CHAPTER 16

Speech acts

Speech acts

16.1 Locutionary, perlocutionary, and illocutionary acts

Communication is not just a matter of expressing propositions. A 'naked' proposition, as we saw in Chapter i, cannot communicate anything at all. To communicate we must express propositions with a particular **illocutionary force,** and in so doing we perform particular kinds of action such as stating, promising, warning, and so on, which have come to be called **speech acts.** It is, however, important to distinguish between three sorts of things that one is doing in the course of producing an utterance. These are usually distinguished by the terms **locutionary acts, perlocutionary acts,** and **illocutionary acts.**

16.1.1 Locutionary acts

Locutionary acts were explained by Austin (1962) as follows:

The utterance of certain noises ... certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain sense and a certain reference.

Notice that this conflates a number of distinguishable 'acts'; Lyons sets these out as follows:

    (a) produce an utterance inscription;
    (b) compose a sentence;
    (c) contextualize.

The first of these refers to the physical act of speaking, that is, producing a certain type of noise (or, in the case of written language, a set of written symbols). In principle, a parrot could do this. The second refers to the act of composing a string of words conforming to the grammar of some language (more or less well). (Searle (1969) groups these two together as performing an **utterance act.)** The third itself has two components. First, many sentences contain either lexical or grammatical ambiguities. Normally only one of the possible readings is 'intended': the speaker's intention in this regard forms part of the specification of the locutionary act being performed. The second

component is that any definite referring expressions in an uttered sentence normally have extralinguistic referents intended by the speaker. The assignation of these, too, forms part of the locutionary act. It can be seen, therefore, that if the sentence uttered is declarative in form, then performing a locutionary act includes the expression of one or more propositions. (Searle refers to **propositional acts.)** As far as is at present known, parrots cannot perform (b) or (c).

16.1.2 Perlocutionary acts

Perlocutionary acts are acts performed by means of language, using language as a tool. The elements which define the act are external to the locutionary act. Take the act of persuading someone to do something, or getting them to believe that something is the case. In order to persuade someone to do something, one normally must speak to them. But the speaking, even accompanied by appropriate intentions and so on, does not of itself constitute the act of persuasion. For that, the person being persuaded has to do what the speaker is urging. The same is true of the act of cheering someone up: this may well be accomplished through language, in which case it is a perlocutionary act, but even then the act does not consist in saying certain things in a certain way, but in having a certain effect, which in principle could have been produced in some other way.

16.1.3 Illocutionary acts

Illocutionary acts are acts which are internal to the locutionary act, in the sense that, if the contextual conditions are appropriate (see below), once the locutionary act has been performed, so has the illocutionary act. Take the act of promising. If someone says to another *I promise to buy you a ring* they have, by simply saying these words, performed the act of promising. Notice that it makes sense to say: *I tried to persuade her to come, but I failed,* or: *I tried to cheer him up, but failed,* but it makes no sense to say: *I tried to promise to come, but I failed,* except in the sense that one failed to utter the words, that is, to perform the locutionary act.

The same illocutionary act can be performed via different locutionary acts: for instance *I saw Jane today* and *I saw your wife today* (on the assumption, of course, that the addressee's wife is called Jane). Furthermore, the same locutionary act can realize different illocutionary acts: for instance, *I'll be there* can function as a promise, prediction, or warning, and so on. It is also the case that a locutionary act can be performed without an illocutionary act thereby being performed (although Searle, for instance, denies this). For instance, in classes in elementary logic, propositions such as *All men are mortal* are often 'entertained' without anything being expressed beyond the bare proposition. The focus of the present chapter is on illocutionary acts.

16.2   Illocutionary acts

16.2.1 Implicit and explicit illocutionary force

The illocutionary act aimed at by producing an utterance is known as the **illocutionary force** of the utterance. There is no communication without illocutionary force. How does a speaker convey, or a hearer understand, the illocutionary force of an utterance? We can first of all distinguish between **explicit** and **implicit** illocutionary force. In the former case, there is a specific linguistic signal whose function is to encode illocutionary force. We can distinguish two types, lexical and grammatical. The lexical type are illustrated by the following:

I promise you I will leave in five minutes.
I warn you I shall leave in five minutes.
I beg you not to leave so soon.
I thank you for staying.

