Chapter 5

IDENTITY CRITERIA: THE STRAWSON-SEARLE APPROACH

The previous chapter was a global presentation of the arguments that show a fourth unit of analysis for discourse is needed. This chapter will develop one such argument systematically.

That dissertation acts are not a subclassification of illocutionary acts, but a category at the same hierarchical level, shall be substantiated by showing that the sentence, the proposition, the illocutionary and the dissertation act have different identity criteria. The reason for calling this method the Strawson-Searle approach is given in the previous chapter and will also be evident further on.

Identity criteria

Let us begin by considering some examples, to see why we need a fourth unit. Let us suppose there is a speaker, whom we shall call S_1, approaching a hearer, H_1, in the middle of a party. Let us further suppose that S_1 utters:

(1) You are smoking,

and that when he is doing so, he is extending his arm and showing he has an ashtray in his hand. Let us say that this situation is picture 1, or P_1.

And let us consider another situation, picture P_2. Now the speaker, S_2, is a teacher in a classroom, and he is approaching a hearer, H_2, who is a very young student, and who is sitting in a chair. But now S_2 is approaching H_2 with a grave expression and crossed arms. He also utters:

(1) You are smoking.

The first thing to notice is that we have two utterances of the same sentence. (1) is being uttered twice, once in P_1 and once in P_2. The second thing to notice is that a different proposition is involved each time. In P_1 a proposition about H1 is being formulated, but in P_2 the proposition being expressed is about H_2.

> If we let k represent the predicate 'be smoking', $k(H_1)$ can represent the proposition that H_1 is smoking. In the same manner, $k(H_2)$ will represent the proposition that H_2 is smoking. We can, then, show the two pictures as follows:

P_1: party, S_1, H_1, (1), $k(H_1)$

P_2: classroom, S_2, H_2, (1), $k(H_2)$

What is being shown is that the same sentence can be used to formulate propositions that are not the same. Is the converse also true? Is it possible to have the same proposition with different sentences? The answer is yes. Consider a variation of P_1, which will be represented as P_1'. P_1' is equal to P_1 in every respect, except that instead of S1 uttering (1), he utters (2):

(2) Jessica is smoking.

In both P_1 and P_1' the same person is being referred to, namely H_1. The difference is that in one case she is addressed with the pronoun 'you' and in the other case with the proper name 'Jessica'. Some might wish to say that in the second case she is not addressed, in the strict sense, because the verb form corresponds to the third person, rather than the second. They might be right, but the point is that still the same person is being referred to, and the same predicate, k, is being associated with her. We have the same proposition with different words, and therefore, with different sentences. Let us show this in the notation developed:

P_1: party, S_1, H_1, (1), $k(H_1)$

P_1': party, S_1, H_1, (2), $k(H_1)$

What the contrast between P_1 and P_2 and between P_1 and P_1' show is that the criteria to say that we have the same sentence on two occasions are different

from the criteria to say that we have the same proposition. The identity criteria for sentences have to do with the words chosen, "you" or "Jessica". The identity criteria for propositions have to do with who is being referred to, here, H_1.

What is being said here is, of course, what Strawson said in 1950, when he made the critique of Bertrand Russell's treatment of sentences like "The king of France is wise", which was summarized in the previous chapter. It is just that it is being said using Searle's concept of identity criteria (Searle 1969: 22-24) and with the help of an *ad hoc* notation, which is being developed to establish the category of dissertation acts rigorously.

But let us go back to our first two pictures, to the party situation and to the classroom situation, because there is a third thing to notice. We have two illocutionary acts. In P_1 there is the act of offering an ashtray; and in P_2 there is the act of ordering H_2 to stop smoking. Same sentence and different acts. And again, as was the case with propositions, the converse is also true, which can be shown by the use of (2). Let us represent these contrasts:

P_1: party, S_1, H_1, (1), k(H_1), offer

P_2: classroom, S_2, H_2, (1), k(H_2), order

P_1': party, S_1, H_1, (2), k(H_1), offer

The identity criteria for illocutionary acts are, then, different from the identity criteria for sentences. According to Austin and Searle, they have to do with intentions, with the intention of offering, or the intention of ordering, for example. And they have to do with the social relations obtaining between speaker and hearer, and with other aspects of the situation of utterance, such as the physical setting. Uttering (1) in P_2 counts as an order because S_2 is in a position of authority *vis-a-vis* H_2, and because youngsters are not supposed to smoke in classrooms. But uttering (1) in P_1 does not count as an order because different conditions obtain.

Clearly, the identity criteria for illocutionary acts are not different only from the criteria for sentences, but also from the criteria for propositions. And this can be shown easily. To see that the same act can be performed when different

propositions are being formulated, we just need to imagine a small variation of P_2, say P_2'. Here, S_2 utters (3):

(3) You are not smoking.

