

Chapter 9

Sentences, utterances, and speech acts*

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A gleam pushed through the sleepiness in his grey eyes, and he sat up a little in his chair, asking: 'Leggett's been up to something?'

'Why did you say that?'

'I didn't say it. I asked it.'

Dashiell Hammett, *The Dain Curse*

1. Introduction

Most of the time, when we speak, we do more than express propositions; we suggest, promise, offer, accept, order, threaten, assert — we perform *speech (or illocutionary) acts*. The history of the research on this topic— initiated by Austin (1975) — is well-documented, and many textbooks, handbooks and encyclopaedias contain excellent surveys, thus treating speech acts as a major topic (e.g. Levinson 1983: chapter 5; Jaszczolt 2002: chapter 14; Sadock 2004). However, the main contemporary pragmatic theories of utterance interpretation devote little space, if any at all, to the way utterances are interpreted as speech acts, viz. to the way they are assigned an *illocutionary force* (see, for instance, Sperber and Wilson 1995; Levinson 2000; Carston 2002; Recanati 2004; Jaszczolt 2005). One might think that speech acts went out of mode simply because the topic had been exhausted by the considerable amount of publications spanning from Austin's work in the late fifties to the late eighties — when other topics, such as the pragmatic determinants of literal meaning, came to the fore of attention.

Yet, contemporary literature is rife with confusions stemming from the lack of a careful consideration of the role of illocutionary force attribution in utterance interpretation. In particular, two crucial mistakes must be avoided. The first consists in conceiving of illocutionary forces as determined by sentence meaning; the second equates utterance content and speech act content. Interestingly enough, both confusions

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can be traced back to the founding fathers of modern pragmatics: the former to Searle, the latter to Grice. I will start this Chapter by considering these two problematic legacies in turn. Next, we will see how avoiding the confusion between sentence meanings, utterance meanings and illocutionary contents helps to better grasp the major issues related to the analysis of illocutionary force attribution.

2. Searle: illocutionary forces as intrinsic to sentence meanings

According to Searle (1969, 1975a, b; Searle and Vanderveken 1985), the meaning of a sentence corresponds to the speech act any literal utterance of this sentence constitutes. In Searle's conception, the study of linguistic meaning amounts to the study of speech acts. It follows that in order to determine the literal illocutionary force of an utterance, it suffices to know its linguistic meaning. Searle's view rests on the assumption (explicitly stated by his Expressibility Principle; cf. Searle 1969: 20-21) that any illocutionary act type IA can be matched with a certain sentence type *s* in such a way that IA corresponds to the literal meaning of *s*. Detailed criticisms of such a 'literalist' view — which takes literal utterance meaning to be determined by sentence meaning — can be found in Recanati (1987: 219-224), Carston (2002: 30-42, 64-70), and Kissine (forthcoming-a). The important point for present purposes is that Searle's conception implies that illocutionary forces are located at the level of conventional sentence meaning. In his view, if a sentence is used literally, its illocutionary force is directly derivable from its linguistic meaning.

Sentences with imperative mood might seem to provide the strongest case for such a direct derivation of illocutionary force from sentence meaning. This is the reason why I will use imperative sentences to build up my case against incorporating illocutionary forces within sentence meaning. In languages that have a morphological imperative mood — and we will see in a moment that this qualification is important — directive speech acts such as requests, orders, commands, etc. are prototypically realised by uttering grammatically imperative sentences. Of course, this does not entail that the linguistic, conventional meaning of the imperative mood is to be analysed in terms of a directive illocutionary force. Yet, I am not flogging a dead horse here, for such an idea underlies many recent accounts of the imperative mood: see, for instance, Portner (2007), Barker (2004), Han (2000) or Russell (2007). Without getting into the details, all such theories presuppose that the imperative mood, at the level of sentence meaning, encodes the notion that the speaker (S) is prompting the addressee (A) to bring about the truth of the propositional content (for recent and critical surveys, see Schwager 2006; Iatridou 2009).

As is well known, many imperative sentences are used to perform non-directive speech acts (e.g. Wilson and Sperber 1988). The most obvious examples include permissions (1), advice (2), good wishes (3), and threats (4):

- (1) A: May I have this piece of cake?
B: Yes, take it.
- (2) Always cut your fingernails round and your toenails square. (from Hamblin 1987: 11)
- (3) Have a nice journey.
- (4) Hit me, and I'll hit you back.

Virtually everyone agrees that in (sincerely) performing a directive speech act $F_D(p)$, where F_D stands for the directive force and p for the propositional content, S

expresses her intention/desire that A bring about the truth of p with $F_D(p)$ as a reason (e.g. Searle 1975a; Bach and Harnish 1979; Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Alston 2000). Clearly, the examples in (1-4) can be felicitously uttered even though it is mutually manifest that S does not intend A to bring about the truth of the propositional content; for instance, because S would prefer H not to (1), because S does not care whether H does so or not (2), because H has no active control on the truth of the propositional content (3) or because H bringing about the truth of the propositional content is undesirable for S (4).¹

Those scholars who analyse the meaning encoded by the imperative mood as including some reference to the directive illocutionary force have two options available in order to explain away examples like (1-4).² The first consists in elaborating a semantic account of the imperative mood that is flexible enough to predict non-directive uses of imperative sentences (e.g. Wilson and Sperber 1988; Clark 1993; Allan 2006; Schwager 2006). This amounts to rejecting the equivalence between the directive illocutionary force and the imperative mood — which is precisely the theoretical recommendation I wish to make in this Chapter. The second option is to maintain that the imperative mood encodes the illocutionary directive force, and to claim that (1-4) are either indirect or non-literal speech acts.

Let us start by considering the possibility that (1-4) are indirect speech acts. Traditionally, a speech act is said to be indirect whenever its performance by means of the utterance u requires u to constitute another, direct speech act. (We will qualify this definition later on, but it is perfectly suited for the needs of the present discussion.) For instance, while (5) is literally question, it will also constitute a request in many contexts.

(5) Don't you think that you had enough beer already?

Likewise, (6) is, literally, an assertion; but it can be interpreted as a directive speech act.

(6) You've had enough beer already.

