

## Chapter 5

# SPEECH ACTS AND ILLOCUTIONARY LOGIC\*

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### 1. Illocutionary acts and illocutionary logic.

The minimal units of human communication are speech acts of a type called *illocutionary acts*.<sup>1</sup> Some examples of these are statements, questions, commands, promises, and apologies. Whenever a speaker utters a sentence in an appropriate context with certain intentions, he performs one or more illocutionary acts. In general an illocutionary act consists of an illocutionary force  $F$  and a propositional content  $P$ . For example, the two utterances “You will leave the room” and “Leave the room!” have the same propositional content, namely that you will leave the room; but characteristically the first of these has the illocutionary force of a prediction and the second has the illocutionary force of an order. Similarly, the two utterances “Are you going to the movies?” and “When will you see John?” both characteristically have the illocutionary force of questions but have different propositional contents. Illocutionary logic is the

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<sup>1</sup>The term is due to J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

logical theory of illocutionary acts. Its main objective is to formalize the logical properties of illocutionary forces. Illocutionary forces are realized in the syntax of actual natural languages in a variety of ways, e.g. mood, punctuation, word-order, intonation contour, and stress, among others; and it is a task for empirical linguistics to study such devices as they function in actual languages. The task of illocutionary logic, on the other hand, is to study the entire range of possible illocutionary forces however these may be realized in particular natural languages. In principle it studies all possible illocutionary forces of utterances in any possible language, and not merely the actual realization of these possibilities in actual speech acts in actual languages. Just as propositional logic studies the properties of all truth functions (e.g. conjunction, material implication, negation) without worrying about the various ways that these are realized in the syntax of English (“and”, “but”, and “moreover”, to mention just a few for conjunction), so illocutionary logic studies the properties of illocutionary forces (e.g. assertion, conjecture, promise) without worrying about the various ways that these are realized in the syntax of English (“assert”, “state”, “claim”, and the indicative mood, to mention just a few for assertion) and without worrying whether these features translate into other languages. No matter whether and how an illocutionary act is performed, it has a certain logical form which determines its conditions of success and relates it to other speech acts. We will try to characterize that form independently of the various forms of expression that may exist in actual natural languages for the expression of the act. However, though the results of our investigation are in general independent of empirical linguistic facts, the method of the investigation will require us to pay close attention to the facts of natural languages, and the results should help us to analyze actual performative verbs and other illocutionary force indicating devices of natural languages. In Chapter 9 we will apply our results to the analysis of English illocutionary verbs.

Any element of a natural language which can be literally used to indicate that an utterance of a sentence containing that element has a certain illocutionary force or range of illocutionary forces we will call an *illocutionary force indicating device*. Some examples of illocutionary force indicating devices are word order and mood as in: (i) “Will you leave the room?”, (2) “You, leave the room!”, (3) “You will leave the room”, (4) “If only you would leave the room!” In each of these examples, there is some syntactical feature which, given the rest of the sentence and a certain context of utterance, expresses an illocutionary force  $F$ , and some syntactical feature  $p$  which, given the rest of the sentence and a context of utterance, expresses a propositional content  $P$ .

From the point of view of the theory of speech acts, then, the general form of such simple sentences, which express elementary illocutionary acts of form  $F(P)$ , is  $f(p)$ . We will call these elementary sentences.

A special class of elementary sentences are the *performative sentences*. These consist of a performative verb used in the first person present tense of the indicative mood with an appropriate complement clause. In uttering a performative sentence a speaker performs the illocutionary act with the illocutionary force named by the performative verb by way of representing himself as performing that act. Some examples of performative sentences (with the performative verbs italicized) are: (5) “I *promise* that I will come tomorrow”, (6) “I *apologize* for what I have done”, (7) “I *order* you to report to the commanding officer”, (8) “I *admit* that I committed the crime.” There has been a great deal of philosophical controversy concerning the proper analysis of performative sentences. The two most widely held views are: First, that the performative element in the sentence functions simply as an illocutionary force indicating device on all fours with other devices, such as word order. On this view an utterance of a sentence such as (5) consists simply in the making of a promise. Secondly, that all utterances of performative sentences are statements, and thus for example in utterances of (5), a speaker makes a promise only by way of making a true statement to the effect that he promises. On the first view, performative utterances such as (5) do not have truth values; on the second view they do. In this paper we will try a third approach, according to which performative utterances are *declarations* whose propositional content is that the speaker performs the illocutionary act named by the performative verb. On this account, the illocutionary force of a performative sentence is always that of a declaration, and then, derivatively, the utterance has the additional force named by the performative verb. Since the defining trait of a declaration<sup>2</sup> is that it actually brings about the state of affairs represented by its propositional content, and since the propositional content of a performative utterance is that the speaker performs a certain sort of illocutionary act, the successful declaration that a speaker performs that act will always constitute its performance.

Not all illocutionary acts are of the simple  $F(P)$  form. More complex cases we will call *complex illocutionary acts* and the sentences used to express them *complex sentences*. Complex sentences are composed of simple sentences using connectives that we will call *illocutionary connectives*. For example, the connectives of conjunction (“and”, “but”)

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<sup>2</sup>See J. R. Searle, ‘A taxonomy of illocutionary acts’, in *Expression and Meaning*, pp. 1-29.

enable speakers to conjoin different illocutionary acts in one utterance. In general, the utterance of a sentence which is the conjunction of two sentences constitutes the performance of the two illocutionary acts expressed by the two sentences. Thus in a certain context by uttering (9) "I will go to his house, but will he be there?", a speaker both makes an assertion and asks a question. This conjunction of two illocutionary acts constitutes the performance of a complex illocutionary act whose logical form is  $(F_1(P_1) \& F_2(P_2))$ . The illocutionary connective of conjunction is "success functional" in the sense that the successful performance of a complex illocutionary act of form  $(F_1(P_1) \& F_2(P_2))$  is a function of the successful performances of its constituents. Not every pair of sentences will grammatically admit every illocutionary connective. For example, the following conjunction is syntactically ill formed in English: (10) "When did John come and I order you to leave the room?"