In P_2' we have a different proposition than in P_2; in fact we have the negation of it. But we retain exactly the same order to stop smoking. If q stands for 'not k', the contrast can be represented as follows:

P_2: classroom, S_2, H_2, (1), k(H_2), order

P_2': classroom, S_2, H_2, (3), q(H_2), order

Let us show the converse, that it is possible to have the same proposition and different illocutionary acts. Let us consider a variation of P_1', and let us call it P_1". Let us see what happens in P_1" before S_1 utters (2). H_1 is in a group of three or four people, and there is a lively conversation going on. S_1 joins the group, while holding a cigarette in his mouth and uttering: "John, have you got a light?", to which John replies: "No, I'm sorry, Carlos." S_1 has all the reasons to believe that H_1 has heard the exchange, and in fact she has. It is now that he turns to H_1 and says:

(2) Jessica is smoking.

We have the same proposition as in P_1'. But now we have another illocutionary act. Instead of the offering of an ashtray, we have a request for a light. The two situations can be represented as follows:

P_1': party, S_1, H_1, (2), k(H_1), offer

P_1": cigarette in mouth, S_1, H_1, (2), p(H_1), request

Dissertation acts

Although there is a risk of the exposition seeming repetitive, due to the spiralling, step-by-step construction of the framework, it is convenient to re-state in

specific terms what I said earlier in a general fashion. This will provide both a solid basis for the four units view of discourse and a more subtle means of analysis. In P_1, besides (and not instead of) the illocutionary act of offering an ashtray, there is the act of asserting the proposition that is being formulated. To show the point clearly, let us suppose we have another situation of the P_1 family. Let us call it P_1*. This is like P_1, except that now S1 utters (4):

(4) Are you smoking?

What we have done is to retain the proposition, that is, the association of a predicate and a referent, but we have varied the dissertation act. In P_1, $k(H_1)$ is asserted; but in P_1*, it is not: we have a pure association. The assertion is, as it were, suspended. So, we have the acts of assertion and of suspended assertion. We could call the latter 'question', for short, but only if we are careful not to imply with this term the illocutionary act of request for information. For, as we saw in Chapter 4, there are questions which are not requests for information (such as rhetorical questions). Let us represent this:

P_1: party, S_1, H_1, (1), $k(H_1)$, offer, assertion

P_1*: party, S_1, H_1, (4), $k(H_1)$, offer, question

Now, is the converse true? Can we have the same dissertation act and different propositions? The answer is yes. To show this, we just need to transport (4) to a P_2 sort of situation, to P_2*:

P_2*: classroom, S_2, H_2, (4), $k(H_2)$, order, question

Then we will have a proposition not about H_1, but about H_2. And we will still have a question about the proposition involved in that case.

The starred situations show that the identity criteria for dissertation acts are different from the criteria for propositions. And with the help of these situations, it can also be shown that they are different from those for illocutionary acts. A comparison of P_1 and P_1* shows that we can vary the dissertation act from assertion to question without varying the illocutionary act of offering. And a com-

parison of P_1^* and P_2^* shows that we can vary the illocutionary act from offer to order without varying the dissertation act of question.

It only remains to be shown that the identity criteria for dissertation acts and for sentences are different. As phoneticians like to show, one can have the same affirmative sentence, say (1), either to make an assertion or to ask a question. All that is needed is the right intonation. In one of the P_1 situations, say P_1^{**}, S_1 could utter (2) with low rise intonation. The situation can be represented as follows:

P_1^{**}: party, S_1, H_1, (2), ?, k(H_1), offer, question

To show that the converse is also true, that it is possible to have the same question with different sentences, let us imagine two pictures, P_1^{***} and P_1^{****}, where S_1 utters (5) and (6), correspondingly:

(5) Is Jessica smoking?

(6) I wonder if Jessica is smoking.

'Wonder' in (6) is a lexical device that does in P_1^{****} what the word order of (5) and the ? intonation do in P_1^{**} and P_1^{***}, respectively. We have:

P_1^{***}: party, S_1, H_1, (5), k(H_1), offer, question

P_1^{****}: party, S_1, H_1, (6), k(H_1), offer, question

The standard theory accepts the distinction between proposition and dissertation act. In fact, Searle used question and assertion to show the point (Searle 1969: 22-23). What the standard theory does not recognize is the distinction between illocutionary act and dissertation act. That is, it is incapable of accounting for the difference between P_1 and P_1^* at the level of speech acts. It can only distinguish them at the level of sentences. One wonders what the source of this confusion is.