The important point is that while (5) and (6) often constitute indirect directive speech acts, they still remain a question and an assertion, respectively. In other words, if an illocutionary act IA_2 is performed by way of performing another illocutionary IA_1 , such that both IA_1 and IA_2 correspond to the same utterance u , the interpretation of u as IA_1 remains available.

In sum, the claim under examination holds it that (1-4) are, *qua* direct speech acts, directives (since the imperative mood encodes the directive illocutionary force), but that, *qua* indirect speech acts, they are interpreted as permission, advice, a good wish and a threat, respectively. However, it is impossible to interpret (1-4) as directive speech acts, except in very specific contexts. And whenever one sets up such a context, it becomes impossible to interpret the examples at hand as permission, an advice, a good

¹ The content of the imperative clauses in (1-4) is desirable from S's or H's point of view or from both (for a detailed discussion, see Dominicy and Franken 2002). However this is not always the case:

(i) Get the flu, and they'll fire you without further ado.

Literature on constructions like (4) and (i) is extensive and intricate, and I will not attempt to review it here (cf. Schwager 2006; Iatridou 2009).

² Another option is to claim that some of non-directive imperatives — for instance, (4) or (i) in footnote 1 — are not genuine imperatives (e.g. Clark 1993; Han 2000; Russell 2007). Such a claim is straightforwardly undermined by cross-linguistic data (Schwager 2006; Iatridou 2009).

wish and a threat, respectively. Imagine, for instance, that S and A are involved in some kind of sadomasochistic game, and that S utters (4). To be sure, the imperative in (4) then receives the directive illocutionary force; but in such a context, the example cannot be read as a threat anymore.

It thus turns out that, if the imperative mood is to be associated with the directive illocutionary force, (1-4) cannot mean what would be literally said. So we are led to the idea that, while (1-4) are directive speech acts when taken literally, they are not interpreted as such when S is speaking non-literally. In other words, non-directive imperatives should be treated in the same way as sarcastic or ironic declaratives. By uttering (7), S may mean that the party is boring; similarly, by uttering (1-4) non-literally, S will give advice, give permission, express a good wish or make a threat.

(7) This party is great.

The first problem here is that irony may be, and often is, missed. Hearing (7) you can fail to discern the sarcasm, and come to believe that I really love the party. Yet, it seems totally implausible to suppose that, when hearing (1-4), we may miss the alleged non-literal meaning and interpret these utterances as plain directive speech acts.

Perhaps such an argument does not settle the issue, for it may be argued that the difficulty accessing the (alleged) literal meaning of (1-4) — viz. to interpret them as directive speech acts — stems from the fact that the (alleged) non-literal readings — viz. permission, advice, good wish and threat — are so conspicuous that one can hardly miss them. In order to bring home the point that in (1-4) the imperative mood is used literally, albeit non-directively, let us consider in more detail the idea that the threat in (4) means the opposite of what is literally said (cf. Dominicy and Franken 2002). A first possibility would consist in assuming that only the imperative conjunct is non-literal; (4) would then amount to something like (8).

(8) Don't hit me, and I'll hit you back.

This is clearly not what S means by (4). One can envisage, as a second possibility, that both conjuncts are used non-literally such that (4) amounts to something like (9).

(9) Don't hit me and I won't hit you back.

Conjunctions of the form *p! and q* (where *!* stands for the imperative mood) entail the corresponding conditionals *if p, q*; thus (4) entails (10).

(10) If you hit me, I will hit you back.

However, what (9) entails is (11), not (10):

(11) If you don't hit me, I won't hit you back.

To be sure, (11) can be 'perfected', viz. pragmatically enriched, into a biconditional (e.g. Geis and Zwicky 1971; Horn 2000) that would ground the entailment relation between (9) and (10). However, 'conditional perfection' is a pragmatic, hence defeasible interpretive process, so that (9) — which is supposed to be meant by (4) — is compatible with the falsity of (10). The examples in (12) are typical instances of cancelled pragmatic enrichment.

(12) *a.* Don't hit me and I won't hit you. But/actually, even if you hit me, I won't hit you back.

b. If you don't hit me, I won't hit you back. But/actually, even if you hit me, I won't hit you back.

By contrast, the threat in (4) proves infelicitous if the conditional in (10) turns out to be false, and the examples in (13) are sheer contradictions.

- (13) a. Hit me, and I'll hit you back. # But/ # actually, even if you hit me, I won't hit you back.
 b. If you hit me, I'll hit you back. # But/ # actually, even if you hit me, I won't hit you back.

It can be concluded from the foregoing that non-directive uses of the imperative mood are as literal and direct as the directive ones. This I take to be a clear case against building the illocutionary force within sentence meaning (for the same point, see Wilson and Sperber 1988).

Scholars eager to pair sentence meanings with illocutionary forces sometimes invoke typological data (e.g. Han 2000: 164). Their rationale is along the following lines: "If natural languages bother to devote a specific form to directive speech acts, then the directive illocutionary force is not a matter of pragmatic processing, but part and parcel of sentence meanings". Sadock and Zwicky (1985) claim that every language has a specific imperative sentence-type associated with directive speech acts. Yet, the morpho-syntactic system of many languages lacks — totally or partially — distinctively imperative linguistic forms (this is the case for 122 languages out of the 552 sample analysed in van der Auwera and Lejeune 2005). In languages with defective or empty imperative paradigms, various compensatory strategies can be found: aorist (e.g. Georgian), subjunctive mood (e.g. French or Armenian), optative mood (e.g. Eskimo), irrealis mood (e.g. Javanese), indicative mood (e.g. Hebrew), and, perhaps more surprisingly, passive forms (Maori) (see, for instance, Xrakovski 2001; König and Siemund 2007; Allan 2006). If the directive illocutionary force were encoded within the linguistic meaning, how are we to explain these typological facts?

Should we accept that, in languages that lack genuine imperative mood, the suppletive sentence-types are linguistically ambiguous? First, such an 'ambiguity' thesis violates Grice's Modified Occam's Razor (which recommends avoiding the multiplication of linguistic meanings beyond necessity). Second, the ambiguity thesis proves hard to maintain across languages. To see this clearly, contrast the use of future in Nunggubuyu and in French. Nunggubuyu lacks any morpho-syntactic imperative; the same construction is used to express future time reference and to perform directive speech acts (Heath 1984, 1986). Out of context, it is impossible to decide whether (14a) should be translated as (14b) or (14c).

