

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **AUSTIN, SEARLE: DOING THINGS WITH WORDS**

This chapter aims to explore how Austin and Searle explicate the relationship between the word and the world with special reference to Austin's *How to do Things with Words* (1962) and Searle's *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language* (1969). This chapter is an attempt to pose the insights that have undercut the authority and certainty of all acts of perception and interpretation, that is, all acts of assigning or discovering meaning in language.

The hypotheses governing this chapter are: first, the role of language in shaping our world is not limited to certain specific acts, because it is not possible to say with confidence exactly what it does on specific occasions. Its broader effects have to be examined as it organizes our encounters with the world. Second, so far the relation between social conventions—the constitutive conventions that make possible social life—and individual acts is concerned, the former are not merely the background against which we decide how to act. Rather, this relation between social conventions and individual acts brings forth an account of the complexities of norm and action.

The fundamental assumption informing this study is that any convincing theory of meaning must be given in the context of a theory of language. The “linguistic turn” in the twentieth century thought that sees language as the medium of all human experience and knowledge make a theory of language fundamental to an investigation of meaning and of anything else for that matter.

The relation between what language does and what it says—precisely the relation between the word and the world—though seems transparent, is a yet unsolved problem. Where we conceive of a harmonious fusion of doing and saying, there appears an ineluctable tension that governs all verbal activity. ‘Truth’ is therefore affected by a determinate undecidability, the literal haunted by the figurative, the given, the so-called ‘real’ is always in some sense subject to perception or a reading—the necessary is never entirely separable from the merely possible. Instead of a totality in which any statement could find a centre of reference, knowledge is burdened with a certain supplementarity that in the end remains uncompassable.

This study seeks to contend that the social character of a practice like language cannot be reduced to a contract paradigm. A sentence which would escape the norms of a given linguistic practice would be a complete impossibility. At the same time, the same possibilities which are potentialities of expression are simultaneous restrictive possibilities. Subjects and objects do not stand outside of it waiting to choose or be chosen. Rather their occurrence as ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ is contingent upon the possibilities of the language itself.

Second it contends that, at the limit of language and its ambiguities, stands the relation of the word to the thing. Felicitous or otherwise, a speech act represents the irreducibility of things that language purports to deny. Hence however perfectly tamed and designated by words with which we place them in our daily transactions, and subject to linguistic causality, a speech act may be with or without effect, but the striking effect all speech acts produce is that of a word meeting or displacing a thing.

Austin’s commentators have assumed hugely different stances initially toward the performative/constative contrast/identity. While application of Austin and Searle’s work to the critical enterprise certainly continues the fruitful adaptations of modern literary scholarship however, speech act theory challenges a foundational principle of other schools. It shifts attention from what language is to what it does and sees a social process where other linguistic schools see a formal structure. Hence, Austin’s contemporaries are found to be mostly caught up in a debate regarding the performative/constative distinction, thereby bringing to the fore questions regarding the ordinary language philosophy.

P. F. Strawson, in the essay, “Austin and Locutionary Meaning” also brings to the fore some interesting observations:

Austin distinguishes between the ‘meaning’ of an utterance and its ‘force’ . . . Various interpretations seem to receive some support from the text of *How to Do Things with Words*; but the text also supplies grounds for rejecting all those interpretations. (Austin 46)

Strawson comments the following to prove his point:

A preliminary pointer to this opposite extreme is a contrast which Austin draws on p.73 between meaning and force: ‘precision’ in language makes it clearer what is being said—its meaning: explicitness, in our sense, makes clearer the force of the utterance.’ . . . It seems to be implied, not that the use of linguistic devices for making illocutionary forces explicit results in the absorption of illocutionary force into locutionary meaning, but rather that force can never be absorbed into meaning, even when made explicit by the use of linguistic devices. (52)

After elaborately discussing the nuances of the performative/constative and the illocutionary/locutionary distinction, he opines:

We might, with some justice, in some cases, say that we are talking both about the words and the world, both about the situation and the description. In so far as we can make remarks equivalent to these, employing the word ‘true’, we have, to an equivalent degree, remarks about the relation of words to world (56)

Among Austin’s other contemporaries, for instance. G.J. Warnock has an interesting comment to offer regarding the speech act. In the essay, “Some Types of Performative Utterance” (1973), G. J. Warnock makes the following observations: (1) There is a tolerable sense in which all utterance is, performative; whenever anyone speaks there are things—many things of many sorts—that he could be said therein to do; so that we have a general topic, as yet unexhausted nor even very well defined, that we could call the topic of ‘speech-acts’. However it is not necessarily in virtue of a convention that to issue a certain utterance is to perform a certain speech act, though doubtless some are. (2) The fact that all utterance is in a sense performative does not imply that there never was a sub-class of utterance called ‘performative’, to issue which is in a special way to do something. There are at least two special sub-classes, fairly different from each other—(a) that sub-class of utterances the issuing of which by ‘convention’ is ‘operative’ in the doing of this or that; (b) that sub-class which is identifiable by the formal feature of being in the first person present indicative.

Katz’s *Propositional Structure and Illocutionary Force* (1977) bases itself on “Austin’s promising idea, undercut by Austin’s own hand” (xiv). For Katz, “Austin

began with a set of neat, clean distinctions, for example, between constatives and performatives, but in the course of his investigations he undermined, blurred and erased almost all of them” (10). In order to keep the neat clarity and eliminate the blurry erasures—as he puts it, in order to show “how to save Austin from Austin” (177)—Katz reinstates the performative/constative distinction as thoroughly dependable.

In the essay “Austin at Criticism” Stanley Cavell also highlights the fact that “To go on saying that Austin attends to ordinary or everyday language is to go on saying, roughly nothing . . .” (98). Cavell elaborates his argument in the following manner:

In proceeding from ordinary language, so far that it is philosophically pertinent, one is in a frame of mind in which it seems (1) that one can as appropriately or truly be said to be looking at the world as looking at language; (2) that one is seeking necessary truths “about” the world (or “about” language) and therefore cannot be satisfied with anything . . . [like] a description of how people talk . . . and (3) that one is not finally interested at all in how “other” people talk, but in determining where and why one wishes or hesitates, to use a particular expression oneself (*Must We Mean* 98-99).

Hence, as our reference to some of the contemporaries of Austin indicates, there has been a good amount of discussion on the nature of the language use in ordinary situations. Accordingly, claims have also been made about the speech act theory demonstrating the feature of instability in meaning.

Conflicting interpretations of Austin’s work on speech acts illustrates the rift in the area of the philosophy of language. In the late 1970s, Searle published a defense of Austin against what he perceived to be Derrida’s misreading of Austin (“Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida”, [1977]. Derrida in turn, unleashed a lengthy response, in the form of a deconstruction of Searle of Searle in *Limited Inc* (1988). Like Austin’s own, the work of such influential continental figures as Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida is in unending and unyielding rebellion against the descriptive fallacy’s view that the function of language is to represent the extra-linguistic world. This debate between Austin and Derrida has in fact become a glaring example of the divergent responses of philosophers about the nature and function of literature. “Signature Event

Context” consistently fastens on locution rather than illocution, Austin no less consistently on illocution rather than locution. Derrida’s most sustained critique of speech-act theory is based on the nature of speech rather than the felicity of the acts it performs. Derrida contends that speech-act theory is like other philosophies of language in requiring a fully conscious person in control of intention and desire for its principles to apply. Derrida says this about Austin’s contribution to the philosophy of language: “The performative does not have its referent outside of itself or, in any event, before and in front of itself” (13). For Austin, the conventions that matter—those that allow speech to act—are always socially specific and historically constituted. For Derrida, the conventions that matter apply to the units of every signifying form and thus inhere in the nature of the mark.