The verbs *promise, warn, beg, thank* are known as **performative verbs:** they function specifically to encode illocutionary force. The grammatical type is illustrated by the following:

You wrote the article.
Did you write the article?
Write the article!

In these cases it is the grammatical form that encodes the illocutionary force.
    According to what has just been said, it would appear that illocutionary force is always explicit. In the sense that every utterance encodes some indication of illocutionary force, this is probably true. However, the illocutionary force of an utterance is not always fully specified linguistically: what is not so specified is implicit. There are two main ways in which the effective force of an utterance may deviate from the overtly expressed force. First of all, it may differ in strength. For instance, the difference between a statement and an emphatic assertion is one of strength. A declarative sentence simply encodes the force of a statement: where it functions as an emphatic assertion, the difference may well be implicit, and must be recovered on the basis of context. The second way in which the effective force of an utterance may differ from the overtly expressed force is when it performs a different illocutionary act. For instance, *You will leave immediately* has declarative form, that is, it encodes the force of a statement; but it could well be used to issue a command. In the latter type of case, it is common to speak of **indirect speech acts.**

16.2.2 Explicit performativity

16.2.2.1 Performative verbs

Performative verbs, that is, those verbs one of whose functions is to signal specific speech acts, have certain peculiar properties which set them apart from non-performative verbs. First of all, they can generally be recognized by the fact that they can occur normally with *hereby* (we are talking here about semantic normality, that is, lack of anomaly; the result may well be somewhat stilted):

(1) I hereby undertake to carry out faithfully the duties of Royal Egg-Sexer.
(2) I hereby declare the bridge open.
(3) I hereby command you to surrender.

This use of *hereby* is not possible with non-performative verbs of speaking:

(4) *1 hereby persuade you to accompany me.
(5) *1 hereby recount the history of my family.
(6) *1 hereby tell the truth.

Performative verbs can be used either performatively or descriptively; in the latter use they are no different from non-performative verbs:

 (7) John is always promising to do things, but he never does them.
 (8) He ordered them to leave the premises.
 (9) Who is going to christen the baby?
(10) He went round congratulating everyone.

Notice that in such descriptive uses of performative verbs, *hereby* is ruled out:

(11) *John is always hereby promising to do things.
(12) *He hereby ordered them to leave the premises.

The performative use of performative verbs is extremely restricted grammatically. They must be in the simple present tense. They may be active or passive; if active, then they must also be in the first person. Consider, first, active uses. Notice the following contrasts:

(13) I (hereby) promise to pay you next week.
      I (*hereby) promised to pay him the following week.

(14) I hereby declare John Smith the duly elected Member for this constituency.
      I have (*hereby) declared John Smith the duly elected Member for this constituency.

(15) I hereby warn you that legal action will be taken.
      I am (?hereby) warning you that legal action will be taken.

Similar contrasts are possible with passive uses:

(16) Passengers are (hereby) requested not to smoke.
Passengers were (*hereby) requested not to smoke.

(17) You are (hereby) warned to leave immediately.
They will be (*hereby) warned to leave immediately.
They are at this moment being (*hereby) warned to leave.

Notice that there is no grammatical restriction on descriptive use, that is to say, the use of a performative verb in, say, present simple first person active form is not necessarily a performative use:

(18) A: Are you clear about what you have to do?
B: Yes, I (*hereby) christen the baby Jonathan, then I (*hereby) congratulate the parents and then I (*hereby) confess that I am the baby's father and (*hereby) promise never to reveal the fact.

The same is true of passive uses:

(19) Passengers are (*hereby) regularly requested not to smoke.

Performative verbs are thus ambiguous in certain of their forms, and context is needed to disambiguate them. (Unresolved ambiguities are vanishingly rare.)

Performative verbs used performatively are often held to be non-truth conditional (although there are alternative claims). Some cases seem clear enough. If someone says *I warn you to stay away from her!* it doesn't make much sense to reply *That's not true.* (Notice that in reply to *I warned you to stay away from her,* a reply of *That's not true* would be perfectly normal.) Similarly with *I congratulate you on your promotion.* Other cases are not so clear. For instance, it does seem to make sense to reply *That's not true* to *I confess that I took the money.* However, it still can be claimed that it is not the veracity of the fact that a confession is being made that is being called into question, but the truth of the proposition that forms the content of the confession. This can perhaps be seen more clearly in the following case:

(20) A: I predict that the world will end tomorrow.
B: That's not true.