- (14) a. Ba-bura:-v̄ (Verstraete 2005; after Heath 1984: 343)
 2 sg (class-A)³ – *sit*-Non-past
 b. You will sit down.
 c. Sit down.

In French, an authoritative way to order things is to use the future constructions. However, French has also a morphological second person imperative; accordingly, a literal translation of (15a) can be only (15b) — not (15c).

³ Verstraete (2005) glosses this 'class-A prefix' as irrealis; nothing in the present discussion hinges on that, since the only way to express future time reference in Nunggubuyu seems to be combining such class-A prefixes with non-past suffixes.

- (15) a. *Tu partiras demain.*
You-sg leave-IND. fut. simple 2 p. sg. tomorrow
 b. You will leave tomorrow.
 c. Leave tomorrow.

As far as I can see, there is no principled ground for the following joint claims: *a)* that the Nunggubuyu construction ‘Class-A prefix + non-past’ is ambiguous between two illocutionary forces, viz. each such sentence being either a direct and literal assertion about the future or a direct and literal directive speech act; and *b)* that in French requests performed with the future indicative are indirect.

But if future tense constructions are said to be ambiguous between the assertive and the directive forces across languages — thus in French too — why should we refrain from extending this rationale to other suppletive forms? As I have just mentioned, there exists a wide range of linguistic strategies for supplying defective imperative paradigms. Following the thread, one would have to assume linguistic ambiguity for any such form that happens to be prototypically used to perform directive speech acts in some language. Take Lingala, which has an imperative form for the singular second person only; in directive speech acts with second person plural, subjunctive mood is used instead (van der Auwera and Lejeune 2005). On the one hand, no sensible semantic theory of mood would consider it plausible that, in Lingala, the ambiguity between a directive and some other illocutionary force might characterize the plural second-person subjunctive form only, and not extend to the singular second-person subjunctive form. On the other hand, data on the distribution of moods militates against the *ad hoc* hypothesis of a cross-linguistic ambiguity of the subjunctive mood. For instance, French has both second-person imperative and subjunctive forms; but the subjunctive proves unacceptable whenever imperative forms are available. To borrow an example from Schlenker (forthcoming), one can advise the Queen to be prudent using either a third person subjunctive (16) or a second person imperative (17); by contrast, the second person subjunctive in (18) is deviant.

- (16) *Que votre Majesté soit prudente!*
wh-particle your Majesty be-SUBJ. pr. 3 p. sg. cautious (= Let her Majesty be cautious).
 (17) *Soyez prudente!*
be-IMP. 2 p. pl. cautious
 (18) ? *Que vous soyez prudente!*
wh-particle be-SUBJ. pr. 2 p. sg. cautious

In (16), the Queen is addressed as a third-person; second person addressed directive speech acts are unacceptable with the subjunctive.

- (19) a. *Sors!*
Get out-IMP 2 p. sg.
 b. ? *Que tu sortes.*⁴

⁴ (16b) is acceptable as an expression of surprise; however, under such an interpretation, the corresponding imperative would be strongly deviant. In curses or blessings both imperatives and subjunctives are acceptable.

- (i) *Sois maudit!*
be-IMP 2 p. sg. cursed
 (ii) *Que tu sois maudit!*
wh-particle you-sg. be-SUBJ. pr. 2 p. sg. cursed

Wh-particle *you*-sg. *get out*-SUBJ pr. 2 p. sg.

Moreover, the acceptability of subjunctive in French is not linked to the presence or the absence of the directive force. For instance, in French equivalents of (4), the surface form of the first verb is unambiguously imperative (20a) (cf. footnote 2), and the first clause has clearly no directive force. In such environments, second-person subjunctives are unacceptable (20b); however, at the third person — for which there is no morphological imperative form —, the subjunctive is fine (20c).

- (20) a. *Sachez trop de choses trop tôt et vous serez traumatisé.*
know-IMP. 2 p. pl. too-many art.-partitive things too early and you-pl. be-IND. fut. simple 2 p. pl. traumatised.
 Get to know too much too early, and you'll be traumatised.
- b. ? *Que vous sachiez trop de choses trop tôt et vous serez traumatisé.*
wh-particle you-pl. know-SUBJ. pr. 2 p. pl. too-many art.-partitive things too early and you-pl. be-IND. fut. simple 2 p. pl. traumatised.
- c. *Qu'il sache trop de choses trop tôt et il sera traumatisé.*
wh-particle he know-SUBJ. pr. 3 p. pl. too-many art.-partitive things too early and he-pl. be-IND. fut. simple 3 p. pl. traumatised.

At this point, I see no justification for arguing that a certain sentence-type — e.g. future in Nunggubuyu or subjunctive in Lingala — is ambiguous between several illocutionary forces, rather than admitting that illocutionary forces belong to the level of utterances rather than to that of sentences.⁵

3. Grice's heritage: illocutionary forces and utterances

In the previous Section, we saw that illocutionary forces do not belong to the level of sentence meaning. From this, however, one should not conclude that whenever a sentence is uttered and acquires propositional meaning, a speech act has been performed *eo ipso*. Yet, a customary — but misguided — shortcut is precisely to recast the opposition between sentences and utterances in terms of the contrast between sentence meanings and speech acts. This opposition plays a major role in a much-discussed issue of contemporary philosophy of language: that of contextual contributions to the propositional content. To take a well worn example, (21) will mean different things in different contexts — depending on what John is ready for.

(21) John is ready.

Phenomena of this kind have been taken to show that literal content cannot be determined by linguistic meaning alone. Yet, opposing this interpretation, so-called

However, the subjunctive (ii) strongly feels like an imprecation addressed at a third party (the gods, the fate...); when no such third-person addressee is available, the subjunctive becomes unacceptable.

- (iii) *Va au diable!*
go-IMP 2 p. sg. to devil
- (iv) * *Que tu ailles au diable!*
wh-particle you-sg. go-SUBJ. pr. 2 p. sg. to devil

⁵ Another, theoretical possibility is to claim that in languages that lack a genuine imperative, directive speech acts cannot be performed directly. However, I do not think it is worth considering seriously: it makes no sense to talk about indirectness when no direct alternative is available.

