution* would then be shown to be the crux of all those actions which are communicative uses of language.[19]

Next we can see why perlocutionary acts can be thought of as outside the province of a study of language as such. Thinking, as we did, of perlocutionary acts as less basic than illocutionary ones, one may have a conception of an episode of speech, and of further things that went on not in the nature of the episode as an episode of speech but because of additional consequences. The idea of an additional consequence is now the idea of a consequence going beyond any that reciprocity could secure.[20] Some perlocutionary acts, such as *persuading*, require language for their performance, and are, to that extent, linguistic acts; but, unlike illocutionary acts, their being performed still relies on more than reciprocity. Even where some type of effect on an audience is the consequence proper to some perlocutionary act, more is required (to have an instance of that act) than simple recognition on the audience's part of what the speaker is up to. (If I am to *persuade* you that Austin was wrong about convention, it is not enough that you should realize that I mean you to come to think that Austin was wrong: to succeed in persuading you, I must avail myself of the power of reason working in you, and not just of the power of a language working for me.) The line between illocutionary and perlocutionary comes between those acts on the one hand which need invoke only reciprocity to have their proper consequences, and those acts on the other hand which invoke either more than reciprocity or something quite else.[21]

1.5 Illocution and performatives

Austin tried to develop an account of illocution in order to further his 'programme of finding a list of explicit performative words'. We have seen that the account he arrived at covered much more ground than the specifically conventionalized utterances he began from. This is not surprising, of course, given that illocutionary performances extend far beyond uses of performative formulae. When people use explicit performatives (and use them outside rituals or ceremonies), they do so, presumably, because their illocutionary attempts might not succeed without the help of a device for making them evident: when there are many things that one might be doing with one's words, one cannot always rely on one's audience to recognize exactly what one is doing, so that one may have recourse to using an explicit performative – to saying what one is doing, that is.

It might seem to require explanation how a speaker could do something simply by saying that she was: utterances of explicit performatives are typically *true*; and the *truth* of what someone says normally requires more than the mere fact of her saying it.[22] But there is an explanation of this when illocutionary acts are thought of as working through reciprocity. Then the speaker of an explicit performative is doing exactly the sort of thing that can be done with words: she is attempting something such that she will actually have done it if she is taken to be doing it. Saying that she is

doing it evidently increases her chances of being taken to do it. One has a better chance of getting someone to recognize one's illocutionary intentions if one lets her know that one is warning her by saying that one is, than if one says only that there's a bull in the field.[23] But even so, one relies on the word 'warn''s meaning in one's mouth what it (perhaps conventionally) does, rather than on any convention peculiar to this form of speech. There may be other speech acts (other than warning) which there is hardly ever any chance of doing without the help of some explicit formula. But even where a performative is indispensable, it can be reciprocity's working that enables success.

Performative formulae are missing from the sentences we ordinarily use to do illocutionary things: we normally have no need to make explicit what we are doing, although, presumably, at considerable risk of considerable tedium, we always *could* make it explicit. *Stating*, for instance, is an illocutionary act, but one an explicit formula for whose performance is very seldom needed: for many expressions of some thought p, it seems to be out of the question that you might have gone in for them and not be seen to have stated that p. (What else might you have been up to?) It is no wonder, then, that Austin found that his distinction between constatives and performatives collapsed: it could not survive his recognition that even when we are stating something, we are doing some illocutionary thing.

Since the explicit performative is a device employed when, for one or another reason, the ordinary working of reciprocity might not run smoothly, Austin, by focusing on such a device, prevented himself from seeing reciprocity working smoothly, as it ordinarily does. This meant that even when he turned from the limited category of conventionalized performatives to the kind he came to call 'explicit', he still failed to grasp the full import of his overall idea of particular things in whose nature it is to be done using words. In order to have a clear idea of reciprocity in action, we should look to central cases of illocution which are furthest from Austin's starting point and which interested him least. Examples of central cases include not only stating (or asserting, or saying in the ordinary *oratio obliqua* sense) but also asking, telling to.[24]

1.6 Illocution in practice

In defending the suggested definition of illocutionary act, I note finally how little it requires. (a) It does not require that every doing of an illocutionary act should be a use of language. (b) It offers no guarantee that an audience will actually realize that a speaker does the illocutionary thing that she means to. (c) It does not rule it out that a speaker might do some illocutionary thing even where no one thought that she meant to. Although these three points show how undemanding the definition is, they can in turn be used to reveal how powerful the concept of illocution itself is.