Other parts of “Signature Event Context” repeat Derrida’s conviction that problems on the locutionary level must be addressed before the illocutionary level can be productively approached. An instance is this distinction between two sorts of conventionality: “Austin, at this juncture, appears to consider solely the conventionality constituting the *circumstance* of the utterance, its contextual surroundings, and not a certain conventionality intrinsic to what constitutes the locution itself” (15). Searle’s response to Derrida basically gives substance to Austin’s idea of a general theory of speech acts by moving beyond the cataloguing stage and providing a theoretical framework within which the three dimensions of utterance, meaning, and action involved in speech acts could be seen as being unified together. What Searle finally makes of Derrida’s claims about iterability and parasitism is as follows:

On a sympathetic reading of Derrida’s text we can construe him as pointing quite correctly, that the possibility of parasitic discourse is internal to the notion of language, and that performatives can succeed only if the utterances are iterable, repetitions of conventional—or as he calls them “coded” forms. But neither of these is in any way an objection to Austin. Indeed Austin’s insistence on the conventional and the illocutionary act in general commits him precisely to the view that any conventional act involves the repetition of the same. (‘Reply’ 207)

The debate between Searle and Derrida in fact provided further insights during the structuralist-poststructuralist era to contemplate grounds of similarity or difference

between both philosophers. Therefore critics like Culler offer important insights to both schools of philosophers. Especially in *On Deconstruction* (1982), Jonathan Culler emphasizes Derrida's demonstration of the deconstructive moves inherent in the concept of a "supplement", of simultaneously what is added to something already complete and what's needed to produce completeness. For Derrida, the "logic of supplementarity" is that by which the essential and the unessential, the inside and the outside, incessantly replace and supplant one another. Culler astutely comments on the prominence of this logic in Austin's presentation of constative and performative:

Austin's analysis provides a splendid instance of the logic of supplementarity at work. Starting from the philosophical hierarchy that makes true or false statements the norm of language and treats other utterances as flawed statements or extra—supplementary—forms, Austin's investigation of the qualities of the marginal case leads to a deconstruction and inversion of the hierarchy: the performative is not a flawed constative: rather, the constative is a special case of the performative. (113)

Culler is also of the opinion that Austin's project is "an attempt at structural explanation which offers a pertinent critique of logocentric premises, but in his discussion he reintroduces precisely those assumptions that his project puts in question" (111). Culler further discusses the fact that "Austin refuses to explain meaning in terms of a state of mind and proposes rather, an analysis of conventions of discourse" (115).

Gayatri Spivak presents a review of Derrida's essay in "Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model" (1980). Acquiring a deconstructive mindset or undergoing what she calls here "a revolutionary change of mind" has important political as well as philosophical consequences: "[W]ithout this revolutionary change of mind, revolutionary 'programs' will fall into the same metaphysical bind of idealized and repeatable intention and context that Derrida plots in speech act theory". Having said this, she goes on to show how the logic of the repeatable and the idealized hides an "iron fist" of repression and exclusion.

Accordingly, thinkers in the late 1980s and the early 1990s have incorporated the insights of Austin and Searle's theory into their own theories of performance and

performativity. Judith Butler, for example, turns to Austin and Derrida's theories of the performative not as a model of individual utterance as it is for Austin and Searle, but as a model outlining the performative constitution of subjectivities and social identity. Butler raises the stakes of speech act theory by showing how performative utterances function as ideological norms that interpellate and name women into social existence. In the essay 'Speech Acts Politically' (1997):

To account for . . . speech acts, however, one must understand language not as a static and closed system whose utterances are functionally secured in advance by the 'social positions' to which they are mimetically related. The force and meaning of an utterance are not exclusively determined by prior contexts or 'positions'; an utterance may gain its force precisely by virtue of the break with context that it performs. . . Language takes on a non-ordinary in order precisely to contest what has become sedimented in and as the ordinary" (257).

Butler opines that: "The 'break' with the ordinary discourse that intellectual discourse performs does not have to be complete for a certain decontextualisation and denaturalization of discourse to take place . . . The play between the ordinary and the non-ordinary is crucial to the process of relaborating and reworking the constraints that maintain the limits of speakability and consequently, the viability of the subject" (257). According to Butler, "The sense of convention in Austin augmented by the terms 'ritual' and 'ceremonial' is fully transmuted into linguistic iterability in Derrida" (261).

It now seems that the most pervasive and persuasive theories of speech acts—for instance Shoshana Felman and J. Hillis Miller's work on the nature of the subject—examine the role of literature as being able to create social worlds, thereby contributing to the understanding of social behaviour. Shoshana Felman uses the principles common to Austin and contemporary continental thinkers especially Jacques Lacan, as the basis for her analysis of Moliere's *Don Juan* in *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* (1983). Felman's book is both a theoretical situation of speech-act philosophy and a practical demonstration of the philosophy's value for literary interpretation. Despite significant differences, psychoanalytic and speech-act theories engage in a single enterprise, interrogation of the things humans do with their symbolic representation of themselves. Felman presents the traits common to Lacan and Austin—their mutual appreciation of language as play, their penchant for deconstructing



logical oppositions, their simultaneous repudiation of the referent as pre-existent substance and validation of the referent produced by a semiotic. That is why Lacan and Austin share “the same taste for paradox and the same self-subverting consciousness of a breach at every point in knowledge” (91). But critics like Sandy Petry are observant enough to point out that:

The language Austin uses to say that literature has nothing to do with the illocutionary act is no more definitive than the language he used to demarcate doing from saying, and that demarcation was set forth only to be repudiated. While Austin never did for the literary what he did for the constative—proclaim the speech-act character of what was originally excluded from speech-act theory—those of us who have ignored his strictures about literature are respecting the spirit of his writings as we ignore the letter. That spirit highlights the multiple interactions between language and society, interactions that contest formalist conceptions of the literary text as strongly as formalist concepts of the linguistic utterance. (*Speech Acts* 53)

Austin himself denies that in literature words do things, but as early as in 1977, *Toward a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (1977), Marie Louise Pratt argues that all oppositions between literature and ordinary language result from misapprehending both. As she states in her preface and shows throughout her book there is no valid reason to assume that language stops being itself when it enters a literary work. On the contrary, “it is both possible and necessary . . . to talk about literature in the same terms we use to talk all other things people do with language” (vii). Since the fundamental starting point for every Austinian enquiry is the collectively sustained conventions that enable words to do things, to consider literature as illocution is also to consider societies from which it comes and in which it circulates. This socialized criticism can address two principal topics: the status of literature in general and the status of separate utterances making up a given text. Pratt’s speech-act doctrine advances rather “a view of literature as a linguistic activity which cannot be understood apart from the context in which it occurs and the people who participate in it” (viii).

For literary and non-literary illocution alike, what speech-act theory addresses is language’s participation, its dynamic and productive participation, in the processes of

collective life. Or rather, speech-act theory reveals that language is among the processes of collective life, which are in turn ‘inside’ language. This interpretation, vital to the force of literary work, means that speech-act critics will interpret just like Austin, by attending to the communal identity required for a conventional procedure to have conventional effect. Pratt and Richard Ohmann agree with one another on the necessity for this attention but they direct it to different communities. Pratt’s deep concern to keep the text socially alive leads her to keep the author alive and take the speaker/hearer model as analytic paradigm. Ohmann’s recognition that the speaker/hearer model breaks down leads him to concentrate on the text’s interaction with the social being of its readers. If we do so agree, then speech act criticism has both an interpretive and a reader-response branch. Each looks at language as performance rather than description, each understands that language can become performance only in collaboration with society.

The punch of speech-act criticism thus comes less from sensitivity to certain kinds of language than from recognition that all kinds of language make tangible the network of relationships and agreements in which humans and their signs are always embedded. Stanley Fish in “How to Do Things with Austin and Searle” addresses the priority of a community’s interpretive operations over all reified and extra-communal concepts that Fish writes as “Reality, the Real World, Objective Fact” (243). Fish draws a curious distinction between what is “social” and what is “conventional”: “in speech-act theory the notion of felicity isn’t social but conventional [ . . . ] The notion of felicity is social only in the narrow sense that it is tied to conditions specified by society” (225).