Another type of complex illocutionary act involves the negation of the illocutionary force, and we will call these acts of *illocutionary denegation*. It is essential to distinguish between acts of illocutionary denegation and illocutionary acts with a negative propositional content, between, for example, (11) "I do not promise to come" and (12) "I promise not to come." The utterance of (11) is typically an act of illocutionary denegation and it is of form  $\neg F(P)$ . The utterance of (12) by contrast is an illocutionary act with a negative propositional content and it is of the form  $F(\sim P)$ . We can say generally that an act of illocutionary denegation is one whose aim is to make it explicit that the speaker does not perform a certain illocutionary act.

The fact that illocutionary denegation is not success functional is shown by the fact that the non-performance of an illocutionary act is not the same as the performance of its illocutionary denegation; for example, from the fact that I did not make a promise, it does not follow that I declined or refused to make a promise. And the usual asymmetry between the first person present and other occurrences of performative verbs reveals the same phenomenon. A person's silence may be sufficient for somebody to say truly of him (13) "He did not promise." But a person's silence is not the same as the overt act of saying (14) "I do not promise." Most acts of illocutionary denegation are performed in English by way of negating a performative verb as in (11) but some, very few, verbs are explicit performatives for illocutionary denegation. "Permit" is the denegation of both "forbid" and "prohibit"; "refuse" is frequently used as the denegation of "accept" and "disclaim" as the denegation of "claim".

The conditionals "if" and "if...then" are also used as illocutionary connectives. A conditional speech act is a speech act which is performed

on a certain condition; its characteristic forms of expression therefore are sentences of the form “If  $p$  then  $f(q)$ ” and “If  $p$ ,  $f(q)$ ”. Some examples are: (15) “If he comes, stay with me!”, (16) “If it rains, I promise you I’ll take my umbrella.” It is essential to distinguish between a conditional speech act and a speech act whose propositional content is a conditional. In a conditional speech act expressed by a sentence of the form “If  $p$  then  $f(q)$ ” the speech act expressed by “ $f(q)$ ” is performed on condition  $p$ . Syntactically the “if” clause modifies the illocutionary force indicating device. This form is quite distinct from that of the speech act performed by an utterance of a sentence of the form “ $f(\text{if } p \text{ then } q)$ ” whose propositional content is conditional, for in this case an illocutionary act of force  $F$  is categorically performed. Thus, for example, in a bet on a conditional of the form (17) “I bet you five dollars that if a presidential candidate gets a majority of the electoral votes he will win” one either wins or loses five dollars depending on the truth or falsity of the conditional proposition (provided all the presuppositions hold). On the other hand, in a conditional bet of the form (18) “If Carter is the next Democratic candidate, I bet you five dollars that the Republicans will win”, there is a winner or a loser only if Carter is the next Democratic candidate. The logical form of (18) is  $P \rightarrow F(Q)$ . This conditional is not truth-functional, for from the fact that Carter does not run for the presidency, it does not follow that every speaker performs a conditional bet of the form (18). Part of the task of illocutionary logic is to analyze illocutionary denegation and illocutionary conditionals.

In carrying out the general project of illocutionary logic some of the main questions we will attempt to answer are: (1) What are the components of illocutionary force and what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful performance of elementary illocutionary acts? How can the conditions of success of complex illocutionary acts be defined in terms of the conditions of success of their constituent parts? (2) What is the logical structure of the set of all illocutionary forces? Is there a recursive definition of this set, i.e. can all illocutionary forces be obtained from a few primitive forces by applying certain operations and, if so, how? (3) What are the logical relations between the various types of illocutions? In particular, under which conditions does the successful performance of one illocutionary act commit the speaker to another illocutionary act?

A theory of the foundations of illocutionary logic capable of answering these questions should be able to characterize a set of logical laws governing illocutionary forces. Thus, for example, there are laws of distribution of illocutionary forces with respect to truth-functions, e.g. if a speaker succeeds in asserting a conjunction of two propositions ( $P$  and

$\mathcal{Q}$ ) then he succeeds both in asserting  $P$  and in asserting  $\mathcal{Q}$ . Furthermore, such a theory should explain the relations between illocutionary forces and intensionality, modalities, time, presuppositions, and indexicality. It should also explain the reasons why the utterances of certain sentences of natural language constitute self-defeating illocutionary acts. Self-defeating illocutionary acts have self-contradictory conditions of success and are thus odd semantically.<sup>3</sup> Some examples of sentences expressing self-defeating illocutions are: (19) "I promise you not to keep this promise", (20) "I assert that I do not make any assertion", (21) "Disobey this order!"

A theory of illocutionary logic of the sort we are describing is essentially a theory of illocutionary commitment as determined by illocutionary force. The single most important question it must answer is simply this: Given that a speaker in a certain context of utterance performs a successful illocutionary act of a certain form, what other illocutions does the performance of that act commit him to? To take the simplest sort of example, a speaker who warns a hearer that he is in danger is committed to the assertion that he is in danger. A speaker who denies a proposition  $P$  is committed to the denegation of an assertion that  $P$ . And, as is obvious from even these examples, we will need to distinguish between the overt performance of an illocutionary act and an illocutionary commitment. The overt performance of one illocutionary act may involve the speaker in a commitment to another illocution, even though that commitment does not involve a commitment to an overt performance of that illocution. Thus, for example, if I order you to leave the room I am committed to granting you permission to leave the room even though I have not performed an overt act of granting you permission and have not committed myself to performing any such overt act. Among other things, a logical theory of illocutionary acts will enable us to construct a formal semantics for the illocutionary force indicating devices of natural language.

Illocutionary logic is part of the overall project of logic, linguistics, and the philosophy of language for at least the following two reasons:

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<sup>3</sup>For further discussion of self-defeating illocutionary acts, see D. Vanderveken: 'Illocutionary Logic and Self-Defeating Speech Acts', in Searle *et al.* (eds.), *Speech-Act Theory and Pragmatics* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel, 1980).