(a) Austin recognized the first point when he said that an illocutionary act 'can be brought off non-verbally' (Austin 1962: 121). He went on to say that 'even then to deserve the name of an illocutionary act, for example a warning, it [sic] must be a conventional non-verbal act'. This seems wrong; you do not need to draw on a convention in order to deploy the gestures and expressions you may use to warn someone of something. Austin seems to have thought that every action which is of some illocutionary act must partake of whatever is essential to illocution, and then been led to error by thinking of convention as the essence of illocution. Thinking instead of reciprocity as its essence, we understand how there can be non-verbal performances of illocutionary acts by seeing the potential for non-verbal uses of the communicative potential (reciprocity) that language exploits.

(b) When the full range of illocutionary acts is considered, it becomes plain that illocutionary attempts may fail. We have seen that people may sometimes use explicit performatives because their illocutionary attempts would not succeed without the help of a device for making them transparent. But if one's illocutionary meaning would sometimes not be conveyed if it were not made explicit, then, very likely, when it is not made explicit, it is sometimes not in fact conveyed. In practice of course, simple misunderstanding of how a speaker was to be taken is not uncommon. But despite this, there has to be some truth in the thought that illocutionary attempts are such as to be successful. It is a condition of the existence of attempts to do illocutionary things that, when all is well, they should be recognizable for what they are. For unless it were normal for such attempts to be seen to be the illocutionary acts that they may in fact be, there would be no reciprocity and there would not then be illocutionary acts to be done.

(c) The third point was that, although the definition says that someone's recognizing that S meant to do an illocutionary thing is sufficient for her doing it, it does not say that it is necessary. And it would certainly be wrong to think of illocutionary acts as things that can only be done with a little help from an audience. Even illocutionary verbs that we may think of as central, such as *stating*, may not take an indirect object for an addressee, suggesting that no audience need be in the picture (though of course statements typically are made *to* someone). And even where there is an intended audience, the speaker may do some illocutionary act although the audience does not latch on to it. In fact we talk with some ambivalence about cases where an illocutionary attempt is not recognized. (There are examples which we might describe either with 'She warned him, but he never realized the danger' or 'She tried in vain to warn him.') When Searle spoke of '*fully* succeeding', he presumably meant cases in which an illocutionary act is performed with recognition of its performance, so that where there is no recognition there is less than 'full success'. 'Unless [my audi-

ence] recognizes ..., I have not fully succeeded in telling him [something]', he said (Searle 1969: 47).

There is surely something right about thinking that performances of illocutionary acts in the absence of reciprocity are in some way defective. For such performances are not such as to further the usual communicative ends of language. Someone who does an illocutionary act in spite of the fact that, in the particular case, her action does not have the effect characteristic of such an act, is not fully understood: she is likely, for instance, to be frustrated in doing any perlocutionary acts she might have intended to go in for. It is true that, according to this way of looking at things, actual doings of illocutionary acts may quite often be defective. But it should not be counted an objection to using reciprocity to demarcate *illocutionary acts* that this has the consequence that there are defective cases. The claim is that *reciprocity*, providing as it does for normal performances of certain acts, is central to the general idea of *illocution*. And the idea of reciprocity can be essential to the idea of illocution, without the working of reciprocity's being essential to the isolated performance of any illocutionary act.[25] Illocutionary acts (such as stating or warning) are those things for which reciprocity suffices – things which, even if they can be done without anyone's taking them to be done, are such as to be done when an audience takes them to be. And if you are genuinely to communicate with language, then reciprocity is what you must rely on: only where reciprocity prevails, are you fully understood. One might say that 'perfect' illocutionary acts are done invoking reciprocity.

2 ILLOCUTION'S SIGNIFICANCE

2.1 The example of refusing

'Perfect' illocutionary acts can be peculiarly easy to do. Provided that you can get the words out, and you have a suitably receptive audience, there can be no obstacle to your full success. The effect you need to have, which then constitutes your action as, for example, *stating something*, is an effect that can be had without any contrivance on your part. No contrivance is needed where the presence of reciprocity can be relied on; for then the illocutionary effects, of recognition, which speech actions have, are present in the social situation which speakers share with their audiences.