'semantic minimalists' argue: *a*) that the contents expressed by (21) on different occasions of utterance are speech act contents; *b*) that these speech act contents do not correspond to the literal, semantic content of the sentence uttered. In other words, while different utterances of the same sentence correspond to the performance of different speech acts, with possibly different contents, speech act contents are to be distinguished from the semantic content proper, which — excepting a restricted set of indexicals — is entirely determined by sentence structure and remains constant across contexts of uses (Cappelen and Lepore 2005; Soames 2002). Implicit in this view is the assumption that any utterance constitutes a speech act, or, in other words, that for a sentence to be uttered amounts to its acquiring an illocutionary force.

Such an assumption can be traced back to Grice's notion of $\text{meaning}_{\text{nn}}$. Saying, for Grice, is intending to provoke some cognitive response, such that the reason for that cognitive response is the recognition of this very intention (or, at least, cases of saying can always be reconstructed in this way). The nature of the response *S* intends to provoke by her utterance in the mind of *A* determines the 'central' speech act the instance of saying corresponds to: if it is the belief that *p*, *S*'s saying will be an assertive speech act; if it is the intention to bring about the truth of *p*, *S*'s saying will be a directive speech act (cf. Grice 1968, 2001: 50-55).

Now take a sarcastic utterance like (7) above: *S* says that the party is great, but, clearly, she doesn't mean it. To the best of my knowledge, no theory of irony would claim that in such a case *S* asserts that the party is great. Furthermore, a sarcastic utterance that *p* is clearly not accompanied by an overt intention (to communicate that *p*) of the kind that, according to Grice, characterises saying. This entails, in Grice's view, that the sarcastic *S* does not say anything, but just acts as if she was saying something — a very counter-intuitive consequence (see Neale 1992; Carston 2002: 114-116; Kissine 2009).

The existence of cases where *S* says that *p* without asserting that *p* constitutes a strong argument against equating utterances and illocutionary acts. Austin (1975) explicitly distinguished between sentence meaning (phatic act), contextual meaning (locutionary act) and illocutionary act (for a detailed discussion, see Kissine 2008b, 2009). In other words, even though sentence meaning and utterance meaning are not to be confused, illocutionary force attribution constitutes yet another level of interpretation.

In a series of papers, Kent Bach (e.g. 1994, 2005) argues that what is said by an utterance does not coincide with the content of the illocutionary act performed by this utterance; what is said corresponds to the *locutionary* act performed. However, unlike, for instance, Recanati (2004 and this volume) or Carston (2002 and this volume), Bach defines what is said as the output of the semantic interpretation of the syntactic structure; pragmatic contributions to what is said are limited to determining the reference of a restricted set of indexicals. Moreover, in Bach's view, what is said does not always correspond to a full-blown proposition. Take (21), for instance. As pointed out above, it is impossible to decide what John is ready for in the absence of any contextual information. But such extra-linguistic information does not contribute, according to Bach, to what is said. Illocutionary content is the place where such pragmatic influences come into play. What is said by (21), in Bach's view, is the sub-propositional radical [*John is ready*___], whose empty slot has to be completed at the illocutionary level.

One of the reasons Bach — rightly — invokes for distinguishing between locutionary and illocutionary acts is that sometimes we do not mean what we say; irony is a case in

point. Accordingly, in such cases, the utterance reduces, at the literal level, to a locutionary act that corresponds, in Bach's view, to the semantic interpretation of the syntactic structure and to the indexical resolution that both remain blind to the pragmatic, wide context.

Bach's conception does not conform to Austin's original definition of the term *locutionary act* (cf. Kissine 2008b, 2009). More importantly, while the existence of cases where we do not mean what we say justifies the rejection of Grice's equation of saying with performing a speech act, it also shows that 'forceless' saying — the locutionary act — is already endowed with propositional, pragmatically determined meaning. Imagine that John is notoriously bad at preparing his talks on time. Imagine that, a few hours before John's talk, S sarcastically says:

(22) Of course, John is ready.

Whatever theory of irony one favours, it is clear that in saying (22) S does not mean what she says. But in order to determine what she does mean — something like 'Of course, John is not ready *for his talk*' — one has to know what S does not mean. And at this stage one cannot avoid determining what John is ready for in (22). In other words, S's locutionary act — what she says in (22) — is not, *pace* Bach, a sub-propositional radical: it is a full-fledged, contextually determined proposition.

There is another argument to support this claim. The verb *say*, as used in indirect reports of the 'S said that *p*' kind, is ambiguous, according to Bach (2005), between locutionary and illocutionary meanings. Therefore, Bach must accept that in reporting the ironic utterance in (22) by (23) one transmits S's locutionary act (since her illocutionary act has a different content):

(23) S said that John was ready.

Some may feel inclined to say that the report in (23) is false in a context where the audience does not have access to the non-literality of S's original utterance. However, no sense could be made of (24) if (23) were not true:

(24) S said that John was ready, but she didn't mean that/*it*.

Even though the truth of (23) does not depend on the possibility for the audience to recover the non-literality of the original utterance, it remains impossible to maintain that the embedded clause in (24) is sub-propositional. The main reason is, of course, that the reference of the demonstrative *that* or of *it* in (24) must be a full-fledged proposition.

4. Locutionary acts

In Section 2, we saw that illocutionary forces do not belong to sentence meaning. In the previous Section, we saw that some utterances do not have any (direct and literal) illocutionary force, even though they are endowed with propositional and context-dependent meaning. However, until now the discussion was limited to grammatically declarative sentences. A chief reason for introducing the notion of a locutionary level — intermediate between sentence meaning and illocutionary level — is, as we have seen, the existence of cases where what is said differs from what is meant. Parallel cases of non-literality can be found with imperative sentences. In the following example, S does not literally request, order, allow or wish A to ruin her carpet.

(25) [A spills his glass of wine over the carpet, and clumsily attempts to wipe it off. S says:] Go on! Ruin my carpet!

Exactly as S does not literally assert anything when she sarcastically says that the party is great, the speaker of (25) does not perform any literal directive speech act. But if so, what is the literal content of (25)?