### 1.1 Illocutionary force is a component of meaning.

Part of the meaning of an elementary sentence is that its literal utterance in a given context constitutes the performance or attempted performance of an illocutionary act of a particular illocutionary force. Thus, for example, it is part of the meaning of the English sentence, (22) “Is it raining?”, that its successful literal and serious utterance constitutes the asking of a question as to whether it is raining. Every complete sentence, even a one-word sentence, has some indicator of illocutionary force; therefore, no semantical theory of language is complete without an illocutionary component. A materially adequate semantics of a natural language must recursively assign illocutionary acts (elementary or complex) to each sentence for each possible context of utterance. It is not sufficient for it simply to assign propositions or truth conditions to sentences. In order to assign illocutionary acts to sentences an illocutionary logic would need first to provide a semantic analysis of illocutionary verbs and other illocutionary force indicating devices found in actual natural languages. In the sense that it provides an analysis of the illocutionary aspects of sentence meaning, illocutionary logic is part of a theory of meaning.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 An adequate illocutionary logic is essential to an adequate universal grammar (in Montague’s sense of ‘universal grammar’).<sup>5</sup>

Since illocutionary forces and propositions are two components of the meanings of elementary sentences, the ideal language of a universal grammar must contain logical constants and operators capable of generating names for all possible illocutionary forces of utterances. Any sentence in any natural language should be translatable into sentences of the ideal language of universal grammar, and those sentences must reflect the illocutionary potentiality of the natural language sentences. Up to the present time universal grammar has been mostly concerned with propositions, but it also needs to include an account of illocution-

<sup>4</sup>For further discussion, see D. Vanderveken, ‘Pragmatique, sémantique et force illocutoire’, *Philosophica*, vol. 27, no. I, 1981.

<sup>5</sup>See R. Montague (1970), “Universal Grammar”, *Theoria* 36. The general semantics for natural language developed in D. Vanderveken *Formal Semantics of Success and Satisfaction* Volume 2 of *Meaning and Speech Acts* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) is a generalization and extension of Montague Grammar. Its ideal object language has richer expressive powers than that of Montague. It can express illocutionary forces as well as propositions.

ary forces, and therefore, it goes beyond the boundaries of intensional logic as traditionally conceived.

## 2. Illocutionary acts and other types of speech acts.

In order to prepare the way for a formalization of the theory of illocutionary acts we need first to clarify the relations between an illocutionary act and certain types of speech acts, specifically utterance acts, propositional acts, indirect speech acts, perlocutionary acts and conversations.

Just as the sentences used to perform elementary speech acts have the form  $f(p)$ , where  $f$  is the indicator of illocutionary force and  $p$  expresses the propositional content, so we can say that the illocutionary act itself has the logical form  $F(P)$ , where the capital  $F$  stands for the illocutionary force, and  $P$  for the propositional content. The distinction between illocutionary force and propositional content, as was suggested by our earlier remarks, is motivated by the fact that their identity conditions are different: the same propositional content can occur with different illocutionary forces and the same force can occur with different propositional contents. The character of the whole illocutionary act is entirely determined by the nature of its illocutionary force and propositional content. This distinction also motivates the introduction of another speech act notion, that of the propositional act.

In the performance of an illocutionary act the speaker performs the subsidiary act of expressing the propositional content and this act we will call the *propositional act*. A propositional act is an abstraction from the total illocutionary act in the sense that the speaker cannot simply express a proposition and do nothing more. The performance of the propositional act always occurs as part of the performance of the total illocutionary act. Syntactically this fact is reflected in natural languages by the fact that “that” clauses, the characteristic form of isolating the propositional content, cannot stand alone; they do not make complete sentences. One can say “I promise that I will leave the room”, but one cannot say simply “That I will leave the room”.

Some, but not many, types of illocutionary forces permit a content that does not consist of an entire proposition but only a reference, as in an utterance of “Hurrah for the Raiders!” Such an utterance does not have the form  $F(P)$  but rather  $F(u)$  where  $u$  is some entity of the universe of discourse. And some permit an utterance consisting only of an illocutionary force and no propositional content, e.g. “Hurrah”, “Ouch”, and “Damn”. These utterances simply have the form  $F$ . With these very few sorts of exception, all illocutionary acts have a propo-

sitional content and hence (with such exceptions) all performances of illocutionary acts are performances of propositional acts.

Illocutionary acts are performed by the utterance of expressions, and this fact motivates the introduction of yet another speech act notion, that of the *utterance act*: an utterance act consists simply in the utterance of an expression. One can perform the same illocutionary act in the performance of two different utterance acts, as, for example, when one says either “It’s raining” in English or “II pleut” in French; or even in the same language, when, for example, one uses synonymous sentences, as one may say either “John loves Mary” or “Mary is loved by John” to perform the same illocutionary act. Furthermore, an utterance act can be performed without performing an illocutionary act, as, for example, when one simply mouths words without saying anything. And finally, the same utterance act type can occur in the performance of different illocutionary acts. For example, if Bill says “I am hungry” and John says “I am hungry”, in the two token utterances the same utterance act type is performed but two different illocutionary acts are performed, since the reference and hence the proposition is different in the two cases.

This account of the general form of the illocutionary act and the relation of its performance to that of propositional and utterance acts can be summarized as follows. In the utterance of a sentence of the form  $f(p)$  the speaker performs an utterance act. If the utterance is in certain ways appropriate he will have expressed the proposition that  $P$  (which proposition is a function of the meaning of  $p$ ), and he will thereby have performed a propositional act. If certain further conditions are satisfied he will have expressed that proposition with the illocutionary force  $F$  (which force is a function of the meaning of  $f$ ) and he will thereby have expressed an illocutionary act of the form  $F(P)$ . Furthermore, if the conditions of success of that act obtain, he will thereby have successfully performed that act.

