Chapter 8

ILLOCUTION REVISITED

The central problem of this chapter is the identity criteria, or definition features, of illocutionary acts. This problem is approached from the view of illocution exposed in previous chapters, *ie* the view that the terrain of illocution is the terrain where words and actions meet. The aim is to elaborate the proposal, also presented earlier, that illocutionary developoment be described in deontic terms.

The elaboration stems from a discussion of Edmonson's critique of Searle's basic approach to the definition of speech acts. It emphasizes the importance of adhering strictly to Austin's distinction between illocution and perlocution and, therefore, the need to reject Searle's use of perlocutionary elements in the treatment of illocutionary acts. At the same time it isolates the elements in the approach which can be used to distinguish acts by systematic variation. This discussion also produces an initial identification of the features which have to be added in order to achieve a comprehensive framework.

How the proposal might be implemented is exemplified in the anlysis of a particular dialogue. This shows the various sorts of deontic interventions speakers make: comply or violate the deontic conditions existing at the moment of utterance; change the conditions; propose changes; accept or reject the proposed changes.

From a further elaboration, which points to other examples, it is concluded that four elements are needed to define an illocutionary act: intervention, deontic values involved, person subjected to values and social relationship of speaker to subject. The potential of this approach is demonstrated in a list of sketches of definitions of various acts.

The view arrived at is used to clarify the main coding confusions noted in the first part of the thesis. This clarification suggests ways to link the study of acts with the study of larger units, like act pairs and act sequences.

As anounced in Chapter 1, the points made are articulated to reject the main arguments that aim to exclude speech acts from discourse analysis and pragmatics: the one held by Levinson and by Brown and Yule and the one put forth by Sperber and Wilson.

Finally, the chapter points to two applications in the classroom of the insights provided: the use of the interaction itself and reflection on it.

Critique of the illocutionary acts paradigm

The discussion in chapters 4 and 5 emphasized that the point of illocution is to make present, modify or create the conditions for the interpretation and judgement of action. The basis for focusing on this was Austin's statement that illocutionary acts are often "designed... for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct" (Austin 1962: 15). The view adopted was reinforced by showing that the distinction between illocution and perlocution (Austin 1962: 109-120), which is commonly misunderstood, delimits illocutionary acts to the social or civil domain.

This position is, in fact, an invitation to reconsider the terms in which illocutionary acts are usually defined. To see why, let us take, as a starting point, the paradigm established by Searle, which, as was mentioned in chapter 2, is a variation of Austin's general felicity conditions (Austin 1962: 14-15). According to it, every type of act has four kinds of rules (Searle 1969: 54-71). One is about the 'propositional content' of the utterance that is used to perform the act; another states its 'preparatory' conditions, *ie* those that have to obtain at the moment of utterance; there is also a 'sincerity' rule, which specifies the speakers intentions and beliefs supposedly necessary for the act to count as such; the last rule is called 'essential', and it describes the effect of the act.

The prototypical analysis of an act in these terms is that of promising. From Searle's summary (1969: 63), which illustrates well the meaning of the four rule types, the following scheme can be obtained:

Promising.

- *Propositional content*. Future act A of speaker S.
- *Preparatory*. S believes the hearer H prefers S's doing to his not doing A. It is not obvious to S and H that S would do A in the normal course of events.
- *Sincerity*. S intends to do A.
- *Essential*. S undertakes the obligation to do A.

The four types of rules seem to capture the essence of illocutionary acts. In fact, by specifying rules of each type Searle can distinguish several types of acts (Searle 1969: 64). Nevertheless, the rule types have been subject to different criticisms, among others by Levinson (1983: 278-79). Probably the most incisive are Edmondson's, and I believe their discussion can be very illuminating:

> A first problem is the propositional content rule, *ie* determining whether and in what sense a proposition P is expressed in an utterance T. The preparatory rule...suffers from the weakness that H's preferences and S's beliefs as to H's preferences are not open for inspection, except in so far as we may deduce these from the discourse itself. Similarly the sincerity condition clearly offers no identificational criterion, as following Gricean co-operative principles we assume sincerity. Finally, the essential condition provides simply a dictionary definition of the notion of promising...
>
> (Edmondson 1981: 21)

Edmondson's observations divide Searle's rules in two sets. On the one hand, we have the propositional content rule and the essential condition, which, for Edmondson, are inadequate; on the other, we have the preparatory rule and the sincerity condition, which are "not open for inspection".