Here, B might be claimed not to be challenging the fact that A is making a prediction, but is denying the truth of what he is predicting. However, we need to be clearer about what is happening here. Take the case of *I confess. ..* If someone says something, then it is either true or false that they are making a confession. Therefore it does not make sense to say that Zcon/m... cannot be assessed for truth value. However, confession consists in saying certain words (although *sincere* confession obviously demands more), so the truth of the proposition that A is confessing is a necessary consequence of A's uttering appropriate words, among which are the words *Iconfess.. .* In other words, the

reason we cannot say *That's not true* to someone who says *I confess,* is that it is necessarily true, like *Bachelors are unmarried.*

Something more needs to be said, however, about why it is acceptable to say *That's not true* in response to *I predict the world will end tomorrow,* but not in response to *I congratulate you on your promotion,* or *I warn you to leave immediately.* Actually, two reasons are involved here. First of all, one can only deny the truth of an expressed proposition; if the utterance in question does not actually express a proposition (other than the necessarily true performative part) then one cannot deny its truth. This is the case with *I warn you to leave.* If the utterance does express a proposition whose truth is contingent rather than necessary, the normality of saying *That's not true* depends on the relative salience of the performative part of the meaning and the propositional part. For instance, in the case of *I warn you the roads are slippery,* the important part of the meaning (for most hearers) is that the roads are slippery, not that the speaker is delivering a warning. On the other hand, in *I bet you £500 that I can get Mary to go to bed with me,* the nature of the performative act is crucial. It is therefore a matter of salience, and graded normality. Of course, it must also be borne in mind that there is a difference between saying *I warn you the roads are slippery* and *The roads are slippery* (even when uttered with the intention of warning the hearer): in the former case the speaker is constraining the hearer's interpretation, by making the intentions more explicit.

16.2.2.2 Grammatical performativity

Most languages have grammatical ways of indicating the illocutionary force of an utterance (this is not intended to be an exhaustive list):

(21) John is brave.
(22) Is John brave?
(23) Be brave, John!
(24) What bravery!

These grammatical forms perform the same sort of function that performative verbs do. Thus, the first three sentences above have an obvious relation to the following:

(25) I (hereby) state that John is brave.
(26) I (hereby) enquire whether John is brave.
(27) I (hereby) urge John to be brave.

(Interestingly, the fourth has no performative verb equivalent: *??I hereby exclaim...* This point will be further elaborated below.)

However, the range of choice of forms is much more limited than is the case with performative verbs, and hence the meanings are much less specific. It is therefore not possible, in general, to paraphrase the grammatical forms precisely in terms of explicit performative verbs. Let us examine more closely the four types illustrated.

Declaratives

Sentence (21) is in declarative form. Now, obviously, a sentence in declarative form can have a wide range of illocutionary force. Something like He's *leaving* can function to inform someone of the fact, to ask whether it is true (normally with appropriate intonation), as a promise, or a threat, or a command, or even a congratulation. Because of this wide range, doubts have been expressed as to whether declarative form encodes any sort of speech act at all (in fact the doubts in some quarters extend to interrogatives and imperatives). Austin's original treatment drew a distinction between what he called **performative sentences** and **constatives,** and declaratives fell into the latter category. Later he decided that declaratives, too, were performatives, and that there was no dif-ference in principle between *John is brave* and *I (hereby) state that John is brave,* except that in the latter case the performative verb was explicit. It is also worth remembering that declarative sentence form has often been regarded as in some sense the 'basic' sentence form (as in early versions of transform-ational grammar), and it is easy to go from this to regarding it as a 'neutral' form, from which all others are 'derived'. It is therefore not surprising that it has a wide range of applicability. This notion of basicness has a parallel in lexical meanings. Compare the colour name *red* with, say, *orange. Red* has a wide range of 'extended' uses, as in *red hair, red earth, red wine,* many of which are not objectively red at all. *Orange,* on the other hand, cannot be used so freely: something described as *orange* must have a colour much closer to the prototype. However, *red* also has a clear prototype. This phenomenon is quite widespread. Take *circle* and *pentagon. If* someone says: *The mourners stood in a circle around the grave,* the circle may be very approximate indeed. But if someone says: *The mourners stood in a pentagon round the grave,* the dis-position of the mourners is much more constrained. It is in this sense, perhaps, that the declarative sentence form can be viewed as basic. Being 'basic', it can be extended in ways that other forms cannot. But it none the less has a much more restricted, non-extended range of interpretations. And in its prototypical manifestations, it commits the speaker to the truth of the expressed prop-osition, and thus belongs to the same family of illocutionary meanings as *assert, state, declare, claim,* etc. The various performative verbs mentioned can be regarded as specifications of the meaning of the straight declarative proto-type. (The use of a performative verb also has the effect of highlighting the performative aspect of the sentence: with all grammatical performatives, the performative meaning is relatively backgrounded, but this is especially the case with declaratives.) It would be a mistake, however, to believe that every declarative, to be understood, must be 'translated' into a sentence containing one of the overt performatives. (This is no more true than a claim that, for instance, *It's red* cannot be understood unless the precise named shade of red, e.g. *scarlet, crimson, maroon, brick red,* can be recovered.) An alternative view is that the declarative form does nothing but express the proposition, and that any performative force arises in the form of implicatures. This approach, how-