Often speakers perform one illocutionary act implicitly by way of performing another illocutionary act explicitly. The explicitly performed act is used to convey another speech act; and the speaker relies on background knowledge and mental capacities that he shares with the hearer in order to achieve understanding. So, for example, if someone on the street says to you, “Do you know the way to the Palace Hotel?”, it would be in most contexts inappropriate to respond simply “yes” or “no”, because the speaker is doing more than just *asking a question* about your knowledge: he is *requesting* that you tell him the way to the hotel. Similarly, if a man says to you, “Sir, you are standing on my foot”, the chances are he is doing more than describing your location: he is requesting you to get off his foot. In these cases two speech acts

are involved: the non-literal primary speech act (“Tell me the way to the Palace Hotel!”, “Get off my foot!”) is performed indirectly by way of performing a literal secondary speech act (“Do you know the way to the Palace Hotel?”; “Sir, you are standing on my foot”). Such implicit acts are called *indirect speech acts*.<sup>6</sup> The speaker may convey indirectly a different illocutionary force or propositional content from what is directly expressed; hence in one utterance act he may perform one or more non-literal indirect illocutionary acts.

Just as indirect speech acts are quite pervasive in real life, so in real life illocutionary acts seldom occur alone but rather occur as parts of conversations or larger stretches of discourse. Traditional linguistics tends to construe a speaker’s linguistic competence as a matter of his ability to produce and understand sentences; and traditional speech act theory tends to construe each illocutionary-act as an isolated unit. But we will not get an adequate account of linguistic competence or of speech acts until we can describe the speaker’s ability to produce and understand utterances (i.e. to perform and understand illocutionary acts) In *ordered speech act sequences* that constitute arguments, discussions, buying and selling, exchanging letters, making jokes, etc. For terminological convenience we will call these ordered sequences simply *conversations*. The key to understanding the structure of conversations is to see that each illocutionary act creates the possibility of a finite and usually quite limited set of appropriate illocutionary acts as replies. Sometimes the appropriate illocutionary act reply is very tightly constrained by the act that precedes it, as in question and answer sequences; and sometimes it is more open, as in casual conversations that move from one topic to another. But the principle remains that just as a move in a game creates and restricts the range of appropriate countermoves so each illocutionary act in a conversation creates and constrains the range of appropriate illocutionary responses.

When an illocutionary act is successfully and nondefectively performed there will always be an effect produced in the hearer, the effect of understanding the utterance. But in addition to the illocutionary effect of understanding, utterances normally produce, and are often intended to produce, further effects on the feelings, attitudes, and subsequent behavior of the hearers. These effects are called *perlocutionary effects*<sup>7</sup> and the acts of producing them are called *perlocutionary acts*. For ex-

<sup>6</sup>J. R. Searle, “Indirect Speech Acts”, in *Expression and Meaning*, pp. 30-57; and H. P. Grice, “Logic and conversation”, in P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (eds.). *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, *Speech Acts* (New York: Academic Press, 1975).

<sup>7</sup>Following Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

ample, by making a statement (illocutionary) a speaker may convince or persuade (perlocutionary) his audience, by making a promise (illocutionary) he may reassure or create expectations (perlocutionary) in his audience. Perlocutionary effects may be achieved intentionally, as, for example, when one gets one's hearer to do something by asking him to do it, or unintentionally, as when one annoys or exasperates one's audience without intending to do so.

Perlocutionary acts, unlike illocutionary acts, are not essentially linguistic, for it is possible to achieve perlocutionary effects without performing any speech act at all. Since illocutionary acts have to do with understanding they are conventionalizable. It is in general possible to have a linguistic convention that determines that such and such an utterance counts as the performance of an illocutionary act. But since perlocutionary acts have to do with subsequent effects, this is not possible for them. There could not be any convention to the effect that such and such an utterance counts as convincing you, or persuading you, or annoying you, or exasperating you, or amusing you. And that is why none of these perlocutionary verbs has a performative use. There could not, for example, be a performative expression "I hereby persuade you", because there is no way that a conventional performance can guarantee that you are persuaded, whereas there are performative expressions of the form "I hereby state" or "I hereby inform you", because there can be conventions whereby such and such counts as a statement or counts as informing you. It is essential to keep this distinction clear in what follows, for we will be investigating speech acts proper—that is, illocutionary acts. Perlocutionary acts will figure only incidentally in our discussions.

### **3. The seven components of illocutionary force.**

The study of illocutionary logic is mainly the study of the illocutionary forces of utterances. We therefore need to analyze the notion of illocutionary force into its component elements. On our analysis there are seven interrelated components of illocutionary force, and in this section we will provide an informal explanation and definition of these seven components and of the ways in which they are interrelated. The formalization will be presented in subsequent chapters.

One way to understand the notion of an illocutionary act is in terms of the notion of the conditions of its successful and non-defective performance. Illocutionary acts, like all human acts, can succeed or fail. An act of excommunication, for example, can be successful only if the speaker has the institutional power to excommunicate someone by his

utterance. Otherwise, it is a complete failure. Just as any adequate talk of propositions involves the pair of concepts truth and falsity, so any adequate talk of speech acts (and of acts in general) involves the pair of concepts success and failure. And even when they succeed, illocutionary acts are subject to various faults and defects, such as insincerity or failure of presuppositions. We therefore have the following three possibilities: a speech act may be unsuccessful, it may be successful but defective, and it may be successful and nondefective. For example, if one of us now attempts to excommunicate the other by saying “I hereby excommunicate you” the speech act will be totally unsuccessful. The various conditions necessary for such an utterance to be a successful excommunication do not obtain. But if one of us now makes a statement for which he has hopelessly insufficient evidence or warrant, he might succeed in making the statement; however, it would be defective, because of his lack of evidence. In such a case the speech act is successful but defective. Austin’s distinction between “felicitous” and “infelicitous” speech acts fails to distinguish between those speech acts which are successful but defective and those which are not even successful, and for this reason we do not use his terminology, but instead use the terminology of *Speech Acts*.<sup>8</sup> In the ideal case, a speech act is both successful and nondefective, and for each illocutionary force the components of that illocutionary force serve to determine under what conditions that type of speech act is both *successful* and *nondefective*, at least as far as its illocutionary force is concerned. In this section we will present the seven components in a way which will make clear how they determine the conditions of successful and nondefective performance of illocutions.