In Section 2, I have argued that the meaning of the imperative mood should not be analysed in illocutionary terms. Without getting into details, imperative clauses may just be, at the literal level, expressions of propositional contents under a certain attitude or with a certain mode of presentation. Let me just quote two possible accounts, among many. According to the first, the imperative mood presents the utterance content as desirable and potential (Wilson and Sperber 1988; Clark 1993; for critical discussions, see Dominicy and Franken 2002; Schwager 2006). According to the second, the imperative mood functions like a necessity operator; roughly, the ‘attitude’ bearing on the propositional content would be derived from the context-dependent base (i.e. from the domain of quantification) of the modality (Schwager 2006). Independently of the account favoured, locutionary acts must be thought of not only as having propositional content, but also as endowed with a certain mode of presentation of that content (Kissine 2009).

Assessing the semantic accounts of sentence-types— e.g. imperative, indicative, subjunctive, interrogative... — falls far beyond the scope of this paper. The important point is that the semantics of sentence-types predicts which locutionary-act types the utterance of sentences can constitute; the nature of the locutionary act performed constrains, in turn, the range of those direct illocutionary acts the locutionary act can constitute.

5. Forceless meaning and indirect speech acts

Conceiving of illocutionary forces as *optional* properties of utterances allows a fresh perspective on indirect speech acts. Classically, a speech act is said to be indirect whenever its uptake (viz. A’s understanding the utterance as being this speech act) is tied to the uptake of another speech act (Searle 1975b; Bach and Harnish 1979: 70; also Recanati 1987). For instance, if S utters (26) as an answer to A’s offer to go to the movies, A can infer, by using various conversational, cooperation-based principles, that in addition to stating that she is tired, by (26) S rejects A’s offer.

(26) I’m very tired.

Some indirect speech acts are highly conventionalised. For instance, although (27) has an interrogative syntactic structure, it constitutes an extremely conventionalised means to request things.

(27) Can you pass me the salt?

After Morgan (1978), it is customary to think of such cases as ‘short-circuited’ implicatures. In a nutshell, Morgan’s idea is that the link between (27) taken as a literal question about A’s ability to pass the salt and (27) taken as a request to pass the salt can be reconstructed in Gricean terms; however, such a reconstruction generally does not take place. This is so because the link between the *Can you__?* construction and the directive interpretation is highly conventionalised and largely automatic. (Of course, conventionalisation is not arbitrary. In particular, the link between the literal meaning and the indirect force must be easy to grasp. Not every question of the form *Can you__?*

will easily receive a directive interpretation. For instance, that S is able to pass the salt is a preparatory condition which must be fulfilled in order for a request to pass the salt. According to Searle (1975b), this is why a conversationally irrelevant question about a preparatory condition will be readily interpreted as the performance of the corresponding request.)

A view rival to the 'short-circuited implicature' account is that of Sadock (1974), according to whom each sentence-type is associated with an illocutionary force at the syntactic level. Under such an analysis, (27) is linguistically ambiguous between the interrogative and imperative meanings. As we have seen in Section 2, the doctrine of a linguistic coupling between sentence-types and illocutionary forces is problematic for independent reasons. There is one point of Sadock's analysis that is worth considering, though. According to him (1974: 97-109), certain grammatical properties distinguish questions used as requests, and conventionalised forms whose meaning is (allegedly) ambiguous between a question and a directive speech act. Take (28) as an instance of the former case, (29) of the latter.

(28) When will you close the door?

(29) Will you close the door?

Sadock assumes that only grammatically imperative sentences can be followed by *please* or by an indefinite vocative.

(30) Close the door, please.

(31) Close the door, someone.

The unacceptability of (32-33) shows, according to Sadock, that (28) is an indirect request performed by means of uttering an unambiguously interrogative sentence.

(32) ? When will you please close the door?

(33) ? When will you close the door, someone?

By contrast, the acceptability of (34-35) (allegedly) reveals that (29) is linguistically ambiguous between being a grammatically imperative sentence — hence a direct request to close the door —, and being a grammatically interrogative sentence — hence a direct question about S's ability to close the door.

(34) Will you please close the door?

(35) Will you close the door, someone?

In reaction to Sadock's argument, Bach and Harnish (1979: 200-202) point out that *please* is also acceptable in (36).

(36) Can you reach the salt, please?

If (27) is, grammatically, a request to bring about the truth of the propositional content, one should expect (36) to be a request to reach the salt. This is counter-intuitive: (36) is a request to pass the salt, not to reach the salt. Likewise, as pointed out by Bach and Harnish, the following example is clearly not ambiguous between an indicative and an imperative underlying structure, despite the acceptability of *please*.

(37) I'd like some salt, please.

Following Morgan's lead, Bach and Harnish claim that certain questions of the form *Can you__?* or *Will you__?* are standardised means to perform requests. In order to explain away Sadock's grammatical constraints, they argue that (29) is ungrammatical, although pragmatically acceptable.

Both Sadock's, and Bach and Harnish's accounts presuppose that the grammatical acceptability of *please* is linked to the imperative mood. However, the acceptability of *please* or of the indefinite vocative does not depend on the utterance's mood, but on whether or not the utterance's (primary) illocutionary force is directive. The following examples are acceptable only if S believes (or pretends to believe) A to have control over his having a nice journey back or getting well soon, viz. only if the utterances at hand constitute (pretend) directive speech acts.

(38) ? Have a nice journey back, please.⁶

(39) ? Get well soon, please.

Even under such a reading, indefinite vocatives prove unacceptable:

(40) ? Have a nice journey back, someone.

(41) ? Get well soon, someone.

When the imperative clauses cannot receive a directive illocutionary force, as in (4) and (42), *please* and the indefinite vocative are clearly ruled out.

(4) Hit me and I'll hit you back. [repeated]

(42) Be tall and people will be respectful.

(43) ? Hit me, please, and I'll hit you back.

(44) ? Be tall, please, and people will be respectful.

(45) ? Hit me, someone, and I'll hit you back.

(46) ? Be tall, someone, and people will be respectful.

It thus seems that the acceptability of *please* does not depend on grammatical factors — on the sentence mood —, but on pragmatic ones — the utterance's illocutionary force. What do we make of the fact that the adjunction of *please* and of *someone* is constrained by the presence of the directive illocutionary force and not of the imperative mood? According to Bach and Harnish's standardisation thesis, when an indirect speech act is conventionalised, hearers automatically derive the secondary indirect force without going through the derivation of the primary, literal speech act. That is, (29) is directly understood as a request to close the door, whereas (28) is interpreted as a question, and it takes A supplementary pragmatic reasoning to understand it as a request to close the door.