So far criticism of the works of John Searle is concerned, mention may be made of a collection of essays edited by Barry Smith titled *John Searle* (2003). In the essay titled “From Speech Acts to Social Reality”, the first to feature in the book, Smith is of the view that:

Searle was never a subscriber to the view that major philosophical problems could be solved—or made to evaporate—merely by attending to the use of words. Rather his study of the realm of language in *Speech Acts* constitutes just one initial step in a long and still unfinished journey embracing not only language but also the realms of consciousness and the mental, of social and institutional reality. . . In *Speech Acts*, he attempts to come to grips with the

facts of language—with utterances, with referrings and predicatings, and with acts of stating, questioning, commanding and promising (1-2).

According to Smith, “The question that Searle is trying to answer . . . is: ‘How can there be objective facts that are facts only because we think they are facts? How can there be facts where, so to speak, thinking that it is makes it so?’” (25).

Nick Fotion, who has authored the book *John Searle* (2000) sums up his view about Searle’s theory of speech acts in an essay, “From Speech Acts to Speech Activity” in the following manner:

1. When listeners approach a stretch of speech activity they should look for clues left by the speaker about the speaker’s purposes.
2. Observe carefully what kind of speech acts are being employed and, in a preliminary way, classify what is being said as falling under one of three headings: assertive-dominated speech activity, mixed speech activity, or partially mixed speech activity (that excludes or tends to exclude assertives) (Smith 48)

Fotion finally concludes that “adopting a Searlian-like approach to speech-activity brings order to chaos. It is true that this order does not match that found at the speech-act level. This is so because our language is a many-splendored creature” (ibid; p. 50).

*John Searle’s Philosophy of Language: Force, Meaning, and Mind* (2007), is another collection of critical essays on Searle edited by Savas L. Tsohatzidis. After an opening essay by Searle in which he summarizes the essentials of his conception of language, the critical essays are grouped into two inter-connected parts—“From mind to meaning” and “From meaning to force” –reflecting Searle’s claim that an analysis of meaning would not be adequate if it could not integrate a proper analysis of illocutionary force and if it could not itself be integrated within a satisfactory account of the mind.

Tsohatzidis begins his essay, “Yes-no questions and the myth of content invariance”, by adopting a somewhat weak interpretation of the force-content distinction, that the sententially expressible content to which an illocutionary force is propositional. Thereby he creates space for principled dispute over whether any particular such content can or

cannot be properly taken to be propositional. He examines in detail Searle's thesis that a yes-no question and its grammatically corresponding assertion not only have contents that are propositional, but actually have the same propositional content. This according to Tsohatzidis, leads to an analysis of yes-no questions that cannot be preserved unless by assuming either that inconsistent propositions can have the same content or that the identity of an illocutionary act is simultaneously dependent and not dependent on the identity of the proposition to which its force is attached. On the basis of the initial force-content distinction he then suggests a distinction between two fundamental kinds of illocutionary acts: first-order ones (for example, assertions) whose forces are applied to propositions, and higher-order ones (particularly questions) whose forces are not applied to propositions, but rather to sets of possible first-order illocutionary acts.

Hence an analysis of the critical review of the speech act theory brings into focus three important ways in which this review goes about: (a) early philosophers of the ordinary language philosophy like Warnock, Strawson, Urmson concentrate on the performative/constative distinction in ordinary speech; (b) critics like Culler and Spivak whose primary aim is to look for traces of deconstruction in Austin and Searle's theory; and (c) critics like Felman, Butler, Pratt, who look for a merger between the language of ordinary use and that of literature, thereby study the influence of the performative/constative or locutionary/illocutionary in the complexities of social and cultural discourse. While the focus of the present chapter is on the implications of language use in various social and individual contexts, it would definitely traverse all the above mentioned territories to examine the distinctive features of ordinary speech, if there are any, and examine them in contrast/similarity with the language of literature and thereby explore the impact that use of language has in the larger context of a social and cultural context. Thus, this justifies the enquiry conducted in this chapter, which is intended to serve as a link among all these schools of critical response, if one may put it that way.

Austin starts out by opposing the performative to the constative. But by the end of *How to Do Things with Words*, he is asking whether the opposition was really sound. What collapses in *How to Do Things with Words* is not the distinction between performative and constative utterances but the very notion of a permanent distinction which the philosophers would like to believe in. For instance, according to Austin, for a felicitous

speech act, “There must exist an accepted conventional procedure, having a conventional effect” (*How to* 14) and that “We must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued—the total speech act...” (52). On the other hand, he opines later that “It is difficult to say where conventions begin and end” (119). Thereby a single speech act may evoke or create multiple and divergent conventions. Hence if what we mean by context can be thought of only under the category of totality, then the concept of context itself must be discarded. From this it follows that the multiplicity of contexts and conventions risk preventing us from ever determining the ‘exact conventions, contexts, and circumstances’ essential to an exact theory of language.

What Austin does in fact, is a deconstruction of the theoretical mode of investigation. Reading through the pages of *How to Do Things with Words* one soon finds that Austin’s relentless insistence on contexts and puzzles shows normal use of language to present as many ‘aberrations’ as its literary counterpart. Much more common will be cases where it is uncertain how far a procedure extends—which cases it covers or which varieties it could be made to cover: “There will always occur difficult or marginal cases where nothing in the previous history of a conventional procedure, will decide conclusively whether such a procedure is or is not correctly applied to a case” (*How to* 31). Austin’s numerous illustrations of such uncertain cases clearly show that although “difficult or marginal” for the theory, these irregularities are plentiful and cannot be dismissed as mere exceptions.

On the other hand, Searle suggests in what he calls the “principle of expressibility”, that in principle, if not in fact, it is always possible to utter a fully explicit sentence, that is, a sentence that corresponds to, and uniquely determines the force and content of the speech act one is performing. It follows that “study of the meaning of sentences is not in principle distinct from a study of speech acts. Properly construed, they are the same study” (Searle 18).

Thus this principle of whatever can be meant can be said indicates that the notion of linguistic transformation can be disjoined from the overtly finite tie to iteration it had received in the hands of Derrida. Transformation not only involves repetition (iteration) and/or alteration of the same— it may also involve a sort of open-ended transformation; in a sense, creation. It follows then, that the content communicated by an utterance cannot be fully encoded into the sentence. The principle of expressibility, then being

weakened, does not support the claim that “the study of sentence meanings and the study of speech acts is one and the same study”. What is said explicitly is always against a background of unarticulated assumptions. Accordingly there’s more to the content of a speech act than can be encoded into the meaning of a sentence. Searle however, uses the Principle of Expressibility precisely to argue against such a view.

According to Searle, speakers have in principle the ability to surpass the finitude of the means of communication available to them. Speech then, is not the effect of the system; the relationship seems to be the other way round. Language appears to be a malleable tool in the hands of its users:

Any language provides us with a finite set of words and syntactical forms for saying what we mean, but where there is in a given language or in any language an upper bound on the expressible, where there are thoughts that cannot be expressed in a given language it is a contingent fact and not a necessary truth. (20)

According to this view, speakers might choose the constraints, the contracts, to which they are committed. That is, the constraints of language would dissolve into the voluntary contractual engagements of their users. It also follows from this that there can be no actual limits placed on the novel utterances that can be produced or understood by users of language, and hence the number of sentences that remain outstanding, yet to be uttered, may be described as limitless or infinite. Is it possible to move from this notion of limitlessness to Searle’s principle of expressibility, to the assertion that anything that can be meant can be said?

The philosophy propounded by Austin and Searle, therefore leads to a question of knowing what the centre of the discursive field might be—or if it is to be centred at all.

On the basis of the above, a question might be raised as to whether it is possible to talk about the speech act in terms of the determinate totality—as Austin axiomatically states that “the total speech act in the total speech situation is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating” (*How to* 148). In other words, it would be of interest to know whether a general theory containing the requisite comprehensiveness is possible and whether the nature of language permits such

comprehensiveness. Such an attempt presupposes that language is at one point or moment totally manifested in the present, totally actualized. There remains then nothing left outstanding in the requisite conditions of utterance in the internal context, grammatical form, or no irreducible polysemy. Usage returns to the primacy of the literal, one which can be wholly be manifested and grounded in intentionality.