ever, ignores the fact of the prototypical nature of what might be called assertiveness.

Interrogatives

All interrogatives, at least in their prototypical uses, express ignorance on some point, and aim at eliciting a response from a hearer which will remove the ignorance. There are two sorts of question. The first sort effectively specify a proposition and express ignorance as to its truth: these are the so-called *Yes! No* **questions,** because they can be so answered. So, for instance, *Is John brave?* presents the proposition *John is brave* and aims at eliciting a response which indicates whether that proposition is true or not. The other sort present an incomplete proposition, and aim at eliciting a response which completes the skeleton proposition in such a way that the resulting proposition is true. So, for instance, the question *What time is it?* presents the skeleton proposition *The time is X,* and aims at eliciting a response that provides a value for *X* which makes the complete proposition true. Interrogatives (of both types), too, have a wide range of non-prototypical uses, but in their prototypical uses, they fall into the same sort of semantic area as performative verbs such as *ask, enquire, demand to know,* and so on. But again, they are not, in every instance of use, reducible to one of the overt performatives.

Interrogatives are sometimes held to be a type of imperative. Thus, the meaning of *Is John brave?* might be paraphrased "Say *Yes* if the proposition JOHN is BRAVE is true and *No* if it is false". Likewise, the meaning of *What is the time?* can be paraphrased "Give me a value for X such that the proposition THE TIME is X is true". These paraphrases are obviously imperative in nature, and equally clearly, capture directly at least some of the meaning of the corresponding interrogatives. This analysis gives a good account of examination questions. These have the function of instructing candidates to produce a quantity of linguistic output under certain semantic (and secondarily syntactic, etc.) constraints. Notice the absolute equivalence between *What are the reasons for...?* and *State the reasons for...* in an exam context. Notice also that a form such as *State the reasons for. ..* will still be regarded as an examination QUESTION. Another interesting observation is the parallelism between *Open the door, please* and *What is the time, please?*

However, the imperative analysis deals less successfully with cases like *Now where did I leave my wallet?,* said when one is alone. It might be argued that the speaker in such a case is addressing the question to an imaginary hearer, and ordering him to give an answer. But this does not seem intuitively correct: such questions are not usually accompanied by such images. Lyons (1977) suggests that in such cases one is not **asking** a question, but merely **posing** it, and that posing a question is expressing doubt or ignorance. Lyons also points to the fact that if someone says *No!* in answer to a command, one is refusing to carry out the desired action, but if one says *No* in answer to *Is John here?,* one is not refusing to answer the question, but is actually answering the question.

It is necessary to make a distinction between saying that questions are a type of imperative, and saying that questions have an imperative-type component to their meaning. There is also a distinction between saying this and saying that questions prototypically have an imperative-like component. (The latter is what will be claimed here.) Notice that the strong imperative analysis omits any mention of an expression of ignorance. Such analyses rely on this being supplied inferentially in the contexts in which it occurs; likewise with the expression of a desire for the ignorance to be removed.