So why not say that (29) has the force of a request only, whereas (28) has the primary force of a question, and, indirectly, constitutes a request? We have seen above that some utterances constitute a locutionary act with a certain content *p* but do not correspond to any illocutionary act with the content *p*. The same applies here. In (29), the content of the directive illocutionary act — of the request to close the door — differs from that of the locutionary act which the utterance of the interrogative sentence corresponds to.⁷

⁶ Keith Allan pointed out to me that (i) is acceptable:

(i) Please may you have a safe journey home.

However, (i) is an imploration — a directive act — addressed at some third party (the gods, the fate, ...). It is therefore plausible that *please* is acceptable because it is directed at such a virtual addressee.

⁷ Note that not every utterance of an interrogative sentence constitutes a locutionary act. I can, for instance, utter an interrogative sentence to test a microphone or to practice my English. My utterance —

Since the only illocutionary force of (29) is a directive one, it is also, trivially, the primary force. As expected, constructions whose acceptability depends on the primary force being directive are allowed. By contrast, the literal force of (28) is that of a question; since the directive force is not primary in this case, constructions like *please* are not allowed.

To repeat, (29) is syntactically and semantically an interrogative; however, it is not interpreted — nor intended by S to be interpreted — as a question. Such a rationale presupposes that literal and serious utterances of interrogative sentences are not necessarily associated with the act of requesting information, exactly in the same way as not all utterances of imperative sentences constitute directive speech acts. Interrogatives that are neither requests of information nor expressions of ignorance include the following: rhetorical questions (47), exam questions (48), guess questions (49), and surprise questions (50).

- (47) [Peter, who had made a New Year resolution to give up smoking, lights up. Mary says:] What was your New Year's resolution? (from Wilson and Sperber 1988)
 (48) Where did Napoleon die?
 (49) Which hand is the marble in?
 (50) A: The President has resigned.
 B: Good heavens. Has he? (from Wilson and Sperber 1988)

For a careful and illuminating account of the relationship between the interrogative mood and the speech act of questions the reader is referred to Fiengo (2007), who analyses interrogative sentences as expressing incomplete or truth-valueless propositions.

Further arguments in support of the view that conventionalised indirect speech acts like (27) or (29) are, at the literal and direct level, cases of saying without performing an illocutionary act, can be found in Terkourafi (2009), who provides an interesting discussion of the relevant experimental data.⁸ On the one hand, experiments reveal that the putative direct force of a *Could you* request like (27), viz. the illocutionary force of questioning, seems to be ignored in favour of the intended speech act of request. On the other hand, the interrogative *form* of the sentence is processed, as shown by answers such as 'Yes, I can' or by the fact that the interrogative form is recalled (for an extensive discussion and references, see Terkourafi 2009).

We thus arrive at the following picture of the possible relationships between locutionary and illocutionary acts:

- a) The locutionary content corresponds to the content of the primary, direct speech act. This is the ordinary case.
- b) The locutionary act does not constitute any direct speech act; the only speech act performed by the utterance is indirect. Here, two further sub-categories must be distinguished.

devoid of any contextually determined 'sense and reference' — would then be a phatic act, but not a locutionary one.

⁸ In opposition to the present paper, however, Terkourafi endorses Bach's minimal notion of what is said.

- i)* The utterance is non-literal; S does not endorse the locutionary content. For instance, this content ‘echoes’ an utterance or a thought of another (possibly virtual) person (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1981; Wilson 2006). The important point is that, in such cases, S’s performance of the indirect speech act cannot be reconstructed as an inference taking as one of its premises the performance of a primary speech act that shares its content with the locutionary act.
- ii)* The utterance is literal, but the content of the only illocutionary act the utterance constitutes is distinct from that of the corresponding locutionary act. However, it is possible to reconstruct the interpretation process as starting from the performance of an illocutionary act whose content is identical with that of the locutionary act.

The contrast between ironic utterances — point *b.i* — and conventionalised indirect speech acts — point *b.ii* — deserves a little more discussion. Morgan’s (1978) idea in treating conventional indirect speech acts as ‘short-circuited’ implicatures is precisely that even though the indirect speech act can be derived from the putative performance of a direct speech act, such an inference does not actually take place: instead, A jumps directly to the indirect speech act. Take (27).

(27) Could you pass the salt? [repeated]

One possible Gricean reconstruction of A’s interpretation of (21) runs as follows (cf. Searle 1975b):

- (51) *Step 1:* S is asking me whether I have the capacity to pass the salt;
Step 2: S probably knows that I have this capacity;
Step 3: S knows that I know that she knows that;
Step 4: So, S believes that I understand that she does not want to be informed as to my capacity to pass the salt;
Step 5: We are at a dinner, and it is possible that S needs salt;
Step 6: Being able to pass the salt is necessary in order to pass the salt;
Step 7: So, by asking me whether I am able to pass the salt S requests me to pass her the salt.

However, A’s exposure to conventions of language use allows him to jump directly from his recognition of S’s utterance of an interrogative sentence of a certain form — which *does not* amount to asking a question — to interpreting S’s utterance as a request to pass the salt. The important point about the rational reconstruction of the interpretation of an indirect speech act like (27) is that the first step — S’s performance of the primary speech act of questioning — remains compatible with the last step — S’s performance of a request. This reconstruction parallels that of genuinely indirect speech acts like (28).

(28) When will you close the door? [repeated]

The fact that, by uttering (28), S asks A when he will close the door is compatible with the fact that S, by means of this same utterance, requests A to close the door.

Now, contrast this with the ironic utterance of (7):

(7) This party is great. [repeated]

In order to understand what S really means by (7), A has to understand that S does not assert what she is saying. As in (51), let us try a rational reconstruction that would start with the premise that S performed a direct and literal speech act.

- (52) *Step 1:* S is asserting that the party is great;
Step 2: This party is all that S hates;
Step 3: So, most probably, S does not believe that the party is great;
Step 6: S is cooperative and would not violate conversational Maxims gratuitously;
Step 4: S believes that I believe that S does not believe that the party is great;
Step 5: S does not assert that the party is great;
Step 7: S means that the party is awful.