Talking about intentionality first, even if we could all agree on a person's intentions and second, even if we could communicate our intentions without fearing the indeterminacies of our linguistic expression—even if conditions such as these are realized, it would be pertinent to ask if we can be sure that our interlocutor's intentions are all present to his consciousness. To put it in another way it would perhaps be too ambitious to expect him to know what he really intended. So one cannot be sure that he did not intend more than one thing at one time. On the other hand, if I cannot know what I really want and intend, and if some interference from the unconscious disturbs the truth value of my linguistic performance, the question remains as to whether it is possible to discuss my linguistic performance in terms of my intentions. Moreover, if my interlocutor experiences the same difficulties, one is in a doubt as to who/what will respond to the illocutionary force of my utterance—his knowledge and experience of the world, or his consciousness. In a way, it is not known as to how in my turn, I am to read his response. Basically it is not known, as one might put it, whether one who issues an utterance thereby sometimes does something over and above whatever it may be that he necessarily does just as a speaker of the language, merely in saying whatever it is that he says.

In such a case, one may ask whether Searle's view that the speaker can say 'exactly and literally' (*SA* 216) what he means bear any standing and whether it is possible to send the literal so easily. Moreover, one does not know which interpretation—the speaker's 'intention' or the 'listener's 'interpretation'—determine the literal meaning of an utterance.

One might say with Austin that "the words used are to some extent to be 'explained' by the context in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic exchange" (*How to* 100). But how far do we contextualise? In short, into what text(s), what situation(s) and what convention(s) shall we contextualise our utterance?

Given Austin and Searle's emphasis on the 'conventions' which provide that saying something or other is to constitute or 'count as' doing whatever it may be, finally it needs to be analysed whether certain acts can be, in its true sense, categorised as 'parasitic uses' or 'etiologies' of language. In the process it is required to examine whether ordinary language might be affected by such kinds of etiologies.

## II

In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin starts with the observation that "It was far too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe some state of affairs' or to 'state some fact, which it must do either truly or falsely' (1). The normal utterance was conceived as a true or false representation of a state of affairs, and utterances that failed to fit this model were treated either as unimportant exceptions or as deviant "pseudo-statements". "Yet", Austin continues, "we, that is, even philosophers, set some limits to the amount of nonsense we are prepared to admit we talk, so that it was natural to go on to ask, as a second stage, whether many apparently pseudo-statements really set out to be 'statements' at all" (2). Austin thus proposes to attend to cases treated as marginal and to take them as independent type. He proposes a distinction between *constative* utterances, which make a statement, describe a state of affairs, and are true or false, and another class of utterances that are not true or false and that actually perform the action to which they refer: *performatives*. To say "I promise to pay you" is not to describe a state of affairs but to perform the act of promising; the utterance itself is an act. The distinction between performative and constative captures an important difference between types of utterances and has the great credit of alerting us to the extent to which language performs actions rather than merely reports on them.

However in *How to Do Things with Words*, as Austin pushes further in his account of performatives, he encounters difficulties. It seemed initially that to identify performatives one might draw up a list of the "performative verbs": verbs that in the first person of the present indicative (I promise, I order, I declare) perform the action they designate, while in other persons and tenses they behave differently and describe actions rather than perform them, as in: "I promised to come"; "You ordered him to stop"; "He will declare war if they continue". It is interesting here that Austin notes that



performatives can't be defined by listing the verbs in this way, because, for instance, the utterance "Stop it at once!" can constitute the act of ordering someone to stop just as much as can "I order to stop". And the apparently constative statement, "I will pay you tomorrow", which certainly looks as though it will become true or false, depending on what happens tomorrow, can, under the right conditions, be a promise to pay you, rather than a description or prediction like, "he will pay you tomorrow". However, once we allow for the existence of such "implicit performatives", where there is no explicitly performative verb, we have to admit that *any* utterance can be an implicit performative. For example, in English the sentence "The cat is on the mat" is the stock example of a simple declarative sentence, a basic constative utterance. On the contrary, "The cat is on the mat" could be seen, rather, as an elliptical version of "I hereby affirm that the cat is on the mat", a performative utterance that accomplishes the act of affirming to which it refers. Austin concludes that what we need to do for the case of stating, and, by the same token, describing and reporting is to realize that they are speech acts no less than all those other speech acts described as performative. Constative utterances also perform actions—actions of stating, affirming, describing, and so on. They are a kind of performative. In brief, Austin starts from a situation where performatives are seen as a special case of constatives—pseudo-statements—and arrives at a perspective from which constatives are a particular type of performative.

Given the difficulty of finding solid criteria for maintaining the distinction between constatives and performatives, Austin abandons "the initial distinction between performatives and constatives and the program of finding a list of explicit performative words" and considers instead "the senses in which to say something is to do something" (*How to* 121). He distinguishes the locutionary act, which is the act of speaking a sentence, from the illocutionary act, which is the act we *perform by* speaking this sentence, and from the perlocutionary act, which is an act accomplished (effects secured) by performing the illocutionary act. Thus uttering the sentence "I promise" is a locutionary act. By performing the act of uttering this sentence under certain circumstances I will perform the illocutionary act of promising, and finally, by promising I may perform the perlocutionary act of reassuring someone, for example. Thus instead of two types of utterance, constative and performative, we end up with three dimensions or aspects of every speech act, of which the locutionary and illocutionary are particularly important to the theory of language. The result of Austin's heuristic trajectory is

radically to change the status of the constative statement: it began as the model for all language use, then became one of two general uses of language, and, finally, with the identification of the problem that prevent the firm separation of constative from performative, subsists not as an independent class of utterance but as one aspect of language use. On the other hand, in short, the final result of the performative is to bring to centre stage a use of language previously considered marginal. The performative breaks the link between meaning and intention of the speaker, for what I perform with my words is not determined by my intention but by social and linguistic conventions. The utterance, Austin insists, should not be considered as the outward sign of some inward act that it represents truly or falsely: “The truth or falsity of a statement depends not merely on the meanings of words but on what act you were performing in what circumstances”. (*How to*144)

If I say “I promise” under appropriate conditions, I have promised, have performed the act of promising, whatever intention I may have in my head at the time. Austin in fact argues that there is a traditional view on truth, sense and reference, “an overly simplified notion of correspondence with the facts” (*How to*146) when, in fact, there can be “no simple distinction of ‘true’ and ‘false’ (*How to*147). Appraisal of truth value involves consideration of a vast array of terms, intentions, perspectives, and contexts:

Suppose that we confront “France is hexagonal” with the facts, in this case I suppose, with France, is it true or false? Well, if you like up to a point: of course I can see what you mean by saying that it is true for certain intents and purposes. It is good enough for a top-ranking general, perhaps, but not for a geographer. ‘Naturally it is pretty rough’, we should say, ‘and pretty good as a pretty rough statement.’ But when someone says: ‘But is it true or false? I don’t mind whether is rough or not; of course it’s rough, but it has to be true or false—it’s a statement isn’t it?’... It is just rough and that is the right and final answer to the question of ‘France is hexagonal’ to France. (*How to* 143)

Earlier, Austin asserts that “there can hardly be any longer a possibility of seeing that stating is performing an act” (*How to* 139). It is not the case then that Austin has simply substituted the notion of force or of performance for that of truth. Rather he has a broader account which manifests the over-determination of truth within a speech situation. Truth and falsity, like sense and reference, are ‘ancillary’ with respect to the performative

(*How to* 97), not reduced to or simply subsumed under the category of force. However, despite the fact that Austin sees the failure and abstraction of the true/false distinction, the fact/value distinction, etc. and the impossibility of arriving at the purity of the performative, he still talks about the speech act in terms of the determinate totality, as per the classical form.