Now there is a counterpart to the fact that 'perfect' illocutionary acts can be peculiarly easy to do: they can be impossible to do. Just as it is more or less automatic that an attempt at an illocutionary act is fully successful when certain socially defined conditions obtain; so, when certain conditions do not obtain, there cannot be a fully successful performance.

An example which illustrates this comes from the case of a woman responding to a man's sexual advances. In the notorious words of Judge

David Wild: 'it is not just a question of saying no'.[26] The judge was in the process of acquitting a man accused of rape; he wanted the court to believe that the woman had meant 'Yes' by *no*. But a different construction can be put upon his words. To do a perfect illocutionary act of refusing, an utterance of the word 'no' is not enough: a woman may mean to refuse, but a condition of her having fully successfully refused – that she be recognized as attempting to refuse – may not be fulfilled.

Of course, as we have seen, there can be an illocutionary act even when, the speaker having not been fully successful in Searle's sense, there is no 'perfect' illocutionary act. And taking the woman's part against the judge, we can say that she *did* refuse, and say this assuming that she was sincere and without thinking about how she was actually taken. The judge, however, wanted to put the woman's sincerity into question. He hoped to create a presumption of this woman's being insincere; and if she had been insincere, then indeed there would not have been a non-defective act of refusal on her part. By creating such a presumption in court, the judge may have made it difficult to anyone there to believe that the woman had refused (even if she had). Where a presumption of a speaker's lack of sincerity is in place, the demands on the audience lapse, and it becomes impossible for a speaker, with however much sincerity she actually utters 'No', to be taken to refuse.

Once reciprocity is in the picture, we see how it is that a non-defective act of refusal makes demands of an audience as well as of a speaker: such an act must not only be attempted, but be taken to be. We see then that if the presumption introduced with 'It's not just a question of saying no' governed the actual circumstances in which a woman said 'No', then in those circumstances it would be impossible for her fully successfully to refuse. A condition of her refusing which is outside her control would be bound to remain unsatisfied.[27]

No doubt it requires some explaining how it could become impossible to do a perfectly good act of refusing even using a word as well suited for refusal as 'no' is. But this could be explained if we believed that a view of women informs the social practices of which our speech actions are a part.[28] The mind-sets and expectations of those with whom we speak are as much a part of the social situation as our utterances themselves. If the situation is such that the reciprocity of attempt and recognition required for the particular illocution is missing, then a woman's potential for participating in illocutionary acts, and thus, in turn, for securing wanted perlocutionary consequences, is diminished.

2.2 Silencing

I think that the potential of members of certain groups to participate in speech acts is what is at issue in some of the debates about free speech. And I shall finish with a notion of *silencing* which makes a connection

between these debates and what I have said about illocution.[29] (The topic of free speech itself I leave for another occasion.)

Feminists have claimed that 'women's voices have gone unheard, masked by male power realities incorporated into language';[30] and similar claims have been made about the 'silencing' of other oppressed groups (other than women). I suggest that when power relations are said to be 'incorporated into language', one idea is that the scope and limits of reciprocity have been determined by powerful groups in a community, and determined so as to restrict the illocutionary potential of members of less powerful groups. A group that is said to be 'silenced', then, is one whose members may be thought of as incapacitated as fully successful doers of some illocutionary acts. It is not that they literally cannot be heard, but that they are not in a position fully successfully to do some of the things that others might fully successfully do using speech. Illocutionary things, whose achievement usually consists in nothing more than someone's being heard (literally) in a setting of reciprocity, are things that they cannot do.

The example of sexual refusal has provided a stark and rather special example of a silenced person – of a person deprived, through no fault of her own, of her illocutionary potential. We should need to turn to different sorts of example to show that the phenomenon of silencing could be real and widespread and affect even such acts as stating. It would then be a further question whether, and to what extent, social mechanisms of silencing are actually at work in our own or any other culture, diminishing people's powers of using speech. But others have made the empirical claim that the promulgation of a demeaning view of a group has rendered members of that group relatively powerless parties in communicative exchanges. Here I have wanted only to make such claims intelligible, by connecting the notion of silencing with something fundamental to an understanding of language use.[31]

This is reciprocity. It has a role to play in an account of language use at a point where Austin wrongly supposed the notion of convention would serve; and it is indispensable to a proper appreciation of the phenomenon of communication between human beings, who, except for reciprocity, would not do any of the things they actually do using words.[32]

APPENDIX

Although I have taken over an idea from Searle in characterizing illocution, I have paid no attention to what Searle himself has had to say about illocution. In fact I think that failure to register the distinction between actions and acts has been an obstacle to his finding a correct, general characterization of *illocution*. (It has not been an obstacle to his providing a variety of interesting accounts, of which the account of telling is only one.) I shall attempt to make this out here (A.1). And I add some further comment on telling (A.2).