An alternative analysis on the lines of the imperative analysis is to say that what a question *really* means is an expression of ignorance, leaving the imperative component to be supplied inferentially in the contexts which call for it. This analysis handles the *Where did I put my wallet?* case, but deals less well with the examination case.

It is argued here that none of these reductive analyses account satisfactorily for the overwhelmingly strong intuition that the *real* meaning of a question, its prototype, includes at least the imperative component, the desire for the removal of ignorance, and the expression of ignorance. With this complex as central, it is easy to see other, non-prototypical readings clustering round it, forming a family resemblance structure with varying degrees of resemblance.

Imperatives

Imperatives resemble declaratives and interrogatives in that there is a proto-typical use, whose main component is to get someone to do something, as with *Shut that door!,* and a cluster of non-prototypical uses, such as *Take another step, and III shoot,* which manifestly does not aim at eliciting the action repre-sented by the verb in the imperative, but rather the opposite. The negative force of this use of the imperative shows up in the (relative) normality of:

(28) Take another step and I'll shoot. And don't move your hand, either.

Once again, the prototypical meaning of the grammatical imperative lies in the same area as that of a set of explicit performatives, such as *order, com-mand, enjoin, beg, beseech, request,* and so on, but as usual, is not synonymous with any of them.

Some analyses of imperatives (for instance, Palmer (1986: 29-30)) argue that the strong directive force observable in, say, a military command, is not a property of the imperative as such, but arises from the recognized authority of the speaker. Palmer points to the fact that 'Come in!' in response to a knock on the door is not strongly directive, but is in fact a granting of permission. He suggests that the basic meaning of the imperative is the expression of a gener-ally favourable attitude to the action indicated (if a higher-ranking military person expresses a favourable attitude to some action, a lower-ranking addressee will infer that he or she had jolly well better do it!). However, this is not entirely convincing. If someone says, 'Peel those potatoes!' the directive force is not at all dependent on the authority of the speaker (although the

felicity of the command is). The directive force is, however, dependent on whether the action is more likely to benefit the speaker or the hearer (see the discussion of the 'cost-benefit' scale in the next chapter). It is arguable that the prototypical use of the imperative is to elicit actions which are beneficial to the speaker: cases like 'Come in!' in answer to a knock on the door, or 'Have a nice holiday!', on this view would not be prototypical uses.

With the three grammatical performatives we have looked at so far, the following characteristics are observable:

(i) They all have a range of uses which goes well beyond that of any explicit performative.

(ii) Their meanings are not identical with that of any explicit performative.

(iii) Their prototypical meanings are at the same time superordinate to, and more 'basic' than, the meanings of related performative verbs.

Exclamations

Curiously, exclamations cannot be performed by any performative verbs, although there are verbs with meanings describing such actions:

(29) What a lovely day it is!
     *1 hereby exclaim what a lovely day it is.
     (I exclaimed what a lovely day it was.)

It seems that one does not exclaim by saying the word *exclaim:* one exclaims by calling something out in a loud voice:

(30) ?'How boring it all is', exclaimed John in a barely perceptible whisper.

The word *exclaim* therefore does not encode an illocutionary act. It is too loaded with manner meaning, like *whisper:*

(31) ?I hereby whisper that you mustn't do that in the presence of the Queen.

What, then, is one doing with the exclamative form? Is it a speech act? Notice that it is truth conditional:

(32) A: What a lovely day it is!
     B: Is it hell!

But it is not the primary purpose of an exclamation to inform:

(33) A: Tell me about your day.
     B: *What a lovely day I've had.

The encapsulated information seems to be presupposed (although one can enter the house after a day at the beach, and say *What a lovely day I've had* as a way of informing the occupants of the fact that one has had a lovely day. However, this can usually be done with presuppositions). All that is expressed is a psychological attitude to the fact. Intuitively, it is not performativizable, but it is still a mystery why not.

16.2.3   The 'performative hypothesis'

There are certain types of utterance whose properties seem to suggest that even implicit performatives have a 'hidden' or underlying explicit performative verb. This is the essence of the **performative hypothesis,** according to which every implicit performative has a 'deep' structure something like:

I (hereby) V$_p$ you (that) S

where **V$_p$** is a performative verb, and **I (hereby) V$_p$ you (that)** is optionally deletable without change of meaning. The claimed advantages of this proposal are that certain otherwise puzzling phenomena receive a natural explanation.