What is of primary interest in the speech act theory, then, is its demonstration that entities often taken as incompatible are instead thoroughly interactive. Words and things, speaking and doing are one and the same when language performs. The theory also brings together the inner self and the outer world, the individual and the communal, but it does so only when we participate perceptibly in communal life. Austin codifies the primacy of the collective in several ways; most strikingly in the precondition for performative language he labelled A.1:

There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances. (*How to* 14)

The repeated “conventional” and the redundant “accepted” all designate the same necessity for communal agreement. While words that say things are either right or wrong, words that do things are either successful or unsuccessful—in Austin’s terminology, they are either felicitous or infelicitous, happy or unhappy. It may be noted that the result of Austin’s enquiry into conventions is an extension of his own theory. It brings to the fore the idea that any linguistic (semantic, syntactic, semiotic) manifestation is relevant to language. More important however, is the fact that it also acknowledges that the effects of language exceed communication. Thus it seems to assert that the interferences of those aspects of language that theoreticians find irrelevant are perhaps the most ‘relevant’ of all: unlike ‘relevant’ data, they illuminate the whole area of competence of a theory, including its limitations, its failures, and mostly, the line of demarcation between its competence and incompetence.

Austin gives letters and numbers to five other rules besides A.1. All five are a logical consequence of the requirement for a conventional procedure with a conventional effect. According to rule A.2: “the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked” (*How to* 14-15).

Austin's commentary on these conventions expanding over two lectures does not however, paraphrase, explain, or illustrate the rules as much as they present a myriad of cases that we may consider either as exceptions or as cases lying at an indeterminable borderline. He also explores and questions the exact meaning and extension of some of the key concepts he uses in the formulations of the rules ("exist", "accepted", "procedure", etc.). Most of the time, he leaves open the questions he raises. After citing infelicitous speech acts that do not follow rule A.1 properly, for example, he notes:

Much more common, however, will be cases where it is uncertain how far a procedure extends—which cases it covers or which varieties it could be made to cover. It is inherent in the nature of any procedure that the limits of applicability, and therefore, of course, the 'precise' definition of the procedure, will remain vague. There will always occur difficult or marginal cases where nothing in the previous history of a conventional procedure, will decide conclusively whether such a procedure is or is not applied to such a case. (*How to* 31).

And then, what of conventions themselves, if as he notes, "It is difficult to say where conventions begin and end" (*How to* 119)? The second set of conventions makes matters more complicated:

B.1 The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly

B.2 and completely. (*How to* 15)

We are told that for B.1 "examples are more easily seen in the law; they are naturally not so definite in ordinary life, where allowances are made" (*How to* 16); and for B.2 "here again in ordinary life, a certain laxness in procedure is permitted—otherwise no university business would ever get done"! (*How to* 37). How can a procedure be at once executed correctly and completely and admit allowances and laxness? Mustn't it be executed correctly and completely? Or, how much laxness can it bear?

Thus we cannot simply contend that, since the procedure is both incorrect and incomplete and since the participant is inappropriate, an utterance remains without effect. In fact, if we indulge in some "laxness" and make some "allowances" (rules B), if we

stretch just a little the “limits of applicability” of the convention (rules A), then perhaps we have a felicitous speech act. After all, as we have been previously informed, there is no knowing where conventions begin and end. An utterance, to some extent creates a context and a convention which go hand in hand. With constative as with performative, for instance, the imperative is always to contextualize:

In order to explain what can go wrong with statements we cannot just concentrate on the proposition involved (whatever that is) as has been done traditionally. We must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued—the total speech-act—if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances, and how each can go wrong. (*How to 52*)

On the other hand, however, Austin himself specifies at least some of the exclusions which prohibit the comprehensiveness of a general theory. He states first that there are “certain whole dimensions of unsatisfactoriness to which all our actions are subject” (*How to 21*), and which are to be excluded from consideration. Under these are included actions done under duress, by accident, or otherwise unintentionally committed. The second instance involves the possibility for every performative to be ‘cited’, to be reiterated, transformed or grafted into a new context, to undergo, as Austin puts it, “a sea-change in special circumstances”:

as utterances our performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ills which infect all utterances... a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem or in a soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways— intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiolations of language. All this, we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (*How to 22*)

What is at issue here? It may be specified by questioning whether all that Austin has labelled “parasitic” can be called derivative or dependent with regard to what is “natural” (ultimately normal and literal) in a language. On what basis can language be considered

so self-enclosed and, in the end, so ahistorical? New codes, new uses arise out of, transform, and replace old ones. This occurs no less with regard to utterances “parasite” in fiction, poetry, the theatre etc.—but it also occurs in normal use. The picture of these spheres as completely divided could hold only if, to use Austin’s phrase, usage were never able to “crack the crib of reality” (*How to* 24).

Literature, according to Austin, is “parasitic”, “not serious”, an enfeebled “etiolation” of language seemingly because his concentration on words’ power to do things in face-to-face oral exchange makes him blind to the things done by written words in a literary text. It would be worthwhile to consider Austin’s repetition of literature’s exclusion from the list of illocutionary acts, especially his examples:

We may speak of “poetical use of language” as distinct from “the use of language in poetry”. These references to “use of language” have nothing to do with the illocution-ary act. For example, if I say, “Go and catch a falling star”, it may be quite clear what both the meaning and the force of my utterance is, but still wholly unresolved which of these other kinds of things I may be doing. There are etiolations, parasitic uses, etc. various “not serious” and “not normal” uses. (*How to* 104)

Since the illocutionary act’s defining feature is its conventionality, it is difficult to understand how so thoroughly conventionalized a language form as literature can have “nothing to do with the illocutionary act”. Prominent in Austin’s categorisations of literature is the word “normal”, used as if literature’s abnormality were universally and eternally self-evident. Yet all the rest of Austin’s work argues that the norms applied to language are changeable conventions of social assessment instead of fixed inherent qualities. Moreover, because the category of abnormality can come only from the conventions of normalcy, even to categorise literature as abnormal subjects it to Rule A.1. What Austin considers non-etiolated, full normal uses of the performative are far from the sole manifestation of conventional determination of linguistic force. His expulsion of literature from the realm of speech acts ignores his own demonstration that society establishes when speech fails to perform felicitously as well as when it succeeds. If we decline to accept Austin’s definition of literature as non-serious, we have support in the many ideas of great seriousness he himself conveys through literary allusions and techniques.

For literature is an illocutionary act even if its illocutionary force is vastly different from that of ordinary language. What Austin called the “sea-change in special circumstances” that occurs when words become literary as much as a social production are the special circumstances prevailing before the change occurs. In the tenth lecture, Austin admits that the use of language in fiction “may be and intuitively seem[s] to be, entirely different” (*How to* 122). Indeed “may be” and “intuitively seems” are considerably cautious reservations, especially when followed by “further matters we are not trenching upon” (*How to* 122). It may be suggested that taken Austin’s reservations and hesitations literally, it may mean that in fiction, language may be used differently, but then, it may not.

One may feel tempted to raise another argument. Austin says, “Our word is our bond”, but can there be a speech act without speech? Austin eventually recognizes that “infelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all conventional acts...This is clear if only from the mere fact that many conventional acts, such as betting or conveyance of property, can be performed in non-verbal ways...This is much obvious” (*How to* 19). Indeed if somebody waves a finger, it can be for no specific purpose, but if he is at an auction, it means bidding. In a still different situation, as in a cricket match, waving of the finger by the umpire indicates that a batsman is out, while in another instance finger waving may express the person’s discontent and be taken as a warning or a threat. Since the speech act hinges upon the explicit performative understood in the gesture, we may say that from the viewpoint of speech act theory, there is no difference between a verbal and a nonverbal speech act. In other words a “nonverbal convention” seems to be a contradiction in terms.

Even if no word is uttered, to be recognized as a meaningful act depends on the verbal utterance into which we transcribe it. In raising my finger at an auction I signify my intention to bid, while in waving my finger at somebody else, I admonish him/her. *In doing x, I am doing y* is, of course, Austin’s formula for illocutionary acts. The conventional aspect of a meaningful act is therefore no more than the performative verb that makes explicit its force(s) and, of course, the general code that allows for the substitution of the actual act (waving), for the explicit performative(s) (admonish, bid, etc.). In fact, it seems clear from Austin’s early examples that he was not at first thinking particularly or even at all, of *linguistic* acts; some of his early examples are, for instance

of legal doings, such as getting married or bequeathing property. The question is, then, how it is, as one might put it, that one who issues an utterance thereby sometimes does something, over and above whatever it may be that he necessarily does just as a speaker of the language, merely in saying whatever it is that he says.