Whatever the details, the important point is that, this time, and by contrast with (51), taking the last two steps requires falsifying the first one.

Note also that both rational reconstructions (51) and (52) presuppose that A is capable of making hypotheses about S's beliefs about A's mental states — i.e. that A has the capacity to attribute second-order or third-order mental states. Take first the reconstruction in (51). In order to get to the conclusion that S does not merely want him to say whether he can pass the salt, A must assume that S believes that A knows that S is not interested in (merely) knowing the answer. It would be irrational for S to use a question in order to request something, if she were fairly certain that A would not understand this. That is, A must attribute to S beliefs about A's beliefs about S's beliefs. Things are similar for (52): if A does not understand that S believes that A believes that S does not like the party, A cannot make the difference between S's being lying and S's being sarcastic (for a more detailed discussion see Kissine 2008a).

From the foregoing, we can draw an important empirical reason for not taking rational reconstructions of indirect speech act interpretation as reflecting actual interpretive processes. Children do not master second-order mental state attribution before the age of seven (Perner and Winner 1985). Importantly, this cognitive ability seems to be required for understanding irony and for lying in an efficient way (Winner and Leekam 1991; Talwar and Gordon 2007). By contrast, it has been repeatedly shown that well before seven, children respond adequately to and produce (conventionalised) indirect requests (e.g. Bates 1976: 275-282; Shatz 1978; Reeder 1978; Carrell 1981; O'Neill 1996), which reveals that this pragmatic ability does not require complex mind-reading skills, contrary to what is implied by rational reconstructions of the kind of (51).

6. Indirect speech acts and explicit performatives

Explicit performatives constitute one of the oldest and most vexing topics in the history of theorising about speech acts (for recent surveys, see Harnish 2002, 2004). While, again, I will not attempt an exhaustive review here, the fact, discussed in the previous section, that conventionalised indirect speech acts do not have more than one illocutionary force has an implication for the analysis of performatives that is worth considering.

Prototypical performative sentences have the form 'I VP ___', where the VP stands for the illocutionary act the utterances of these sentences constitute under normal conditions. Here are some examples:

- (53) I order you to leave this room.

(54) I promise that I'll come to your party.

(55) I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*.

Utterances of (53-55) are generally self-verifying: they constitute the act named by the matrix verb. By uttering (53), S makes it the case that she has ordered A to leave; by uttering (54), S makes it the case that she has promised to come to the party; by uttering (55), S makes it the case that the ship is named *Queen Elizabeth*.

The 'self-verifying' character of performatives like (55) can be explained by extra-linguistic, culture-specific institutions (for a more extensive discussion, see Kissine forthcoming-b). However, it is highly doubtful that the same treatment can be applied to (53-54) (for an attempt, see Searle 1992; for a cogent criticism, see Bach and Harnish 1992). The challenge consists in explaining how (54) is interpreted as an order and (55) as a promise without, at the same time, giving up commonplace semantics — i.e., by deriving the truth-conditional content of (53-54) through the same compositional semantic principles as for other structures of the form 'I VP that___', as in (56), or other present simple forms of *order*, like in (57).

(56) I hope that you are well.

(57) He orders you to leave.

That explicit performatives do not involve any extraordinary semantic features is further suggested by the observation that in some circumstances a sentence like (53) does not constitute a directive speech act at all, and has the content predicted by standard truth-conditional interpretation.

(58) A: Imagine that I light up a cigarette. What is your reaction?

B: I order you to leave this room.

Another interesting fact is that the following examples are as well suited as (59-62) to performing orders and promises.

(59) Leave the room, and that's an order.

(60) I'll come to your party, and that's a promise.

(61) Leave the room, I order you.

(62) I'll come to your party, I promise.

The analysis of examples in (59-60) is pretty straightforward. The speaker first utters a sentence, and then, with the second conjunct, indicates its illocutionary force, the demonstrative *that* picking up the first conjunct. As for (61-62), according to the account developed by Potts (2005; also Bach 1999), utterances with parentheticals express two propositions. The first is the main one — 'at-issue' — while the second is secondary. This second proposition may have a 'procedural' role (cf. Wilson and Sperber 1993), in that it facilitates the processing of the at-issue information. Following this widely accepted line of thought, in (61-62) the secondary propositions — the parenthetical ones — help attribute the illocutionary force to the main content.

The spirit of Davidson's (1979) 'paratactic' account of explicit performatives is quite similar. In his view, the surface form of, for instance (53), hides the following two utterances, where the first demonstrates the second one: *I order you that. You leave the room*. However, it is pretty clear that the *that* in (53) is not a demonstrative. Compare with French where there is no homophony between demonstratives and complementisers or relative pronouns.

(63) J'ordonne que tu sortes d'ici.

I order-IND. pr. 1 p. sg. that-Complementiser you-sg. leave-SUBJ. pr. 2 p. sg. from here.

I order that you leave.

(64) *Sors d'ici et c'est un ordre.*

Leave-IMP 2 p. sg. from here and that-Demonstrative is-IND. pr. 3 p. sg. a order.

Leave, and that's an order.

Although it is not viable, Davidson's account is attractive in that it puts the explicit performatives in (53-54) and (59-62) on the same footing; the utterance's main informational content is assigned an illocutionary force through a comment on this content.

As for Bach and Harnish (1979: 203-233, 1992), they claim that explicit performatives are standardised (conventionalised) indirect speech acts, exactly in the same way as indirect requests of the kind of (27).

(27) Could you pass the salt? [repeated]

Recall from the previous Section that, on their view, although at the direct level (27) is a question, standardisation allows one to interpret it as a request without going through the inference from the direct to the indirect force. Likewise, they argue, explicit performatives like (52-53) are, at the direct level, 'constative' speech acts. The constative class includes those speech acts that aim at transferring information, assertion being a paradigmatic case. Bach and Harnish thus claim that by uttering (53) S asserts that she orders A to leave the room; this assertion is interpreted as an indirect order. However, the inference from the direct to the indirect force is 'compressed by the precedent' — (53) is a standardised indirect order exactly in the same way as (27). Bach and Harnish thus predict both that the content of (53) is the proposition [S order that A leaves] and that (53) is an order.