16.2.3.1   Reflexives:

(34) The letter was addressed to John and myself.
(35) People like yourself should be given every assistance.
(36) ?The letter was addressed to herself.

On the face of it, there is no antecedent for the reflexive pronoun in (34) and (35) (notice the ungrammaticality of (36)), but if there is an underlying performative verb with a first person subject and second person indirect object, then the mystery is explained.

16.2.3.2   Adverbs

(37) Frankly, I couldn't care less.
(38) What's the time, because **I** don't want to miss my train?

At first sight, it is not clear what *frankly* in (37) and the ^ecau^e-clause in (38) modify; however, the natural interpretation of these suggests that it is the performative verb in each case: "I tell you frankly that I couldn't care less"; "I ask you what the time is, because I don't want to miss my train".

Attractive though it might seem, this analysis runs into serious difficulties, and is now out of favour. Two of the problems may be mentioned. Consider sentences (39) and (40):

(39) I hereby state that I am innocent.
(40) I am innocent.

By the performative hypothesis, these should mean the same and therefore should have identical truth conditions. But even if we admit that (39) has a truth condition (which is denied by many) it is true irrespective of whether the speaker is innocent or not; this cannot be the case with (40).

More problems occur with adverbs. For instance, there seems no reason, under the performative hypothesis, why *hereby* is not allowed with implicit performatives:

(41) *Hereby what is the time?/*Hereby it is three o'clock.

(42) I hereby ask you what the time is.

Also the interpretation of many adverbs seems to require the (underlying) presence of verbs not proposed in the performative hypothesis:

(43) Honestly, who do you think will win?

This does not mean "I ask you honestly...", but "Tell me honestly...".

16.3   Classifying speech acts

Performative verbs fall fairly naturally under a small number of headings. It is useful to group them in this way, as it enables us to gain a picture of the range of functions that these verbs perform. The classification we shall illustrate below is due to Searle. It is not a perfect taxonomy, as it is in many cases possible to place verbs under more than one heading, that is to say, the categories are not mutually exclusive. But it enables us to take a synoptic view.

16.3.1 Assertives

Assertives commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition:

state, suggest, boast, complain, claim, report, warn (that)

Notice that *boast* and *complain* also express an attitude to the proposition expressed other than a belief in its truth.

16.3.2 Directives

Directives have the intention of eliciting some sort of action on the part of the hearer:

order, command, request, beg, beseech, advise (to), warn (to), recommend, ask, ask (to)

16.3.3 Commissives

Commissives commit the speaker to some future action:

promise, vow, offer, undertake, contract, threaten

16.3.4 Expressives

Expressives make known the speaker's psychological attitude to a presupposed state of affairs:

thank, congratulate, condole, praise, blame, forgive, pardon

What seems to distinguish these from *boast* and *complain* is that the attitude

expressed by the latter is primarily an attitude towards the state of affairs (or the proposition). In the case of Searle's expressives, the attitude is more towards the persons involved. These do form an intuitively satisfying set, and *boast* and *complain* intuitively do not belong here.

16.3.5 Declaratives

Declaratives are said to bring about a change in reality: that is to say, the world is in some way no longer the same after they have been said. Now in an obvious sense this is true of all the performative verbs: after someone has congratulated someone, for instance, a new world comes into being in which that congratulation has taken place. What is special about declaratives? The point about these is, first, that they cause a change in the world over and above the fact that they have been carried out. This, however, is again true of all the other verbs, but notice that in the case, say, of *congratulate,* such effects would be perlocutionary, whereas in the case of declaratives they are illocutionary. The second point is that they standardly encode such changes. So, if someone says *I resign,* then thereafter they no longer hold the post they originally held, with all that that entails.

resign, dismiss, divorce (in Islam), *christen, name, open* (e.g. an exhibition), *excommunicate, sentence* (in court), *consecrate, bid* (at auction), *declare* (at cricket)

There is a finite number of explicit performative verbs in English (several hundred), but there is no reason to believe that there is a theoretically finite set of possible speech acts.