Clearly, delimiting our objects of study to directly observable entities has many advantages. But it seems to me that the fact that the third and fourth rules

in fact what Edmondson himself proposes in sections that follow the one being considered (see *eg* Edmondson 1981: 87-94).

In other words, we wish to record both the acts performed by individual participants in an event and the act pairs, or even sequences, constituted by those acts. Units larger than the act, such as Edmonson's 'bet', are definitely needed, but giving them the name 'act', and thus leaving the basic unit nameless will not help much —or rather, it will help, but at the same time will cause damage—.

Not to leave loose ends, and to reinforce the warning about the use of everyday terms made at various points in this thesis, it can be noted that when the verb 'to bet' is used performatively, it is associated with the act of placing or proposing a bet, whereas the reporting use of the verb is in expressions referring not to that act alone but to the cluster of proposal plus acceptance of the bet, as in (1) and (2), respectively.

(1) I bet you a pound he didn't do it yesterday.

(2) Peter wanted to bet a pound, but John refused. So they only bet fifty pence.

We can now go back to Searle's essential rule. It is clear that the idea of undertaking an obligation cannot be left out of any definition of promising, whether dictionary or technical. This is why I said Edmondson's objection was too strong. And it is too strong: the idea does need to be modified. A promise is, strictly, not the undertaking, but the move towards, or the proposal of, undertaking the obligation. Obligations are contracted with others and, hence, the intrelocutor has to accept the proposal. This might not be evident because in many cultures a non-rejection, and therefore almost any further act, counts as the acceptance. But it is not difficult to think of situations that would be reported as a rejection of the obligation. Take (3), for instance.

(3) He: I promise to do it at any cost.
She: No, please don't take risks.

In cases like this, we want to say that he promised, even though the obligation was not really undertaken in the end.

to explain the English lexeme 'promising', rather than to establish an analytic category; this is made quite explicit later on (Edmondson 1981: 22). On the basis of what I said in Chapter 3, I could not disagree that analysts must be aware of this danger.

Edmondson's second point is an objection to Searle's explaining the said meaning via an equative predication: "if we know what it is to undertake a commitment, we presumably know what it is to make a 'promise' " (Edmondson 1981: 22). I could not but disagree with this objection, though again on the basis of Chapter 3.

In order not to base my disagreement only on a conception of definitions, and take Edmondson's objection in its own terms, it is necessary to indicate the direction of his argument. Although this will introduce further complications, it will also allow us to note certain valid contributions which can help shape a theory of discourse.

Edmondson's thesis is that illocutionary acts are "co-operative achievements or conversational outcomes" (1981: 26), by which he means that for what is usually understood as an act to really be an act, it must have been accepted. A bet is not a bet if it is not taken, he says.

The thesis focuses on something undeniably important, which further stresses the social and interactive nature of illocution I have been emphasizing. There is, however, a problem with this thesis. If an act only takes place if it is accepted, what happens when it is not? According to the thesis, nothing happens, which is definitely unacceptable. Edmondson's own discussion of promises betrays the position: "The conversation may then conclude without my having entered into any commitment to buy a new vase, although I have 'promised' to do so" (1981: 26).

The untenability of the thesis is even more evident when we think of a promise which was accepted during one communicative event and taken back by the speaker or 'given back' by the hearer in another. The negotiative nature of discourse, which is Edmondson's concern, makes it impossible to define analytic categories on the sole basis of final outcomes. What we want to be able to record is every moment in the illocutionary game, however tentative it may be, which is

are about unobservables is not necessarily a weakness. In order not to get into a long philosophical discussion, let us simply remember that physicists have never actually seen an atom; they have only deduced their presence from their macroscopic effects and, recently, from their paths.

If the preparatory and sincerity rules were necessary, then all we could, and should, do is to demand the derivation of empirical consequences from these rules. However, are they necessary? I believe they are not, for the reasons that follow.