When one wonders about what goes on in the minds of others, one leaves solid ground, but nevertheless, sometimes it is worth doing. I think that the confusion was related to the specific tests for identity criteria employed.

Strawson varied propositions by varying their subjects, which he did by varying the situation of utterance (Strawson 1950: 6-7). And he did all this in order to show the distinction between sentence and proposition. Searle varied the predicate of propositions, which he did by negating the original predicate (Searle 1969: 32). He also varied the form of sentences, from affirmative to interrogative (Searle 1969: 22). Searle did these things to show the distinction between proposition and illocutionary act. I have changed the subject and the predicate, by varying the situation of utterance and by negation. And I have varied the form of sentences. It is by combining these techniques that I have been able to separate the dissertation act from the other units.

But why should this be so? Why should the specific test one uses determine what one sees? The reason is that the four units, sentence, proposition, dissertation act and illocutionary act, are interactive, and to use a metaphor from physics, they have a limited number of degrees of freedom. It is possible to vary some of the units at will, and the ones being varied can be any of the them. But once these are fixed, the rest are also fixed. It is not possible to vary all of them at will. To see this, let us go back to P_1^* and P_2^*:

P_1^*: party, S_1, H_1, (4), $k(H_1)$, offer, question

P_2^*: classroom, S_2, H_2, (4), $k(H_2)$, order, question

It was said earlier that in these two cases we have the same dissertation act, question, and different illocutionary acts, offering and ordering. But it should be noted that we have questions about different propositions. In P_1^* there is a question about $k(H_1)$, and in P_2^* a question about $k(H_2)$. However, when we go from P_1 to P_1^* (or from P_2 to P_2^*), that is, when we go from one picture to another picture in the same family, rather than going across families, we retain the same proposition.

P_1: party, S_1, H_1, (1), $k(H_1)$, offer, assertion

P_1^*: party, S_1, H_1, (4), k(H_1), offer, question

Now, is it possible to go across families, from a 1-type situation to a 2-type situation, without changing the propositions? The answer is yes. The teacher in the classroom can, for example, say:

(7) A friend of mine who is in the party is smoking,

or even:

(2) Jessica is smoking.

But clearly, if this happens, then there is no longer an order. The moment we fix the proposition and the dissertation act, the illocutionary act is automatically fixed.

The units have a limited number of degrees of freedom, they "interlock", they are mutually conditioned, or better, they are overdetermined, as social scientists would put it. This has been implicitly recognized in philosophy and in sociolinguistics. In the conditions that these disciplines postulate for an utterance to count as a given act, there is often some specification of the proposition involved. But the overdetermination requires explicit recognition, because it is very probably the source of the confusion.

Searle's procedures showed that illocution and proposition are different by showing that either one can be varied at will while the other one remains fixed, also at will. But if one is manipulating sentences, propositions, and illocutions, then dissertations are no longer free; they vary alongside, or remain fixed with, the other units. In Searle's case, the dissertation tends to be tied to the sentence, and so it is not visible. It is only by, so to speak, playing Strawson's techniques against Searle's that one can see the four units varying differently. One can, for example, see the dissertation remaining fixed with the sentence at some moment, but varying with the illocution at the next, depending on the situational features.

Summary

The pictures in Table 1 have been compared to establish the dissertation act as a fourth unit of discourse analysis, together with the sentence, the proposition and the illocutionary act. The sentences involved are collected in Table 2. What has been shown is that the identity criteria for dissertation acts are different from the identity criteria for the other units.

Table 1. *Analytical representation of situations.*

P_1	party,	S_1,	H_1,	(1),	$k(H_1)$,	offer,	assertion
P_2	classroom,	S2,	H_2,	(1),	$k(H_2)$,	order,	assertion
P_1'	party,	S_1,	H_1,	(2),	$k(H_1)$,	offer,	assertion
P_2'	classroom,	S_2,	H_2,	(3),	$q(H_2)$,	order,	assertion
P_1''	cigarette in mouth,	S_1,	H_1,	(2),	$k(H_1)$,	request,	question
P_1*	party,	S_1,	H_1,	(4),	$k(H_1)$,	offer,	question
P_2*	classroom,	S_2,	H_2,	(4),	$k(H_2)$,	question	
P_1**	party,	S_1,	H_1,	(2), ?,	order, $k(H_1)$,	question	
P_1***	party,	S_1,	H_1,	(5),	offer, $k(H_1)$,	offer,	question

Table 2. *Sentences involved in situations analysed.*

(1) You are smoking.
(2) Jessica is smoking.
(3) You are not smoking.
(4) Are you smoking?
(5) Is Jessica smoking?
(6) I wonder if Jessica is smoking.