A.1

Searle is one of the writers who uses 'illocutionary act' as if it were equivalent to 'speech act' (see section 1.1). The usage can make us think that the idea of *speech* is what underlies the idea of illocution so that nothing further needs to be said to bring out what is distinctive of the *illocutionary*. The usage is encouraged by a conflation of actions with acts, which shows up in such remarks as these: 'The production of the sentence token ... is the illocutionary act' (Searle 1965: 222); and 'The minimal units of human communication are speech acts of a type called illocutionary' (Searle and Vanderveken 1985: 1). 'The production' of the first quotation, and 'the unit' of the second, are presumably to be thought of as particulars. But then they should not be identified with acts of any type, illocutionary or other. (In Searle, a link between 'speech act' and 'illocutionary act' is sometimes forged by way of the claim that an intention to communicate something to someone is a necessary condition for the performance of a speech act. Assuming that there is a performance of a speech act if, and only if, there is a speech action, this claim introduces the conception of speech action defined in section 1.5.)

When Searle and Vanderveken say 'A propositional act is an abstraction from the total illocutionary act' (ibid.: 9), they speak as if a total act were some composite thing of which somehow the whole was illocutionary. To understand this, we might think of a speech act as a speech-action-restricted-to-certain-acts-it-was-actually-of – where the acts in question will be the illocutionary ones and all those less basic than it (compare nn. 8 and 9 on Austin's idea of a 'total speech act'). But when 'speech act' is used in this hybrid way, it is not clear that a propositional (i.e. locutionary) act is any more or less an abstraction from a total speech act than an illocutionary act is. Searle and Vanderveken elaborate on the sense in which a propositional act is supposed to be an abstraction when they say that 'a speaker cannot simply express a proposition and do nothing more'. But (a) it is not impossible to express a proposition without doing an illocutionary thing; and (b) an illocutionary act (just like a propositional one) cannot be the only thing that a speaker does (when there is some use of words). Their idea must be that every genuine speech action is of some illocutionary act (see above). That idea accords some priority to illocutionary acts, but cannot reveal what makes illocution fundamental to language use.

Searle and Vanderveken wish to use the notion of what is essentially linguistic to characterize the illocutionary. They say, 'Perlocutionary acts, unlike illocutionary acts, are not essential linguistic.' And they give a reason 'For it is possible to achieve perlocutionary effects without performing any speech act at all' (ibid.: 12). But the reason cannot supply any correct sense in which the illocutionary is essentially linguistic, since (a) some illocutionary things can be done without the use of speech (as we

saw in section 1.1); and (b) some perlocutionary things cannot be achieved excepting by using speech (as we saw in section 1.5). Here Searle and Vanderveken seem to take a step backwards from Austin, who would have accepted that there was something right about the 'essentially linguistic' characterization of the illocutionary, but who was careful to note both of points (a) and (b).

In an attempt to home in on illocution, or the essentially linguistic, Searle and Vanderveken follow Austin in using *convention.* They say (ibid.: 12):

> There could not be any convention that such and such an utterance counts as convincing you, or persuading you, or annoying you, or exasperating you, or amusing you.... There can be conventions whereby such and such counts as a statement or counts as informing you.

And they take the possibility of using explicit performatives to show that conventions operate in illocution. But if explicit performatives rely only on words being used as having their ordinary significance, then noting this possibility does not help to characterize the illocutionary; the conventions in question now are only those that are acknowledged in dealing with locution, albeit those attaching to the particular words that denote what are in fact illocutionary acts. (This is not to deny a relation between illocutionary acts and uses of explicit performatives (see section 1.4).)