The inadequate/unobservable distinction is the reflection of a more fundamental distinction about the kinds of rules, or rather the kinds of entities the rules are about. The apparently inadequate rules specify aspects of observable discourse, whereas the unobservable rules relate to the psychological or mental states supposedly associated with such aspects.

Now, the hearer's states belong in the domain of perlocution and are to be described as the effects of processes denoted by verbs such as: "convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading" (Austin 1962: 109). I do not see why, then, the speaker's states are to be taken as part of the social or, in Austin's terms, 'conventional' performance of acts described in terms such as "informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, etc." (Austin 1962: 109).

If our field of enquiry is philosophy of mind, philosophy of will, or even social psychology, it is understandable that we be primarily interested in whether a speaker is sincere or not when making a promise. But if our field is discourse analysis, then what we must be interested in is describing the promise itself in social or conventional terms. Putting it differently, S may not intend to do A and still promise to do A. In that case, of course, he or she will have to, so to speak, take back the promise with an adequate excuse or assume the social sanctions for not keeping it. What the discourse analyst has to describe then is, precisely, that the person who makes a promise becomes, by making it, subject to a set of social obligations.

Here we see that Edmondson's opposition to Searle's essential rule for promising is too strong. The phrase that states the opposition carries with it, I think, two points. Firstly, Edmondson wants to stress that what Searle is doing is

Edmondson's objection to Searle's propositional content rule is, again, too strong. It is true that in the following fabricated exchange he provides (1981: 21) A does not strictly express a proposition in his second intervention (underlined by Edmondson).

(4) A: I think I'll go and get a beer.
B: Oh, get me one too, will you?
A: Okay.

Let us, for the sake of the argument, agree that "Okay" is a promise (Edmondson 1981: 21-22), which on the basis of the previous analysis we would probably have to reject. What has to be clear is that the analyst must somehow relate "Okay" to the proposition expressed by B, namely (5).

(5) Get (A, B, beer)

"Okay" here is not like hello in greetings, which, it is true, is not related to any proposition whatsoever. The expression counts as the undertaking to carry out the action described by B's proposition, *ie* (5), undeniably a future act of A.

The proposition describing an action promised is, then, not necessarily a content of the utterance that counts as the promise, but such a proposition must somehow be present for the speaker making the promise and the hearer accepting or refusing it. In the example above, the proposition's being involved only by virtue of the interaction strengthens Edmonson's view about the nature of discourse; but it does not necessarily imply the proposition has to be left out of the analysis.

The last statement points to a more basic question: ¿can the propositional content of a given speech act distinguish this from another act? To do so, let us first analyse the content. The point about specifying it is to identify an action and the agent of an action. Thus, we would record (6) as the propositional content of (7).

(6) Bring cup of tea (speaker)

(7) Would you care for a cup of tea?

Of course, a more detailed propositional analysis of (7) would first identify (8) as the proposition expressed and would record (6) as a derived proposition.

(8) Care for a cup of tea (hearer)

An even more delicate analysis would treat both propositions as consisting of two arguments, *ie* they would have the form of (9) and (10).

(9) Bring (speaker, cup of tea)

(10) Care for (hearer, cup of tea)

But for the present purposes, it is sufficient to consider (6) as the propositional content of (7).

Now, if the utterance were (11), and the propositional content were (12), instead of (6), then we would have a different act, a request rather than an offer.

(11) Could I have a cup of tea?

(12) Bring cup of tea (hearer).

But if the utterance were (13), and the content (14), the act would not change. We would still have an offer.

(13) Do you want a piece of cake?

(14) Bring piece of cake (speaker)

Hence, the specific action to be performed does not determine the speech act, but the actor does. This is the answer to the basic question. Then, the propositional content rule is important because it specifies the subject who becomes committed by the act, although it could be argued that this information is also contained in the essential rule.

In sum, I would definitely agree with Edmonson on the conception that doing things with words is a cooperative achievement. However, I do not think this im-

plies the need to abandon the idea of acts as individual contributions to discourse. What it does show is that a parameter has to be added to the standard analysis, to deal with proposals and agreements.

On the other hand, there is no reason to eliminate from the definition of an act ideas such as those involved in Searle's preparatory and essential rules for promising. What has to be eliminated are beliefs and intentions to motivate, for they belong in a domain different from illocution. If the term 'intention' is used at all, it ought to be restricted to perlocutionary changes.