### 3.1 Illocutionary point.

Each type of illocution has a point or purpose which is internal to its being an act of that type. The point of statements and descriptions is to tell people how things are, the point of promises and vows is to commit the speaker to doing something, the point of orders and commands is to try to get people to do things, and so on. Each of these points or purposes we will call the *illocutionary point* of the corresponding act. By saying that the illocutionary point is internal to the type of illocutionary act, we mean simply that a successful performance of an act of that type necessarily achieves that purpose and it achieves it in virtue of being an act of that type. It could not be a successful act of that type if it did not achieve that purpose. In real life a person may have all sorts of other

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<sup>8</sup>Searle, *Speech Acts* (1969).

purposes and aims; e.g. in making a promise, he may want to reassure his hearer, keep the conversation going, or try to appear to be clever, and none of these is part of the essence of promising. But when he makes a promise he necessarily commits himself to doing something. Other aims are up to him, none of them is internal to the fact that the utterance is a promise; but if he successfully performs the act of making a promise then he necessarily commits himself to doing something, because that is the illocutionary point of the illocutionary act of promising.

In general we can say that the illocutionary point of a type of illocutionary act is that purpose which is essential to its being an act of that type. This has the consequence that if the act is successful the point is achieved. Some characteristic illocutionary points are the following: The illocutionary point of a promise to do act  $A$  is to commit the speaker to doing  $A$ . The illocutionary point of an apology for having done act  $A$  is to express the speaker's sorrow or regret for having done  $A$ . The illocutionary point of issuing a declaration that  $P$  (e.g. a declaration of war) is to bring about the state of affairs that  $P$  represents.

Illocutionary point is only one component of illocutionary force, but it is by far the most important component. That it is not the only component is shown by the fact that different illocutionary forces can have the same illocutionary point, as in the pairs assertion/testimony, order/request and promise/vow. In each pair both illocutionary forces have the same point but differ in other respects. The other elements of illocutionary force are further specifications and modifications of the illocutionary point or they are consequences of the illocutionary point, but the basic component of illocutionary force is illocutionary point.

In the performance of an act of form  $F(P)$  the illocutionary point is distinct from the propositional content, but it is achieved only as part of a total speech act in which the propositional content is expressed with the illocutionary point. We will say therefore that the *illocutionary point is achieved on the propositional content*. A speaker can be committed to an illocutionary point that he does not explicitly achieve. Thus, for example, if he promises to carry out a future course of action he is committed to the illocutionary point of the assertion that he will carry out that course of action, even though he may not have explicitly asserted that he will do it.

### 3.2 Degree of strength of the illocutionary point.

Different illocutionary acts often achieve the same illocutionary point with different degrees of strength. For example, if I *request* someone to do something my attempt to get him to do it is less strong than

if I *insist* that he do it. If I *suggest* that something is the case the degree of strength of my representation that it is the case is less than if I *solemnly swear* that it is the case. If I *express regret* for having done something my utterance has a lesser degree of strength than if I *humbly apologize* for having done it. For each type of illocutionary force  $F$  whose illocutionary point requires that it be achieved with a certain degree of strength, we will call that degree of strength the *characteristic degree of strength* of illocutionary point of  $F$ . There are different sources of different degrees of strength. For example, both pleading and ordering are stronger than requesting, but the greater strength of pleading derives from the intensity of the desire expressed, while the greater strength of ordering derives from the fact that the speaker uses a position of power or authority that he has over the hearer.

### 3.3 Mode of achievement.

Some, but not all, illocutionary acts require a special way or special set of conditions under which their illocutionary point has to be achieved in the performance of the speech act. For example, a speaker who issues a command from a position of authority does more than someone who makes a request. Both utterances have the same illocutionary point, but the command achieves that illocutionary point by way of invoking the position of authority of the speaker. In order that the utterance be a successful command the speaker must not only be in a position of authority; he must be using or invoking his authority in issuing the utterance. Analogously a person who makes a statement in his capacity as a witness in a court trial does not merely make a statement, but he *testifies*, and his status as a witness is what makes his utterance count as testimony. These features which distinguish respectively commanding and testifying from requesting and asserting we will call *modes of achievement* of their illocutionary points. When an illocutionary force  $F$  requires a special mode of achievement of its point we will call that mode the *characteristic mode of achievement* of illocutionary point of  $F$ . Sometimes degree of strength and mode of achievement are interdependent. For example, the characteristic mode of achievement of a command will give it a greater characteristic degree of strength of illocutionary point than that of a request.

### 3.4 Propositional content conditions.

We have seen that the form of most illocutionary acts is  $F(P)$ . In many cases the type of force  $F$  will impose certain conditions on what can be in the propositional content  $P$ . For example, if a speaker makes

a promise, the content of the promise must be that the speaker will perform some future course of action. One cannot promise that someone else will do something (though one can promise to *see to it* that he does it) and one cannot promise to have done something in the past. Similarly if a speaker apologizes for something it must be for something that he has done or is otherwise responsible for. A speaker cannot successfully apologize for the law of *modus ponens* or the elliptical orbit of the planets, for example. Such conditions on the propositional content which are imposed by the illocutionary force we will call *propositional content conditions*. These conditions obviously have syntactic consequences: sentences such as “I order you to have eaten beans last week” are linguistically odd.