John R. Searle draws the following picture as to how the bridge between the speaker and the hearer works in *Speech Acts*: “On the speaker’s side, saying something and meaning it are closely connected with intending to produce certain effects on the hearer. On the hearer’s side, understanding the speaker’s utterance is closely connected with recognizing his intentions” (SA 48). John R. Searle both borrows from and extends upon Austin’s work. In his first book, *Speech Acts*, he offers an analysis of speech acts, where he attempts to find out the answers to questions related to the philosophy of language, such as:

How do words relate to the world...What is the difference between saying something and meaning it and saying it without meaning it...How do words stand for things? What is the difference between a meaningful string of words and a meaningless one? What is it or something to be true? Or false? (SA 3)

Searle begins by asserting that

Speaking a language is engaging in a (highly complex) rule-governed form of behavior...When I, speaking as a native speaker make linguistic characterizations... I am not reporting the behavior of a group but describing aspects of my mastery of a rule-governed skill (SA12).

That is why, perhaps, Searle feels the necessity “to distinguish between (a) talking, (b) characterizing talk, and (c) explaining talk” (SA 14-5). He defines speech acts as “the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication” (ibid. 16) and emphasizes that “a great deal can be said in the study of language without studying speech acts, but any such purely formal theory is necessarily incomplete” (SA 17). Searle then identifies four types of speech acts: (a) utterance acts, which are simple acts of uttering words and sentences, (b) propositional acts, which are acts of referring and predicating, (c) illocutionary acts, which include stating, commanding and promising, and (d) perlocutionary acts, which express the effects that illocutionary acts have upon a hearer (SA 24-5). The first two



categories provide a finer distinction between acts that Austin would classify simply as “locutionary”, since Searle distinguishes between simple linguistic utterances and those that make specific references. In distinguishing illocutionary acts from perlocutionary acts, however, Searle repeats Austin’s usage of those two terms. In elaborating on the distinction among utterance acts, propositional acts and locutionary acts, Searle notes that “utterance acts consist simply in uttering strings of words” (SA 24), while propositional and illocutionary acts “consist characteristically in uttering words in sentences in certain contexts, under certain conditions with certain intentions” (SA 24-5). At this point, it may be mentioned that Searle is careful to point out that the proposition expressed in the utterance of a sentence is to be kept apart from the sentence. But unfortunately, he nowhere states exactly what he conceives a proposition to be. Moreover, Searle’s use of terminology is inconsistent, because he also states that “the expression of a proposition is a propositional act” (SA 29).

Searle also adds that “propositional acts cannot occur alone; that is, one cannot just refer and predicate without asserting or asking a question or performing some other illocutionary act” (SA 25). While the suggestion that the characteristic form of an illocutionary act is a complete sentence seems to contradict Austin’s assertion that illocutionary acts can be reduced to explicit performative clauses, the point that Searle is making is that, just as propositional acts cannot occur alone, so too must illocutionary acts always contain a proposition. The complete illocutionary act is conveyed not only in the parts of a sentence that express the illocutionary force, but also in those parts that express the proposition that is asserted, stated, questioned, etc. in the illocutionary act. It is impossible to assert or state without asserting or stating something and that something is the propositional content of the illocutionary act. In fact, Searle does attempt to distinguish between the grammatical components that convey a proposition and those that convey the nature of an illocutionary act, and this is evidenced by his division of a sentence into a propositional indicator and an illocutionary force indicator:

From [a] semantical point of view we can distinguish two (not necessarily separate) elements in the syntactical structure of the sentence, which we might call the indicator and the illocutionary force indicator. The illocutionary force indicator shows how the proposition is to be taken, or to put it in another way, what illocutionary act the speaker is performing in the

utterance of a sentence I may indicate the kind of illocutionary act I am performing by beginning the sentence with ‘I apologize’, ‘I warn’, ‘I state’, etc. Often in actual speech situations, the context will make it clear what the illocutionary force of the utterance is, without its being necessary to invoke the appropriate explicit illocutionary force indicator. (SA 30)

In noting that the propositional indicator and the illocutionary force indicator are not necessarily separate in the syntactic structure of a sentence, Searle retains Austin’s analysis of implicit performative structure. And Searle’s examples suggest that the term “explicit illocutionary force indicator” is synonymous with Austin’s first standard form of explicit performatives. At any rate, Searle maintains that the same proposition may be expressed in a variety of illocutionary modes. He allows that the content of an assertion may appear also in a command. In the total speech act then, the proposition or ‘content’ is just the meaning of the referring expression and the meaning of the predicate expression. Since the same predicate expression may be a constituent of many varieties of illocutionary act, those acts may have the same content. In the complete theory then, Searle seems to suggest, expressing a proposition in an utterance may occur when that utterance is non-assertive because to express a proposition is simply to use a word in a referential way to identify some object and also to use a predicative expression with a certain meaning. The proposition expressed is identical to the meaning of both words and expressions. In other words, theory is not committed to propositions as truth vehicles. Further, what is predicated of an object is not an element of a proposition, since the ‘word’ used is not identical to its ‘sense’:

We thus detach the notions of referring and predicating from the notions of such complete speech acts as asserting, questioning, commanding, etc., and the justification for this separation lies in the fact that the same reference and predication can occur in the performance of different complete speech acts. (SA 23)

Two important consequences emerge from this view of the proposition. First, propositions are not what are asserted, even though they are expressed in an assertion. That is, to say something is to say that the speaker refers to an object and says that a word is true of the object. The sense or meanings of the referential and predicative words are not asserted. Second, it makes no sense in Searle’s scheme of things to say that there

is something, a proposition, which is, or may be, ‘what is asserted’ on one occasion, ‘what is questioned’ on another occasion and ‘what is doubted’ by one person and ‘believed’ by another.

The concept of the proposition which remains is that of an innocuous intentional entity, a conjunction of ‘meanings’, common to a variety of illocutionary acts, totally removed from considerations of truth or falsity: “A common mistake in philosophy is to suppose that there must be a right and equivocal answer to...questions, or worse yet, to suppose that unless there is a right and equivocal answer, the concept of referring is a worthless concept” (SA 28). Early analytical philosophers, according to Searle, “treat the elements of language—words, sentences, propositions—as things that represent things or things that are true or false, etc. apart from any actions or intentions of speakers or hearers. The elements of the language, not the actions and intentions of the speakers are what count” (SA 6). On the contrary, Searle holds that “the unit of communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence, but rather, the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act” (SA 16). At the same time, however, he issues warnings such as the following:

It is possible to distinguish at least two strands in contemporary work in the philosophy of language—one which concentrates on the uses of expressions in speech situations and one which concentrates on the meaning of sentences. Practitioners of these two approaches sometimes talk as if they were inconsistent, and at least some encouragement is given to the view that they are inconsistent by the fact that historically they have been associated with inconsistent views about meaning . . . But although historically there have been sharp disagreements between practitioners of these two approaches, it is important to realize that the two approaches . . . are complementary and not competing. (SA 18)

Thus Searle’s theory represents a compromise position in which intentions appear as propositions, while problems of predication and of truth are tied to words and expressions. Within the confines of the linguistic mode therefore, intention, meaning, and the system of signs need not conflict. Sentences and intentions are not distinguishable counterparts in the normal event of a speech act. There is no sign apart

from the speech act, i.e. no meaning apart from the realization of intentions, no intentions apart from the system, i.e. no pre-existent structure to encode and decode from the communicative act. The result, as Searle puts it:

There are, therefore, not two irreducibly distinct semantic studies, one a study of the meanings of sentences and one a study of the performance of speech acts. For just as it is part of our notion of the meaning of a sentence that a literal utterance of that sentence with that meaning in a certain context would be the performance of a particular speech act, so it is part of our notion of a speech act that there is a possible sentence (or sentences) the utterance of which in a certain context would in virtue of (its or their) meaning constitute a performance of that speech act (SA 17-18).