In more concrete terms, what should be retained from the discussion so far is that to specify what certain acts are we have to state: 1) who is the subject involved, the speaker (as in a promise), the hearer (as in a request) or both (as in a bet), and 2) whether they are proposing an obligation, accepting that it be undertaken or actually undertaking it.

Reformulating the theory

I believe such kinds of considerations ought to be the basis for a more general account of illocutionary acts; but, as suggested in earlier chapters, other deontic notions, besides obligations, must be employed. This is obvious even from a brief and simple reflection on acts such as inviting. If we were to develop an analysis of this act in terms of Searle's types of rules, the propositional content rule would be something like: future event E; S will be host. The essential rule would be of this sort: it counts as allowing H to be present at E.

It may be noted, in passing, that in this discussion we would again be faced with the problem of everyday vocabulary. Very often 'invitation' is used to refer to a compound of the illocutionary act described above plus some features in the perlocutionary domain, such as S showing that H's presence is desired or S wishing to please H. Nevertheless, these features are not strictly necessary, which is shown by the existence of lexical and paralinguistic means to indicate in a report if an invitation was accompanied by them or not or, even, if they were sincere or not. "T'was a formal invitation" with falling or falling-rising intonation on the first syllable of "formal" would, for example, very probably mean that H's presence was not really desired. (A rising intonation on the same syllable would

give the utterance a very different meaning: that E is going to be formal, or that the illocutionary force of the act was actually more than that of an invitation).

Returning to the point that was being introduced, if we consult works on logic and the social sciences (*eg* di Bernanrdo 1974), we will find that von Wright's deontic logic (1951) is adequate for the analysis of socially sanctioned conduct. In this system there are four basic normative notions: 'obligatory', 'forbidden', 'permitted', and 'indifferent'. If these are used in combination with the operators of truth-functional logic, only one notion is strictly necessary to start with, because the others can be defined in terms of it. It seems convenient to choose 'permitted' to be this starting notion (di Bernardo 1974: 235). In this case, the definitions for the other notions are:

Obligatory. An act is said to be obligatory if not doing it is not permitted.
Forbidden. A forbidden act is an act not permitted.
Indifferent. An act is indifferent if both doing it and not doing it are permitted.

If we represent an act by 'A' and indicate each notion by its initial letter, we could, following di Bernardo (1974: 235), express the threee definitions as:

(1) $OA = not\ P(not\ A)$

(2) $FA = not\ PA$

(3) $IA = PA\ and\ P(not\ A)$

A few comments could be helpful before the notions are used for the purposes of this section. Not all deontic logic systems start with 'permitted'; there are systems, more developed than von Wright's, which start with the notion of 'sanction', and define 'permitted' as 'not sanctioned' (see, *eg* Anderson 1966). This seems to be useful for the development of certain kinds of discussions which distinguish cases where sanction is necessarily provided from cases where it is flexible (di Bernardo 1974: 237). However, I think that, at least for the present, discourse analysts need not get involved in such discussions; it is possible to leave 'sanction' as a pre-theoretical term, and take 'permitted' as the primitive undefined notion.

Now, if we depend on the everyday meaning of 'permitted' and 'indifferent', they might appear to be synonymous. However, when the logician wants a system of the sort defined above, 'indifferent' is needed because, according to such definitions, what is obligatory is permitted. It is, then, necessary to distinguish what is permitted and obligatory from what is permitted and not obligatory. In other words, the important distinction is that between 'obligatory', and 'indifferent'.

It follows that if we were to use the notions as the basis for a theory of illocution, the actual use of 'permitted' could either be ambigous or redundant. If we only said something was permitted, it might not be clear if it was obligatory or indifferent; and when we had already said that it was either obligatory or indifferent, it would necessarily follow that it was also permitted. Therefore, in rigorous definitions of speech acts we only need the three notions defined in (1), (2) and (3), although in certain types of analyses, if context allows us to resolve ambiguities, it might be more natural to use 'permitted', rather than 'indifferent'.