### 3.5 Preparatory conditions.

For most types of illocutionary acts, the act can be both successful and nondefective only if certain other conditions obtain. For example, a promise might be successfully made and so have achieved its illocutionary point but it would still be defective if the thing the speaker promised to do was not in the hearer’s interest and the hearer did not want him to do it. In making a promise the speaker presupposes that he can do the promised act and that it is in the hearer’s interest to do it. Similarly if a speaker apologizes he presupposes that the thing he apologizes for is bad or reprehensible. Such conditions which are necessary for the successful and nondefective performance of an illocutionary act we call *preparatory conditions*. In the performance of a speech act the speaker *presupposes* the satisfaction of all the preparatory conditions. But this does not imply that preparatory conditions are psychological states of the speaker, rather they are certain sorts of states of affairs that have to obtain in order that the act be successful and non-defective. Speakers and hearers internalize the rules that determine preparatory conditions and thus the rules are reflected in the psychology of speakers/hearers. But the states of affairs specified by the rules need not themselves be psychological.

Preparatory conditions determine a class of presuppositions peculiar to illocutionary force. But there is another class of presuppositions peculiar to propositional content. To take some famous examples, the assertion that the King of France is bald presupposes that there exists a King of France; and the question whether you have stopped beating your wife presupposes both that you have a wife and that you have been beating her. Regardless of which of the various philosophical accounts one accepts of these sorts of presuppositions, one needs to distinguish

them from those that derive from illocutionary forces. The same propositional presuppositions can occur with different illocutionary forces, as, for example, one can both ask whether and one can assert that Jones has stopped beating his wife.

As we noted earlier a speech act can be successfully, though defectively, performed when certain preparatory conditions are unsatisfied. Even in such cases, the presupposition of the preparatory conditions is internal to the performance of the illocutionary act, as is shown by the fact that it is paradoxical to perform the act and deny that one of the preparatory conditions is satisfied. One cannot, for example, consistently make a promise while denying that one is able to do the act promised.

Many preparatory conditions are determined by illocutionary point. For example, all acts whose point is to get the hearer to do something – orders, requests, commands, etc. – have as a preparatory condition that the hearer is able to do the act directed. But some preparatory conditions are peculiar to certain illocutionary forces. For example, a promise differs from a threat in that the act promised must be for the hearer's benefit. Preparatory conditions and mode of achievement are connected in that normally certain preparatory conditions must obtain in order that an illocutionary act can be performed with its characteristic mode of achievement. For example, a speaker must satisfy the preparatory condition of being in a position of authority before he can non-defectively issue an utterance with the mode of achievement of a command.

### 3.6 Sincerity conditions.

Whenever one performs an illocutionary act with a propositional content one expresses a certain psychological state with that same content. Thus when one makes a statement one expresses a belief, when one makes a promise one expresses an intention, when one issues a command one expresses a desire or want. The propositional content of the illocutionary act is in general identical with the propositional content of the expressed psychological state.

It is always possible to express a psychological state that one does not have, and that is how sincerity and insincerity in speech acts are distinguished. An insincere speech act is one in which the speaker performs a speech act and thereby expresses a psychological state even though he does not have that state. Thus an insincere statement (a lie) is one where the speaker does not believe what he says, an insincere apology is one where the speaker does not have the sorrow he expresses, an

insincere promise is one where the speaker does not in fact intend to do the things he promises to do. An insincere speech act is defective but not necessarily unsuccessful. A lie, for example, can be a successful assertion. Nevertheless, successful performances of illocutionary acts necessarily involve the expression of the psychological state specified by the sincerity conditions of that type of act.

The fact that the expression of the psychological state is internal to the performance of the illocution is shown by the fact that it is paradoxical to perform an illocution and to deny simultaneously that one has the corresponding psychological state. Thus, one cannot say “I promise to come but I do not intend to come”, “I order you to leave but I don’t want you to leave”, “I apologize but I am not sorry”, etc. And this incidentally explains Moore’s paradox that one cannot say consistently “It is raining but I don’t believe that it is raining” even though the proposition that it is raining is consistent with the proposition that I do not believe that it is raining. The reason for this is that when one performs the speech act one necessarily expresses the sincerity condition, and thus to conjoin the performance of the speech act with the denial of the sincerity condition would be to express and to deny the presence of one and the same psychological state.

Just as the performance of an illocution can commit the speaker to an illocution that he has not performed, so the expression of a psychological state in the performance of an illocution can commit him to having a state he has not expressed. Thus, for example, a speaker who expresses a belief that  $P$  and a belief that if  $P$  then  $Q$  is committed to having the belief that  $Q$ . The expression of a state commits the speaker to having that state; and one can be committed to having a state without actually having it.

The verb “express”, by the way, is notoriously ambiguous. In one sense a speaker is said to express propositions and in another to express his feelings and attitudes such as fear, belief, or desire. In this discussion of the sincerity conditions of speech acts we are using it in this second sense, which should not be confused with the first. Both senses of “express” are used throughout this book and we believe the contexts will make it clear in each case which sense is intended.

### **3.7 Degree of strength of the sincerity conditions.**

Just as the same illocutionary point can be achieved with different degrees of strength, so the same psychological state can be expressed with different degrees of strength. The speaker who makes a request

expresses the desire that the hearer do the act requested; but if he *begs*, *beseeches*, or *implores*, he expresses a stronger desire than if he merely requests. Often, but not always, the degree of strength of the sincerity conditions and the degree of strength of the illocutionary point vary directly, as in the above examples. But an order, for example, has a greater degree of strength of its illocutionary point than a request, even though it need not have a greater degree of strength of its expressed psychological state. The greater degree of strength of the illocutionary point of ordering derives from the mode of achievement. The person who gives an order must invoke his position of power or authority over the hearer in issuing the order.

In cases where illocutionary force requires that the psychological state be expressed with a degree of strength, we will call that degree of strength *the characteristic degree of strength* of the sincerity condition.