It would be worthy of note here that it is possible that a speaker may mean more than what he says. It often happens that there are many things that we take for granted both in speaking and interpreting the utterances of others. Among the things that we take for granted, some are articulated in the sentence itself, as is the case with the sentence, “John has stopped smoking”. In this case, I presuppose that John smoked before, in virtue of the appropriateness/felicity conditions of the verb ‘to stop’. But there are other things that we take for granted that are in no way articulated in the sentence:

Suppose I go to a restaurant and order a meal...I say, speaking literally, Bring me a steak with fried potatoes”. . . I take it for granted that they will not deliver the meal to my house, or to my place of work. I take it for granted that the steak will not be encased in concrete or petrified. . . But none of these assumptions was made explicit in the literal utterance. (Searle 180)

Thus, “one’s meaning something when one utters a sentence is more than just randomly related to what the sentence means in the language one is speaking” (SA 45). This indicates that there is a gap between the literal sentence meaning and the speaker’s meaning or the utterance meaning. In order to bridge the gap between the two, Searle proposes what he calls the “principle of expressibility”, according to which “whatever can be meant can be said” (SA 9).

In principle, if not in fact, it is always possible to utter a fully explicit sentence, that is, a sentence whose linguistic meaning exactly corresponds to, and uniquely determines, the

force and content of the speech act one is performing. It follows that “study of the meaning of sentences is not in principle distinct from a study of speech acts. Properly construed, they are the same study” (SA 18).

It may be of interest to note that, the principle of expressibility seems to be incompatible with Searle’s finding about background dependence. Yet Searle has explicitly denied that the background phenomena threaten the principle of expressibility. In “literal Meaning”, he writes: There is nothing on the thesis of relativity of literal meaning which is inconsistent with the Principle of Expressibility. . . It is not part of, nor a consequence of, my argument for the relativity of literal meaning that there are meanings that are inherently incomprehensible”. What is to be inferred from this denial? The principle could be understood as simply saying that whatever is meant can be made explicit. That entails that every background assumption relied upon in interpreting an utterance can be made explicit. This is compatible with the fact that (i) there is an indefinite number of assumptions and they cannot all be made explicit at the same time, and (ii) whenever we make one assumption explicit by adding more descriptive material, further background assumptions are implicitly called upon for the interpretation of that new material. In fact, the very terminology of ‘assumptions’ and ‘context’ may mislead if it suggests that for each sentence we could make all the assumptions.

Searle considers the following case in “Literal Meaning”: if I order a hamburger and the hamburger is brought to me encased in a rigid plastic pack too hard to break it open, the fact does not show that I failed to say exactly and literally what I meant: “Rather it seems to say what we should say in such cases is that I did say exactly and literally what I meant but that the literal meaning of my sentence, and hence of my literal utterance, only has application relative to a set of background assumptions” (216). The speaker can still say “exactly and literally” what he means, Searle holds, notwithstanding the context embedded in his statement. But how could we reach the literal if in principle all assumptions cannot be made present? In one passage in *Speech Acts*, Searle seems to have had such a weaker version of the principle in mind: “Another application of this law [the Principle of Expressibility] is that whatever can be implied can be said, though if my account of preparatory conditions is correct, it cannot be said without implying other things” (SA 68-9). Another claim by Searle is worthy of note at this point:

[E]ven in cases where it is in fact impossible to say exactly what I mean, it is in principle possible to come to be able to say exactly what I mean. I can in principle if not in fact increase my knowledge of the language or more radically, if the existing language or . . . languages are not adequate to the task, if they simply lack the resources for saying what I mean, I can, in principle enrich the language by introducing new terms or other devices into it. (*SA* 19-20)

Does it follow from this that one can say all sorts of new things that one wants to? If the speaker is capable of surpassing the present means of communication, is he therefore enabled to create and transform those means without limitation?

The proof for this more radical claim inherent to the principle of expressibility that I can say, i.e. express anything, would therefore need more for its demonstration than the fact that novel utterances can be made. It would need to show how in fact a finite speaker can say not only more than what has previously been said, but can say ‘anything’. That is, the account would need to show not only how the speaker transcends the limitations of the present usage, but likewise the limitations of all usage such that actual usage would put no linguistic constraints upon what can be said and what can be intelligibly produced within a given linguistic state. Searle seems to have recognised these limitations when he somewhat contradicts his own principle of expressibility and states that “in general, illocutionary acts are performed within language in virtue of certain rules and indeed could not be performed unless language allowed the possibility of their performance” (*SA* 38).

Discussing the conventions bound up in such notions as promise or statement –making, Searle asserts that “when one enters an institutional activity by invoking the rules of the institution, one necessarily commits oneself in such and such ways, regardless of whether one approves of the institutions” (*SA* 189). This necessity, however, does not, he states, commit one to “the conservative view that institutions are logically unassailable”. It is not the case that any institution could arbitrarily obligate anyone:

This obligation is based on an incorrect conception of obligations which is not implied in the account given here. The notion of an obligation is closely tied to the notion of accepting, acknowledging, recognizing, undertaking, etc. an

obligation in such a way as to render the notion of obligation essentially a contractual notion. (*SA* 189)

On this view, speakers might choose the constraints, the contracts to which they are committed. In other words, the constraints of language would dissolve into the voluntary contractual agreements of their users. In this regard, conventionalism masks a certain voluntarism. Promising and asserting are possible insofar as they participate in what ‘counts’ as promising or asserting in our shared practices. From this it follows that Searle states that “meaning is more than a matter of intention, it is also at times a matter of convention” (*SA* 45). Without this clause, it would appear that “any sentence can be uttered with any meaning whatever, given that the circumstances make possible any appropriate intentions” (*SA* 45). In other words, Searle’s account affirms that understanding a sentence is knowing its meaning, but its meaning is at least in part determined by its rules of utterance. For example, regarding the sentence, ‘Hello’: “the rules specify that under certain conditions an utterance of ‘Hello’ counts as a greeting of the hearer by the speaker” (*SA* 49).

What is at stake, therefore, is the role these conventions play vis-a-vis the speaking subject. It is Searle’s contention that they are tools for the realization of linguistic intentions. While in our analysis of illocutionary acts “we must capture both the intentional and the conventional aspects and especially the relationship between them” (*SA* 45), it appears that the specification of conditions is not ultimately a specification of limits. The account of the interface that results is much different. If intentionality is dependent upon a transcendent set of conditions for which in the end it cannot be responsible, if any attempt to master the free play of discursive practices is out of question, then any final equation between intention and expression cannot be achieved either.

Moreover the content of a speech act—what the speaker communicates and the hearer understands—seems impossible to be equated with the content of the sentence uttered in performing the speech act. This may be due to many factors: (i) the uttered sentence is often elliptical, indeterminate, or ambiguous, even though what the speaker communicates by uttering the sentence in context is perfectly determinate and univocal, (ii) the referring expression used by the speaker does not, in general, uniquely determine what the speaker is referring to, and (iii) besides what he/ she says, there are many things

that the speaker conveys implicitly or non-literally by the utterance—for example, in indirect speech acts, irony or metaphor.

What is evident from this is that despite Austin's refusal of the simple situations envisaged in logical theory, Searle takes them as the starting point for his explanation of how to do things with words. He puts this across in a fairly uncomplicated way: "What conditions are necessary for the utterance of an expression to be sufficient to identify for the hearer an object intended by the speaker? After it is only words that come from the speaker so how do they identify things for the hearer?" (SA 82). It then becomes a question of knowing what the centre of the discursive field might be—or if it is to be centred at all. Searle presents this famous example in *Speech Acts*:

Suppose that I am an American soldier in the Second World War and that I am captured by Italian troops. And suppose also that I wish to get these troops to believe that I am a German soldier in order to get them release me. I would like to tell them in German that I am a German soldier. But let us suppose I don't know enough German to do that. So I attempt to show that by reciting those few bits of German I know, trusting that they don't know German to see through my plan. (SA 44)

Searle pre-empts possible objections along the lines that the American soldier could not possibly intend to produce the desired effects, given that it would be irrational for him to believe that those effects were sufficiently upto him:

I find myself disinclined to say that when I utter the German sentence what I mean is "I am a German soldier", because what the words mean is "Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom?" I want my captors to be deceived, but part of what is involved in that is getting them to think that that is what the words I utter mean in German. The reason is that what we can mean is at least sometimes a function of what we are saying. (SA 44-45)

This is perhaps the reason because of which Searle defends himself in advance: "We need to distinguish what a speaker means from certain kinds of effects he intends to produce in his hearers. . . the principle that whatever can be said can be understood by others. . ." (SA 20).