A.2

I have taken over Searle's account of telling to illustrate illocution, but should note that it may be controversial whether telling is in fact an illocutionary act. Consider: 'One must assert in order to inform or tell, but not *vice versa*; and telling now seems to be the point or purpose of assertion. This classifies telling among what have ... been called perlocutionary acts' (Aldrich 1966: 56). Well, there is no reason to rule out the possibility that a single action could be someone's doing one thing and her doing another thing, where both those things were illocutionary acts; so the fact that someone may assert and tell has no tendency on its own to show that telling is not illocutionary. And we might think that on occasion a person may state that p only because there is no other way to tell someone that p (just as she utters words that mean that p only because that is her only way to state that p): this removes any suggestion of telling's being an ulterior purpose (where ulterior purpose is associated with what is perlocutionary).

Another objection to treating telling as illocutionary may come from someone who thinks (a) that no one is told that p unless he becomes informed that p; and (b) that a piece of recognition cannot make the difference to whether someone comes to be informed that p. Two points

may be made in response. (a) It is not obvious that we cannot tell people things that they reject and thus do not become informed of. (The matter is complicated, see Radford 1969. We show an ambivalence about how to use 'tell' which is parallel to that in the case of 'warn' illustrated parenthetically in the text of section 1.4.) (b) Awareness of what a speaker is up to can be part and parcel not only of understanding but also of the actual communication of facts. Thus reciprocity can ground telling, as well as asserting. (The present objection might also be made against Searle's idea that 'there can be conventions whereby such and such counts as informing you' (see above). I find it much easier to see how reciprocity could provide for the passage of information than to see how convention could.)

It is because I find attractive the view that reciprocity allows for the communication of facts that I am happy to move as directly as I do from Searle's account of telling to an account of illocution. Someone who rejected the view and thought that telling was perlocutionary could still accept that we gain the crucial idea of reciprocity from the account of (fully successfully) telling, and so could think that reciprocity works in illocution in much the way that I suggest.

NOTES

1 Searle (1965) and (1969). There are further references in the Appendix.

2 In non-philosophical English, there is no term unambiguously true of what philosophers regularly call actions. In the ordinary way we are not concerned with the sort of generalization that requires the recognition of a class of actions, and each of 'act' and 'action' sometimes plays one, sometimes the other role that I have marked out for 'act' and 'action'. On the other hand, 'thing done', and the 'something' of 'she did something', only ever (outside of philosophy) denote the things that I am calling 'acts'.

3 See Davidson (1971) for the idea of using 'actions' unambiguously to denote events.

Davidson himself, and many who follow him, have recourse to the formal mode in distinguishing acts from actions: he speaks of actions as coming under different *descriptions.* This is an alternative way of making the act–action distinction used here, because for each (new) description of an action, there is something (new) the agent does, i.e. some (new) act which she performs. But resorting to the formal mode has made it seem as though there were no material-mode talk of the things we do. This in turn has made it seem as though when we are not at the level of descriptions, we must be speaking of actions (rather than what we are sometimes actually speaking of, i.e. acts, things that are done). I avoid Davidson's more familiar way of putting it, then, because I think it has perpetuated the confusion of acts with actions.

And Davidson, whose use of 'action' I am following, is not himself consistent. He speaks, for example, of 'primitive actions'. But 'more primitive than' cannot be a relation between actions: when one thing that someone did is more primitive than another thing she did, her doing the one thing (the action, Davidson would agree) is the *same* as her doing the other thing, and thus cannot be related to it by the non-symmetrical 'more primitive than' relation. Davidson's 'more primitive than' is a relation like '*more basic than*', which is a

relation between acts that I make use of in section 1.2 below.

4 Mainly these are writers who are not careful to distinguish acts from actions. See the Appendix; and consider a not at all untypical claim such as this: 'The root idea of a perlocutionary act is of an act which when performed by saying something can be redescribed as the performance of an illocutionary act with certain consequences' (Holdcroft 1978: 20). Speaking like this – as if acts could be redescribed – will lead to the identification of what are in fact different acts, and thus will lead, for instance, to the identification of an arbitrary speech act with an arbitrary illocutionary act. What are really redescribed, when various different acts are seen to have been done, are (in my terminology, see nn. 2 and 3) actions.

5 Austin in fact used 'locutionary' in two different ways (my vague 'incorporate' covers both). When he used it in a characterization of the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary (on which more below), he always meant by 'locutionary' an act of the sort which he elsewhere called rhetic. For further details, see Hornsby 1988.