#### 4. Definitions of illocutionary force and related notions.<sup>10</sup>

##### 4.1 Definition of the notion of illocutionary force.

Our discussion so far of the components of illocutionary force enables us to define the notion of illocutionary force as follows: An illocutionary force is uniquely determined once its illocutionary point, its preparatory conditions, the mode of achievement of its illocutionary point, the degree of strength of its illocutionary point, its propositional content conditions, its sincerity conditions, and the degree of strength of its sincerity conditions are specified. So two illocutionary forces  $F_1$  and  $F_2$  are identical when they are the same with respect to these seven features. To illustrate these points, here are a few examples of illocutionary forces that differ in (at least) one aspect from the illocutionary force of assertion. The illocutionary force of the testimony of a witness differs from assertion in that a speaker who testifies acts in his status as a witness when he represents a state of affairs as actual. (This is a special mode of achievement that is specific to testimony.) The illocutionary force of a conjecture differs from assertion in that the speaker who conjectures commits himself to the truth of the propositional content with a weaker degree of strength than the degree of commitment to truth of an assertion. The illocutionary force of a prediction differs from assertion in that it has a special condition on the propositional content. The

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<sup>10</sup>These definitions are in Vanderveken, "Illocutionary Logic and Self-Defeating Speech Acts".

propositional content of a prediction must be future with respect to the time of the utterance. The illocutionary force of reminding (that *P*) differs from assertion only in that it has the additional preparatory condition that the hearer once knew and might have forgotten the truth of the propositional content. The illocutionary force of complaining differs from assertion in that it has the additional sincerity condition that the speaker is dissatisfied with the state of affairs represented by the propositional content.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4.2 Definition of a successful and nondefective performance of an elementary illocutionary act.**

Whether or not an utterance has a certain force is a matter of the illocutionary intentions of the speaker, but whether or not an illocutionary act with that force is successfully and nondefectively performed involves a good deal more than just his intentions; it involves a set of further conditions which must be satisfied. Prominent among these conditions are those that have to do with achieving what Austin called “illocutionary uptake”.<sup>12</sup> The conditions for correctly understanding an utterance normally involve such diverse things as that the hearer must be awake, must share a common language with the speaker, must be paying attention, etc. Since these conditions for understanding are of little theoretical interest in a theory of speech acts, we will simply henceforth assume that they are satisfied when the utterance is made; and we will concentrate on the speaker and on how his utterance satisfies the other conditions on successful and nondefective performance. The seven features of illocutionary force that we have specified reduce to four different types of necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful and nondefective performance of an elementary illocution. Assuming that all the conditions necessary and sufficient for hearer understanding are satisfied

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<sup>11</sup>Additional note of the editor. Searle and Vanderveken formulate in chapter 3 of *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic* the following recursive definition of the set of all possible illocutionary forces on the basis of their analysis of the notion of illocutionary force into components. According to them, there are five and only five basic illocutionary points: the assertive, commissive, directive, declaratory and expressive illocutionary points. So there are five and only *five primitive illocutionary forces* of utterances in the logical structure of language. These are the simplest possible illocutionary forces with a given illocutionary point: they have that illocutionary point, no special mode of achievement of that point, neutral degrees of strength and only the propositional content, preparatory and sincerity conditions which are determined by their point. All other illocutionary forces are derived from these five primitive illocutionary forces by a finite number of applications of operations which consist in adding new components or in increasing or decreasing the degrees of strength.

<sup>12</sup>*How to Do Things with Words*.

when the utterance is made, an illocutionary act of the form  $F(P)$  is successfully and nondefectively performed in a context of utterance iff:

- 1) The speaker succeeds in achieving in that context the illocutionary point of  $F$  on the proposition  $P$  with the required characteristic mode of achievement and degree of strength of illocutionary point of  $F$ .
- 2) He expresses the proposition  $P$ , and that proposition satisfies the propositional content conditions imposed by  $F$ .
- 3) The preparatory conditions of the illocution and the propositional presuppositions obtain in the world of the utterance, and the speaker presupposes that they obtain.
- 4) He expresses and possesses the psychological state determined by  $F$  with the characteristic degree of strength of the sincerity conditions of  $F$ .

For example, in the performance of a particular utterance act, a speaker succeeds in issuing a nondefective command to the hearer iff:

- 1) The point of his utterance is to attempt to get the hearer to do an act  $A$ . (illocutionary point). This attempt is made by invoking his position of authority over the hearer (mode of achievement), and with a strong degree of strength of illocutionary point (degree of strength).
- 2) He expresses the proposition that the hearer will perform a future act  $A$ . (propositional content condition).
- 3) He presupposes both that he is in a position of authority over the hearer with regard to  $A$ . and that the hearer is able to do  $A$ . He also presupposes all of the propositional presuppositions if there are any. And all his presuppositions, both illocutionary and propositional, in fact obtain (preparatory conditions and propositional presuppositions).
- 4) He expresses and actually has a desire that the hearer do  $A$  (sincerity condition) with a medium degree of strength (degree of strength).

As we remarked earlier, a speech act can be *successful* though *defective*. A speaker might, actually succeed in making a statement or a promise even though he made a mess of it in various ways. He might, for example, not have enough evidence for his statement or his promise

might be insincere. An ideal speech act is one which is both successful and nondefective. Nondefectiveness implies success, but not conversely. In our view there are only two ways that an act can be successfully performed though still be defective. First, some of the preparatory conditions might not obtain and yet the act might still be performed. This possibility holds only for some, but not all, preparatory conditions. Second, the sincerity conditions might not obtain, i.e. the act can be successfully performed even though it be insincere.