The comparisons between P_1 and P_2 and between P_1 and P_1' showed that the identity criteria for sentences are different from the identity criteria for propositions, and also from the criteria for illocutionary acts. The comparisons P_2-P_2' and P_1-P_1'' showed that propositions and illocutionary acts have different criteria.

The comparisons P_1-P_1* and P_1*-P_2* have shown that the criteria for dissertation acts are different from the criteria for propositions. These two com-

parisons have also shown that dissertation acts and illocutionary acts have different criteria. P_1'-P_1** and P_1***-P_1**** have shown that the criteria for dissertation acts and for sentences are different.

It has, thus, been shown that dissertation acts have different identity criteria than the other units of analysis. But what sort of criteria they are has not been considered, *ie* the elements to characterize different dissertation acts have not been discussed. This will be the central theme of Chapter 9, whereas Chapter 8 will be devoted to the characterization of illocutionary acts.

I have speculated about the sources of the confusion that has led us to think of illocutionary acts as dissertation acts. It would seem that the overdetermination of the four units of discourse, coupled with the specific techniques used to show the units, can lead to the masking of one unit by another.

The units in perspective

The distinction between dissertation and illocutionary acts might remind the reader of Austin's original distinction between constatives and performatives. I would welcome this association, because both distinctions aim to separate what on several occasions Austin reluctantly referred to as 'descriptive' from what he once termed 'operative'. Moreover, Austin had, at the moment he made the distinction, the same conviction I have that it is fundamental, *ie* prior to other classifications one might make.

There are some differences, however. The first one has to do with the fact that Austin's distinction was the first step in the building of his theory, the theme in the first of the twelve William James lectures he delivered at Harvard in 1955 (Austin 1962). He used the opposition of performatives to constatives in order to construct the idea that words can do (Austin 1962: 6) and, therefore, in other lectures he had to work against the idea that constatives do not do. The solution he found, and formulated clearly in the XIth lecture, was that "Stating, describing, &c., are *just two* names among a very great many others for illocutionary acts" (Austin 1962: 148-149). My distinction, which benefits from Austin's work in that it already presupposes dissertation acts do, is kept as basic. This difference in

view is one reason it is necessary to go deeper into the nature of illocution, which is the subject of next chapter.

The second difference, which is reflected in the terms employed ('dissertation' and 'constatives'), is that Austin's class consists of true or false statements, and, therefore, excludes acts like questions. Recalling the discussion in Chapter 3, and anticipating points that will be dealt with in following chapters, it also excludes other acts we want to have in the same overall category, such as definitions and hypotheses.

The third difference, which is the most important one from the point of view of the present chapter, is that Austin's account implies constatives and performatives are mutually exclusive, whereas I have shown they can co-occur.

To give a specific example, he said "I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth" is a performative and not a constative (Austin 1962: 6). My distinction leaves the possibility open that the utterance be described as both an act of christening and an account of that act. This will be important in Chapter 8, when we discuss a problem that has had serious consequences: indirect speech acts.

The above discussion might tell the reader something else: Searle's (1976) direction of fit is being given a special status. This is partly true. Dissertation is often an attempt to "get the words...to match the world" (Searle 1976: 3), whereas on many occasions the world is made to fit illocution. However, the knowledge created by dissertation is not necessarily about the world, and, as just discussed above, many individual dissertation acts, such as questions or definitions, cannot be judged as true or false about the world. Besides, the dimension (as conceived by Searle) cannot provide a fundamental classification of the sort that has been established here, as Searle himself would recognize (Searle 1976: 4). These points will also be considered in mote detail in Chapter 9.

Implications

One simple, general idea that is present throughout the discussion in this chapter is that acts are not part of the sentence. This is, perhaps, a useful way to start thinking about the language teacher's functions. She has to bring in the illocu-

tions or dissertations that accompany the samples of language the student is faced with. Or, better, she has to provide the contexts that determine the interpretation of sentences as acts.

Being more ambitious, it would be interesting if the teacher could vary contexts at some time and sentences at another, to let propositions and acts become visible to the student. This suggestion has to do with one worry: that our language students learn to "see" the interlockings of sentence types, propositions and the two kinds of acts the same way a native speaker does. Looking at this from a reverse angle, could we trace cultural misunderstandings to different interlockings and different mappings between contexts and units? If so, how could we point to the wrong connections to help the student redraw his system?

To facilitate pedagogical explorations in the directions indicated above, and to encourage research that addresses the last questions, applied linguists could provide frames of analysis that reveal the elements at play. With this in mind, the following chapters, specially those in Part III, will gradually approximate to truly general definitions of the illocutionary and the dissertation acts that show their components as simply and as explicitly as possible. Observations about contextual features related to those components will also be made in those chapters.