Reimer (1995) objects to Bach and Harnish's account that it does not seem intuitively plausible that S asserts anything by means of (53); the constative part of performatives is introspectively inaccessible. However, it is not obvious that the (alleged) question part of indirect requests like (27) is always accessible either. If, when solving a problem, I ask you 'Can you tell me the square root of 16?', it would be highly counter-intuitive to interpret my utterance as a question (e.g. Clark 1979). In any event, nothing implies that conventionalised indirect speech acts have two illocutionary forces. We have seen above that indirect speech acts do not necessarily have a direct illocutionary force; in conventionalised indirect speech acts the content of the locutionary act is different from that of the illocutionary act, but only one illocutionary act is performed. Things are not different with explicit performatives. Recall that locutionary acts are endowed with a full-blown propositional content. Therefore, at the locutionary level explicit performatives have exactly those truth-conditions that would be predicted by regular compositional semantics. The propositional content of the locutionary act performed in (53) is [S orders A to leave]. Yet, this does not imply that S asserts this content. The only illocutionary act performed in (53) is the order that A (should) leave. In that way, we can reconcile two seemingly conflicting intuitions: on the one hand, an explicit performative has the same propositional content as would an assertion constituted by

an utterance of the same sentence; on the other hand, it do not constitute such an assertion.⁹

An interesting example in favour of the account of explicit performatives just sketched can be drawn from Allan (2006). He points out that (65) is adequately paraphrased by (66):

- (65) In the first place I admit to being wrong; and secondly I promise it will never happen again.
 (66) The first thing I have to say is that I admit to being wrong; and the second thing I have to say is that I promise it will never happen again.

In (66) *the second thing* does not refer to a second act of promising, but to the second act of saying, viz. to the explicit performative *I promise it will never happen again*; ditto for *secondly* in (65). That explicit performatives are acts of saying is consonant with the analysing of saying as the performance of a locutionary act. This is not to say that explicit performatives cannot be subject to a rational reconstruction, starting from the premise that S asserted that she, say, ordered A to leave the room. However, to repeat, rational reconstructions do not aim at modelling actual interpretive processes. Note that the fact that the interpretation of explicit performatives can be reconstructed on the basis primary assertions does tell us something: that S is ready to endorse the content of the locutionary act — that she's not ironic. I.e. it tells us that explicit performatives *can* be interpreted as assertions; but it remains that, in most cases, explicit performatives *are not* interpreted as assertions.

7. By way of conclusion: illocutionary force attribution

A natural question to ask, at this point, is how illocutionary forces are attributed. We have seen that developmental evidence makes it unlikely that illocutionary force attribution is underpinned by Gricean inferences about multi-layered communicative intentions (for a classical version of such an account, see Bach and Harnish 1979). Very young children are good at attributing illocutionary forces to utterances well before being able to attribute complex mental states required by Gricean reconstructions. As for contemporary pragmatic theories, as I said in the Introduction, they are fairly elusive on psychological mechanisms underlying illocutionary force attribution.

In Kissine (2009) I argued that speech acts should be thought of as (not necessarily effective) reasons for S to believe that the propositional content is true (assertives), for A to bring about the truth of the propositional content (directives) or for S to bring about the truth of the propositional content (commissives).¹⁰ An important feature of

⁹ This analysis is unavailable to Bach and Harnish, because in their view, as we have seen, the content of locutionary acts is not necessarily fully propositional, viz. does not always have truth-conditions.

¹⁰ Speaking about reasons to believe and reasons to act can also shed a new light on the notion of 'direction of fit'. Searle (1975a) contrasts the word-to-world direction of fit of assertive speech acts with the world-to-word direction of fit of directive and commissive speech acts: the former are satisfied — true — if, and only if their propositional content fits the world, the latter are satisfied if, and only if, the world changes in such a way as to fit the propositional content. Searle (1983) claims that the direction of fit of speech acts derives from that of the mental states they express (see Kissine forthcoming-b for more details on expression and speech acts). Assertive speech acts express beliefs, and beliefs have a mind-to-world direction of fit. Directive speech acts express desires, and commissive speech acts express

this analysis is that it does not require advanced mind-reading skills for attributing illocutionary forces, except for complex communicative moves like irony (cf. Kissine 2008a).

Whenever the content of a speech act corresponds to the content of the constitutive locutionary act, this speech act is literal and direct. We have seen that utterances constitute locutionary acts, viz. they express propositional contents under a certain mood of presentation. The type of the mode of presentation constrains the range of the possible direct speech acts the locutionary act may constitute. For instance, if the imperative mood expresses an attitude characteristic of desiderative mental states, the potential direct illocutionary force will be a directive one.

However, there does not necessarily exist a one-to-one correspondence between sentence-types and modes of presentation of the propositional content. In particular, it is fairly possible that the indicative mood is neutral in this respect (e.g. Recanati 1987; Allan 2006). An indicative sentence like (67) can be performed either as an assertion that A leaves the city Monday or as an order that A leave the city Monday.

(67) You leave the city Monday.

Let us assume that the indicative mood does not constrain the locutionary-act type. Illocutionary force attribution and the interpretation of the utterance-type as a locutionary act with a certain mode of presentation will thus mutually influence each other. Note also that, in both cases, the propositional content is the same; it thus follows that the order in (67) is as direct as the one in (68); cf. Recanati (1987) for the same conclusion.

(68) Leave the city tomorrow morning.

This is in tune with the widely acknowledged fact that most interpretive processes operate on-line. The precise ways sentence-types, locutionary modes of presentation and illocutionary forces interact constitute a rich matter for future research.

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intentions — both desires and intentions have a world-to-mind direction of fit. However, the parallel is less straightforward than it may seem. Contrast directive speech acts, and desires. A desire is satisfied, if, and only if, its content is true. My desire to own a car is satisfied as soon as I own a car — how this satisfaction is brought about is irrelevant for the satisfaction of the desire. By contrast, an order is satisfied (obeyed), if, and only if, the content is true *and* the addressee brings about the truth of this content with the order at hand as reason. If I order you to leave the room, and you leave saying that you do so because you need to buy cigarettes, and not because I told you to leave, my order is not obeyed. Saying that directive speech acts are reasons to act explains this causal constraint without appealing to direction of fit: an order is obeyed, if, and only if, it becomes a *causally effective* reason to act.

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