Taking these ideas into account, a conception of illocution emerges from the earlier discussion in this chapter and the remarks on chapters 4, 5 and 6. The first element of this conception is the point that any illocutionary act or action has a deontic value at the moment it occurs. For example, after a sequence of acts, thanking may be obligatory (for a given subject), whereas at other moments it may be indifferent or even forbidden.

Thus, it is possible that an act will simply comply with its deontic value obtaining at the moment it occurs, as would be the case with the provision of previously requested information. Of course, this means that an act could also violate the existing conditions, as happens with unfulfilled promises.

But this leads us to the other elements of the conception, for another possibility is that the act could cause a change in the values of the possible acts and actions to follow; this is, for example, what would happen with an invitation or a greeting, which would respectively turn the invited action and the answering to the greeting indifferent and obligatory. Moreover, the act could also propose, rather than alone cause, the change, which is clear from the discussion in the previous section. Clearly, the act could also be an acceptance or a rejection of an already proposed change.

An application

Let us illustrate this conception in the analysis of a stretch of discourse. This will also allow for the introduction of a further notion needed to deal with the elements of illocution: the notion of relevant context. The stretch I have chosen is a dialogue between a woman and her husband (an adapted and translated version of one in Mallea 1936):

(4) Husband: Are we going to the party?
Wife: I thought we were.
Husband: Well, we don't have to.
Wife: I know, but we said we were going.
Husband: We can call Ernesto and Jacqueline...
Wife: Yes, of course; but don't you think we should have called last weeK? I mean, if you don't want to go...
Husband: All right, we'll go.

Before the interaction there are a series of conditions, a context. The husband is committed to go to a party with his wife. This commitment is linked to another one which belongs in a wider context: both interlocutors contracted an obligation with Ernesto and Jacqueline, because they accepted a previous invitation and later confirmed their attendance.

The first utterance, "are we going to the party?", is used to perform the act of proposing that it be allowed to propose changes to the first context, the commitment of the husband to the wife. This proposal is rejected with the apparently innocent "I thought we were", which restates the context.

Nevertheless, the proposal that proposals get the value indifferent has an effect. This is due to the fact that the rejection is not definite. This, in turn, is a consequence of a rule (that both spouses accept) which says that it is valid to make proposals so long as what they refer to is relevant, and the proposal to allow proposals has brought the commitment to the terrain of relevance.

The next intervention is more direct; the husband does not propose that proposals be permitted: he simply proposes. "Well, we don't have to go" explicitly posits that the value indifferent replaces the value obligatory.

This time the rejection is achieved by bringing the second obligation to the terrain of relevance, which broadens the context under discussion: "...we said we were going".

Again, we have a proposal that proposals of change be deontically indifferent; this time, the object is the second obligation, namely the one wife and husband together have *vis-a-vis* Ernesto and Jacqueline: "We can call..." This time the rejection is definite. The wife adduces a rule about when it is permitted to renounce an obligation: "...we should have called last week..."

Everything comes to be as it was in the beginning: "All right, we'll go." We have witnessed a battle over deontic conditions at the end of which they remain the same. All acts were proposals of change and extensions of context. Even so, the dialogue stresses the deontic nature of illocutionary acts.

Further examples

Implicit in the previous analysis is a consideration of the social roles of the subjects involved; the account makes sense because we know we are talking about two spouses. Although this type of element seems not to be important in Searle's scheme, it has been focused on in conceptions that have had considerable effects in applied linguistics, such as Labov's (1969) account of orders mentioned in Chapter 7, and it has been taken as fundamental in the delimitation of corpora in studies of paramount significance (see, for instance, Sinclair and Coulthard 1975), as well as in the design of pedagogical materials (see, *eg*, Candlin *et al* 1974). Therefore, here, only a brief space will be devoted to showing the need to consider roles, in the form of some simple examples that further illustrate the conception of illocution as deontic intervention.

Let us begin by completing an idea which has been developed at various points above. Entering another person's home is prohibited. An invitation will make it permitted. However, the invitation has to be issued by the home owner

(or some person who has received the power to invite from the owner). If the inviting were done by someone else, it would be void, or unhappy. As Austin (1962: 15) put it: "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked."