6 Thus stated, there is nothing novel about this suggestion. But there is no agreed way of interpreting it: see the Appendix for Searle's interpretation.

7 Here is an example within the realm of speech acts: it seems equally possible to think of a rhetic act (saying that it is green, for example) as done in doing, or as done by doing, a phatic act (saying 'It's green').

8 The term was introduced by Danto; see his 1965. In Danto and others, the confusion of acts with actions has prevented a correct understanding of basicness. (Cp. n. 3 on Davidson on primitiveness.)

A caveat is needed about the use of 'basic' here. Strictly speaking, one should not think of one act as more basic than another *tout court*; at least for certain pairs of acts, there might be an occasion on which someone did one by doing the other, and a different occasion on which someone did that other by doing the one. Strictly, then, 'more basic than' should be defined relative to particular actions. When we are in the domain of speech act theory, however, we find (except for some insignificant exceptions) that where the relation '*more basic than*' obtains between two things done relative to some one action, it obtains also relative to every other action which is someone's doing the one and her doing the other.

9 Compare Goldman on different sorts of 'generation', in his 1970 chapter 2. Goldman himself takes this to be a relation between actions (or 'act-tokens' as he sometimes calls them). But that is because he fails to see that someone's doing one thing can be (the same event as) her doing another.

The idea of the collection of all the acts arising, by whatever means, from the phonetic (most basic) act will give us Austin's notion of a *total* speech act (relative to any particular speech action, cp. n. 8).

10 When Austin spoke of 'a line between an action we do (here an illocution) and its consequences' (1962: 104), he simply helped himself to the idea of an illocution in separating off the perlocutionary – as if the distinction had already been made out.

When Austin speaks of 'importing an arbitrarily long stretch of what might also be called the "consequences" of our act into the nomenclature of the act itself' (1962: 107), the struggles of someone who has not made a distinction between actions and acts are evident. The 'act' which here has consequences is what we are calling an action. 'The nomenclature of the act' then corresponds to various speech acts (because finding new pieces of nomenclature is a matter of coming to see an action as of different acts, cp. n. 3 above).

11 For a scepticism about the role of convention in an account of language which is more thoroughgoing than that which is registered here, see Davidson 1984: 265–80.

12 Cp. Strawson 1964. Strawson himself introduces an idea deriving from Grice, of what a speaker non-naturally means, at the place in the account where Austin relied upon *convention.*

13 Cp. Warnock 1989, and 1.4 below.

14 I depart from Searle here, saying 'take her to' rather than 'attempt to take her to'. Those who appreciate the virtues of simplicity in this area will understand why I do not wish to see the audience as employing the concept of attempt. (Of course Searle's own account avoids Gricean-style complexity.)

The use by both Searle and me of the concept of attempt in describing even the *speaker's* state of mind might be questioned. My own view (about action generally, now) is that we attempt to do everything that we intentionally do. (The view will not be found acceptable unless one appreciates that it is possible to attempt something without thinking of oneself as attempting it, and possible then in turn for a hearer to recognize that a speaker has done something in witnessing what is actually an attempt at doing it, but without thinking of it as an attempt at doing the thing.)

15 Strictly one should insert here 'for arbitrary p'. The effect of the insertion is to ensure that the definition tells us whether *ϕ-ing* is an illocutionary act, rather than whether, for particular p, *ϕ-ing that p* is. Something will not be shown to be an illocutionary act by finding particular examples where a speaker's attempt at ϕ-ing that p causes an audience to take the speaker to have ϕ-d that p.

16 I do not distinguish between these here. Although the distinctions are important, I hope it will be clear that they cannot serve on their own to draw the illocutionary–perlocutionary distinction.

17 The view about causation is what inspired 'The Logical Connection Argument', supposedly ruling out the possibility that the connection between (say) someone's wanting to annoy x and her annoying x could be causal. The usual response to the Argument is to say that someone's wanting to annoy x can be redescribed, so that any inclination to speak of 'its' logical connection with her annoying x must go away. It is not obvious that the usual response will work as usual in the present case. But it is also not obvious that there is any pressure to make the usual response, excepting as this comes from a questionable Humean view.

18 This criterion is the one that Davidson made famous, though what he said was that an action is an event that is intentional under some description. See n. 3 for an account of my reluctance to put it Davidson's way.