16.4 Conditions for the successful performance of speech acts

There are normally contextual conditions which must be fulfilled before a speech act can be said to have been properly performed. These are usually called **happiness conditions** or **felicity conditions.** Some of these are of course conditions on any sort of linguistic communication, such as the fact that speaker and hearer understand one another (usually speak the same language), can hear one another, and so on. The following conditions are more germane to the present chapter and are worth spelling out (after Searle).

16.4.1 Preparatory conditions

Preparatory conditions do not define the speech act, but are necessary in the sense that if they do not hold, the act has not been carried out (it is said to have **misfired).** In the case of declarative speech acts, the person performing the act must have authority to do it, and must do it in appropriate circum-

stances and with appropriate actions. For instance, it is not enough for someone to break a bottle of champagne on the bows of a ship, and say *I name this ship Venus,* for the ship either to acquire an official name, or to change its name. A proper ceremony must be enacted, with officially recognized participants. The same is true of christening a baby. Even in the case of resigning from a job or position, just saying the words *I resign,* at breakfast, say, does not constitute a resignation: there are proper ways of resigning and channels for communicating such a decision. In the case of a promise, the hearer must prefer the promised action's accomplishment to its non-accomplishment, and the speaker must have reason to believe that the eventuality promised will not happen in the normal course of events. For a command, the speaker must be in authority over the hearer, must believe that the desired action has not already been carried out, and that it is possible for the hearer to carry it out. And so on.

16.4.2 Sincerity conditions

For sincerity conditions to be fulfilled, the person performing the act must have appropriate beliefs or feelings. For instance, in performing an act of asserting, the speaker must believe the proposition they are expressing; when thanking someone, one ought to have feelings of gratitude; when making a promise, one should sincerely intend to carry it out, and so on.

   If the sincerity conditions are not met, the act is actually performed, but there is said to be an **abuse.**

16.4.3 Essential conditions

Essential conditions basically define the act being carried out. Thus, for a promise, the speaker must intend his utterance to put him under an obligation to carry out the act which corresponds to its propositional content. For a request, the speaker must intend that the utterance count as an attempt to get the hearer to do what is requested; for a statement, the hearer must intend that the utterance count as a guarantee of the truth of the statement; for a question, the hearer must intend that the utterance count as an attempt to elicit the appropriate answer from the hearer, and so on. If the essential conditions are not met, the act has not really been carried out.

16.4.4 Other conditions

Prototypically, the hearer should recognize the speaker's intention to *perform* the illocutionary act in question in uttering the words in question. This is called **uptake.** Uptake must be distinguished from acceptance: the fact that one refuses to accept, say, an apology or a resignation does not mean that the speaker's intention has not been recognized. Generally, uptake does not seem to be a necessary condition for speech acts, but there are doubtful cases. Take

the case of boasting. Does someone boast if nobody who hears the utterance thinks it's a boast? There are indications that it is still a boast. First, it is anomalous to say: *?John tried to boast, but everyone thought he was just stating the facts.* Second, one can hear a statement and subsequently find out that someone was boasting: *He told me he had just lost £10,000—-I didn't realize at the time that he was boasting.*

Ideally, the speaker's actions subsequent to the utterance should be consistent with the purport of the speech act carried out. Thus, someone who makes a promise should carry out the promised action; someone who orders someone else to do something should not be angry if they subsequently do it; after asking a question, one should give time for an answer to be given; someone who names a ship should not thereafter refer to it by a different name, etc. These inappropriate actions do not destroy the validity of the speech act, but they none the less indicate that something is amiss. They may be termed **breaches of commitment.**

Discussion questions and exercises

1. Which of the following verbs are performatives?

bet (consider both meanings)
pray (in the religious sense)
admire
interrogate
deplore
regret
celebrate

2. Thinking of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts (and their components), consider what (a) a parrot, and (b) a computer could reasonably be expected to be able to do.

3. Which of the following performative verbs can be classified under more than one of Searle's headings?

complain warn confess bemoan

Suggestions for further reading

For the 'Austin-Searle' version of speech act theory see Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). A good survey of various approaches to speech acts (but not including Leech or relevance theory) is Chapter 5 of Levinson (1983). For a

discussion of grammatical performativity, see Palmer (1986: 1.4) The views of Leech (who rejects the Austin-Searle position) can be found in Leech (1983). The outlines of a relevance-theoretical account are given in Chapter 6 of Blakemore (1992).