### III

As the reading of Searle and Austin suggests, what gets expressed and communicated is dependent upon the specificity of the medium. Once this has been accepted, while it may be wrong to reduce all concepts to language, it will be no less falsifying to attempt to explain them from language. Thus no meaning is absolutely determined by and forever tethered to a presiding and persisting intention. A “sentence” or “utterance” is put in play, pointing to the possibility of meaning, but that meaning is never ontologically finalized by corresponding to an “intention” to which we have no access. Meaning comes into being only within the specificity of the discursive event. It is never simply constituted or translated into signs. The significative intention occurs only insofar as there still exists ‘dialectic’ here between the expressed and its expression. In fact, this is a point that does not go unseen by Austin, who says as much as the same thing near the end of *How to Do*:

We have the idea of an ‘act’ as a fixed physical thing that we do, as distinguished from conventions and as distinguished from consequences. But (a) the illocutionary act and even the locutionary act too involve conventions (b) The perlocutionary act always includes some consequences. . . some of which may be unintentional (*How to* 107)

Nonetheless, just how this event stands “between” the individual and the general, the conventional and non-conventional, the active and the passive or the intentional and the unintentional is still in question.

Language allows the possibility of expressing an unlimited number of things: “. . . in a way these resources are over-rich; they lend themselves to equivocation; and moreover we use them for other purposes” (*How to* 77). That it allows the expression of anything that it is the logically ‘ideal’ and perfectly ‘transparent’ stratum of expression is another question, a question which cannot be decided simply on the recognition that it allows novel utterances. It is not a matter of speakers jointly deciding what means will be at their disposal, how they will be obligated, which linguistic constraints they will accept and which they will reject. Such matters in the end are always already dependent upon a linguistic framework and its constraints from which no speaker could claim that he finally freed himself, because, “the meaning of words. . . cannot depend on any

contingent fact in the world, for we can still describe the world even if facts alter” (*How to* 164).

In this context, it may be relevant to note that the literary text does not seem to be a ‘nonserious’ language, as has been argued by philosophers and linguists alike. On the contrary, it is perhaps the only one that takes language seriously than it does the “theory” of language; the one that exploits the felicity and infelicity of speech acts, thereby acknowledging that infelicity is not a “not doing” but an “other doing”. The felicitousness of a literary composition might also involve its relation to the conventions of a genre. Moreover, one might imagine, a literary composition is felicitous when it fully accedes to the condition of literature by being published, read, and accepted as a literary work, just as a bet becomes a bet only when it is accepted. Whatever else literature may be, it is undeniably a practice of language. Of course, it goes without saying that the actor on stage is not committed to marrying the leading lady. This indicates the language of poetry works differently in the sense that it presupposes a predetermined attitude shared by its readers towards some aspects of its truth-value, thereby constituting one more convention, namely the literary or artistic convention. Indeed the same words, the same sentence may appear in a novel and also spoken at the market-place. This fact alone reminds us that the various contexts that may appear are themselves to a great extent conventionally and ideologically construed.

Of course the abstract nature of speech is simply not pertinent to the concrete felicity of speech acts, as the abstract identity of a given locution is not pertinent to its contextual illocutionary force. To understand why and how speech acts, it is absolutely essential to look at the social conventions it articulates. No matter what they are in themselves, words that do things also interact with collective agreements and demand that we situate them in order to apprehend the nature of their doing. Derrida’s focus on locution precludes precisely the contextualisation Austin took as his special province. Iterability characterizes all signifying marks regardless of whether they function in the conventional procedures specified in Rule A. 1. Austin’s analysis, which begins with Rule A.1, is in no way handicapped by the intrinsic qualities of words that do things when the rule applies. All that counts is the specific force assigned to those words by a given community’s conventional procedures. Thus one may conclude that it’s not that speech-act theory and deconstruction are incompatible but that they lead to different emphases.

Even Derrida's criticisms of speech-act theory foreground the ways Austin's vocabulary opens itself to graphematics: "So that—a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion—a successful performative is necessarily an 'impure' performative, to adopt the word advanced later on by Austin when he acknowledges that there is no 'pure' performative" (17). Rather than invalidating or contesting Austin's arguments and terminology, the concept of general iterability provides another justification for the vocabulary he chose and the arguments in which he applied it. What Derrida says about graphematics and what Austin says about felicity are equally applicable to language and society. Iterability may be general, but within that generality are oppositions with vast consequences for the power of language.

Like Austin, Derrida sees language as a continuous transformation rather than permanent fixity. But Derrida attributes language's transformations to its triumphant 'transcendence of context' whereas Austin attributes them to its inevitable 'articulation with context'. The result is that speech-act theory and deconstruction have as many points of conflict as points of contact. The encounter between speech-act theory and deconstruction is of such interest because their disagreements over *how* language performs take off from the same constant awareness *that* it performs. Undoing oppositions and reversing hierarchies figure among the most persuasively powerful strategies in deconstructive analysis, and those same strategies organize everything Austin wrote about performative and constative language.

Hence speech versus acts, saying versus doing, meaning versus performing, structure versus practice, locution versus illocution: every pair opposes language in itself to language in context, for context alone determines the conventional effects produced by an utterance. This is best seen by considering the vast number of illocutionary conventions that can be activated by a single locution. "The window's open" could warn me to be careful not to fall out, request me to close it, inform me of the state of affairs, guess about a state of affairs, contradict my idea about a state of affairs, and on and on. We perceive an utterance within its immediate narrative context as well as within the context of a convention. As such, any reading/interpretation of a text/ an utterance widens contextualisation to include the reader/listener and the culture he/she represents. Contexts may spread indefinitely, not only because any utterance can be quoted, taken out of its own context and transferred to a new one, but also because even when it is left

in its own, its perception by an unlimited number of listeners/readers (each immersed in and being part of a more or less idiosyncratic set of referential and cultural contexts) activates the possibility of a confusing proliferation of contexts.

Thus considering the word-thing relationship perhaps, Austin does not stop at the first instant of the preliminary distinctions (performative /constative, locutionary/illocutionary/perlocutionary) and deliberately proceeds to question conventions themselves:

Many of you will be getting impatient at this approach—and to some extent, quite justifiably. You will say, “Why not cut the cackle? Why go on about lists available in ordinary talk of names for things we do that have relations to saying. . . why not get down to discussing the thing bang off in terms of linguistics and psychology in a straightforward fashion? Why be so devious? (*How to* 123)

The analysis of the intention stands at the centre of the significative content. In relation to it the sign effaces itself before thought. It relies upon the mental for its support or animation. Hence the sign’s relation to thought is never an essential one—it is rather one of accident to essence or substance. The mental maintains its stability, independence, and identity over and against the significative practices in which it is involved. And this is the case even if we weaken the thesis and find the sign to be, for example, the instrument of thought’s operation in the world, since there remains no question of dependence—the sign deserves to maintain the thought’s identity or to extend its capabilities in its involvement with the world.

Thus, we may not need a new language, but a new theory of language, one that recognizes that the subject’s use of language is far from exhausting what an utterance does. The question of normal use of language may also be put under scrutiny. Meanings and significations are characterized by independence from context, independence from subject, and independence from time, and are therefore indefinitely reiterable. The essential iterability which any language must have in order to function, in order for me to communicate with the other rests on solid ground. The repetition of the elements in linguistic usage is guaranteed precisely because these elements are inalterable. Ambiguity, equivocity, contextual embeddedness are within these grids, never more than

provisional, never more than temporary and always in the process of being clarified and dissolved.