19 And we can then register agreement with some of Searle's ideas: see the Appendix.

20 Since it can be vague (or doubtful) whether reciprocity is working on its own, there is nothing here to ensure that the line between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary is a hard and fast one. (See the Appendix for a doubt about which side of the line 'tell' should come.)

On the present account, the class of perlocutionary acts is heterogeneous, and we should need to make distinctions within it to understand the character of some of the acts that it contains. *Insinuating* and *showing off* (for example) will turn out to be perlocutionary acts, although in Strawson 1964 they are treated as illocutionary acts, albeit special ones. It is a matter for theoretical decision how to use 'illocutionary' at the end of the day: I have been guided by the idea that, seeing what is illocutionary as what is essentially linguistic, we should expect the class of illocutionary acts to be a relatively homogeneous one.

21 The line drawn here marks off the illocutionary from what is less basic than it.

Further refinements would be needed to take account of the fact that more than one chain of consequences may flow from a single action. People with definite conceptions of the perlocutionary may want to introduce such refinements, and to carry out the further work required to circumscribe perlocutionary acts within the class of acts on the 'less-basic-than' side of the line drawn here.

22 The thought here is what led Austin to say that utterances of explicit performatives are not truth-evaluable. See Hornsby 1988 for a more detailed account (and criticism) of what led him there.

23 At least if the circumstances are such that (reciprocity ensures that) it is plausible that one is warning.

24 If it can be agreed that the ordinary *oratio obliqua* 'say' is used in reports of illocutionary acts, then it will become clear how much ground illocution covers. Though there are differences of nuance, I suspect that 'state' and 'assert' can be treated as grander words for what we usually call saying. The reason why theoreticians talk so much about stating and asserting, rather than the plainer 'saying', is that they need to reserve the use of 'say' ('strict and literal saying', as Grice was wont to put it) for the *rhetic* (or *locutionary* – see n. 5) act.

For the idea of 'central' illocutionary acts, see Hornsby 1988. And for an account which shows how *asking* and *telling to* might be accommodated, see Hornsby 1986.

25 Analytical philosophy's obsessive search for ('logically') necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept (as opposed to a search for 'its essence') can then be part of the explanation why the notion of reciprocity has been overlooked. See McDowell 1980, a paper to which I am much indebted.

26 The judge said this during his summing up, reported in *The Sunday Times*, 12 December 1982.

27. Doubts on the speaker's part about the obtaining of reciprocity could lead to an inability to go in for illocution: if it seemed that there was no point in trying to be taken to have done something, because one was very unlikely to be so taken, that in turn would detract from one's ability sincerely to do the thing.

28 I mean a view according to which women who do not behave with especial modesty or dress with especial circumspection are ready and willing to gratify men's sexual urges, but will feign unwillingness, whether through a pretended decency, or through a desire to excite. If the view were widespread that this is how women conduct themselves, and if it determined a man's expectations, then it is easy to imagine circumstances in which the reciprocity of intention and understanding required for refusal was missing.

The idea that pornography's production and consumption may promote, or perpetuate, such a view is the context for Dworkin's discussion of free speech (see n. 29).

29 Consider Ronald Dworkin: 'Only by characterizing certain ideas as themselves "silencing" ideas – only by supposing that censoring pornography is like stopping people from drowning out other speakers – can [feminists] hope to justify censorship within the constitutional scheme that assigns a pre-eminent place to free speech' (Dworkin 1991: 108). Dworkin thinks that the assimilation is a confusion: the argument of the remainder of this paper shows why it would not be a confusion if pornography were an agent of silencing.

30 See, for example, Olsen 1978. The notion of 'silence' has been put to many uses in feminist theory. I am singling out a use of the verb whose connection with political theory is most immediate.

31 For a treatment of the claim that pornography silences women (cp. n. 28), and a treatment of the case of sexual refusal (in line with my own, but using a different conception of a speech act and drawing attention to different features of the case), see Langton 1993. This paper is full of important suggestions about the bearing of ideas in the philosophy of language on feminist debate.

32 I assume that the point of locution cannot be understood except by way of illocutionary notions. Opposition to a non-social conception of language's workings is usually based in denial that meanings can be attached to words privately; opposition might be based also in a denial that speech action can get a foothold outside a context of reciprocity.