### 4.3 Definition of illocutionary commitment.

The idea behind the notion of illocutionary commitment is simply this: sometimes by performing one illocutionary act a speaker can be committed to another illocution. This occurs both in cases where the performance of one act by a speaker is *eo ipso* a performance of the other and in cases where the performance of the one is not a performance of the other and does not involve the speaker in a commitment to its explicit performance. For example, if a speaker issues an order to a hearer to do act  $A$  he is committed to granting him permission to do  $A$ . Why? Because when he issues the order he satisfies certain conditions on issuing the permission. There is no way he can consistently issue the order and deny the permission. And the kind of consistency involved is not the consistency of sets of truth conditions of propositions, but illocutionary consistency or compatibility of conditions of success. In many cases illocutionary commitments are trivially obvious. For example, a report commits the speaker to an assertion because a report just is a species of assertion, an assertion about the past or the present. A report differs from an assertion in general only by having a special propositional content condition. Similarly, a speech act of reminding a hearer that  $P$  commits the speaker to the assertion that  $P$  because reminding that  $P$  is a species of assertion that  $P$  made with the preparatory condition the hearer once knew and might have forgotten that  $P$ . Thus reminding differs from assertion only by having a special additional preparatory condition. In such cases, which we will call *strong* illocutionary commitments, an illocutionary act  $F_1(P)$  commits the speaker to an illocutionary act  $F_2(Q)$  because it is not possible to perform  $F_1(P)$  in a context of utterance without also performing  $F_1(Q)$ .

But there are also cases, which we will call *weak* illocutionary commitments, where the speaker is committed to an illocutionary act  $F(P)$  by way of performing certain illocutionary acts  $F_1(P_1), \dots, F_n(P_n)$  although he does not perform  $F(P)$  and is not committed to its performance. Thus a speaker can be committed to an illocution without explicitly achieving

the illocutionary point of that illocution, and similarly he can be committed to an illocution without explicitly expressing the propositional content or without expressing the psychological state mentioned in the sincerity conditions. For example, if he asserts that all men are mortal and that Socrates is a man, he is committed to the assertion that Socrates is mortal; even though he has not explicitly represented as actual the state of affairs that Socrates is mortal, nor expressed the proposition representing that state of affairs, nor expressed a belief in the existence of that state of affairs.

As a general definition we can say that *an illocutionary act of the form  $F_1(P_1)$  commits the speaker to an illocutionary act  $F_2(P_2)$*  iff in the successful performance of  $F_1(P_1)$ :

- 1) The speaker achieves (strong) or is committed (weak) to the illocutionary point of  $F_2$  on  $P_2$  with the required mode of achievement and degree of strength of  $F_2$ .
- 2) He is committed to all of the preparatory conditions of  $F_2(P_2)$  and to the propositional presuppositions.
- 3) He commits himself to having the psychological state specified by the sincerity conditions of  $F_2(P_2)$  with the required degree of strength.
- 4)  $P_2$  satisfies the propositional content of  $F_2$  with respect to the context of utterance.

Both strong and weak illocutionary commitments satisfy this definition. Thus, for example, a speaker who asserts that all men are mortal and that Socrates is mortal is committed to the illocutionary point of the assertion that Socrates is mortal and similarly he is committed to having the belief that Socrates is a man. A report commits the speaker to an assertion because a report is simply an assertion about the past or the present. Giving testimony commits the speaker to an assertion because to testify is simply to assert in one's status as a witness. A complaint about  $P$  commits the speaker to an assertion that  $P$  because to complain that  $P$  just is to assert that  $P$  while expressing dissatisfaction with the state of affairs represented by the propositional content. *A speaker is committed to an illocution  $F(P)$  in a context of utterance* iff he successfully performs in that context a speech act which commits him to  $F(P)$ . Thus, for example, a speaker who successfully testifies, reports, or complains that  $P$  is committed to an assertion that  $P$ .

#### 4.4 Definition of a literal performance.

A speaker performs *literally* an illocutionary act  $F(P)$  in a context of utterance when he performs  $F(P)$  in that context by uttering a sentence which expresses literally that force and content in that context. Thus, for example, a speaker who requests someone to leave the room by uttering in an appropriate context the sentence “Please leave the room” performs a literal request. Many speech acts are not performed literally but rather are performed by way of metaphor, irony, hints, insinuation, etc. Two classes of speech acts which are not expressed literally in an utterance are of special interest to us: First, there are speech acts  $F_1(P)$  performed by way of performing a stronger illocutionary act  $F_2(Q)$ . In such cases the conditions of success of  $F_1(P)$  are conditions of success of  $F_2(Q)$ , and  $F_2(Q)$  strongly commits the speaker to  $F_1(P)$ . For example, begging commits the speaker to requesting. Second, as we noted earlier, there are indirect speech acts  $F_1(P)$  performed by way of performing another illocutionary act  $F_2(Q)$  that does not commit the speaker to them. In such cases, all the conditions of success of  $F_2(Q)$  are satisfied, but the speaker conveys  $F_1(P)$  by relying on features of the context as well as on understanding of the rules of speech acts and of the principles of conversation to enable the hearer to recognize the intention to convey  $F_1(P)$  in the utterance of a sentence that literally expresses  $F_2(Q)$ .<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.5 Definitions of illocutionary compatibility.

Attempts to perform several illocutionary acts in the same context can break down because of various sorts of inconsistency. For example, if a speaker attempts to perform an illocutionary act and its denegation (if he says for example “Please leave the room!” and “I am not asking you to leave the room”) his speech act will be unsuccessful because of illocutionary inconsistency. The denegation of an illocutionary act is incompatible with that act because the aim of an act of illocutionary denegation of form  $\neg F(P)$  is to make it explicit that the speaker does not perform  $F(P)$ . We will say that a set of illocutionary acts is *simultaneously performable* iff it is possible for a speaker to perform simultaneously all illocutionary acts belonging to it in the same context of utterance. Two illocutionary acts are *relatively incompatible* iff any set of illocutionary acts that contains both of them is not simultaneously performable. Otherwise they are relatively compatible.

<sup>13</sup>For further discussion see Searle, “Indirect Speech Acts”, and D. Vanderveken, “What is an Illocutionary Force?”, in M. Dascal (ed.), *Dialogue: An Interdisciplinary Study* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1985).

Two possible contexts of utterance are *relatively compatible* when the union of the two sets of illocutionary acts that are performed in them is simultaneously performable, i.e. when it is possible to perform simultaneously in the context of an utterance all illocutionary acts that are performed in them. If two contexts of utterance are relatively compatible, no illocutionary act performed in one is incompatible with any illocutionary act performed in the other.