Now, if I were a plumber and the owner of a house asked me to fix a piping and I accepted, we would have performed a series of acts at the end of which, among other things, it would be obligatory for me to come into his house and fix the piping. Realizing this last action would, in turn, count as complying with the obligation created. This would, in such context, commit the owner to give me a sum of money. And that action would, obviously, count as the act of paying.

Between the act of requesting the repair and the act of paying, other acts which were forbidden before the former and would again be prohibited after the latter would be indifferent, such as asking the owner about his family's hygiene habits. In other words, my social role would be variable, rather than fixed; and it would vary because of the acts performed. This means the role and the deontic context are, as it were, two sides of the same coin. Having a certain role is having to comply with the conditions established by given sets of acts and being in a position to perform other determined sets of acts.

The above implies a completely detailed analysis of a discourse would require the use of complex sociological information about the roles of the participants. However, it also entails an analysis at an acceptable level of delicacy could be carried out by specifying the roles in simple, non-specialist terms. Perhaps in most cases it will be sufficient to specify whether the speaker and the hearer have a symmetrical or a non-symmetrical relationship *vis-a-vis* the acts in question. Thus, we could characterize an owner just as someone who has the right to issue invitations and request repairs, without entering into legal considerations. Likewise, a boss would be a person in a position to order, a spouse would be an equal, and so on.

A conclusion

The elements of illocution are, then:

1. The type of intervention on the deontic context. ¿Does it comply, violate, or modify it? ¿Is it a proposal of change?

2. The subjects affected. ¿Who is or would be bound by the deontic conditions in question, the speaker, the hearer, both, or some third person?

3. The role relationship between subjects. ¿Is it symmetric or non-symmetric? ¿If it is asymmetric, is the speaker in a position of authority or is he subordinate to the hearer?

4. The deontic values involved. ¿Is what is in question obligatory, forbidden or indifferent? ¿If a change of conditions is proposed or effected, is it from obligatory to indifferent or is it a different change?

Some definitions

Let us exemplify the use of such elements, by showing some of the distinctions we can make with them. The following are essential sketches of various speech acts, whose names could or could not have exactly corresponding everyday meanings:

Promise. Proposal; speaker; symmetric; indifferent to obligatory.

Request. Proposal; hearer; symmetric; indifferent to obligatory.

Agreement. Assent; hearer; symmetric; indifferent to obligatory.

Acceptance. Assent; speaker; symmetric; indifferent to obligatory.

Order. Effect; hearer; asymmetric (authority); indifferent to obligatory.

Execution. Comply; speaker; obligatory.

Nomination. Proposal; third person; symmetric to asymmetric (authority).

Investment. Proposal; hearer; symmetric to asymmetric (authority).

Accession. Assent; speaker; symmetric to asymmetric (authority).

Declination. Rejection; speaker; symmetric to asymmetric (authority).

Act sequences and act classes

From the previous definitions, it can be seen that the four element view of illocutionary acts can produce a more systematic classification of acts than Searle's (1976). This will be commented on in the following chapter, because, as suggested in Chapter 5, some major differences between the two taxonomies involve the fundamental distinction between illocution and dissertation.

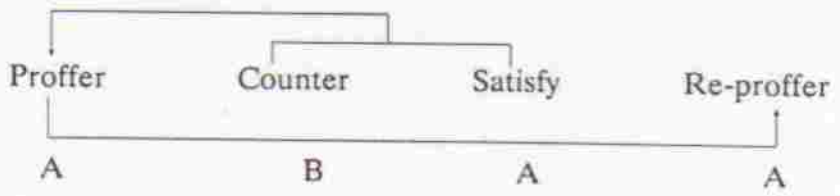
Another advantage of the view is that it explains many of the coding confusions noted in chapters 1 and 2. What the Mallea dialoque tells us, in a negative fashion, is that speakers' participation in discourse is to some extent goal oriented. This is probably the source of Austin's stress on their intentions. But the (intuitive or explicit) realization of that fact is almost surely what makes analysts concentrate on the deontic outcomes of sequences of acts. This is evident in the work by Blum-Kulka et al (1987) criticized in Chapter 1.

To make the point clear, it should be stated that there is nothing wrong in principle with studying outcomes, so long as the researcher is aware that he is not observing individual acts directly. Otherwise he will make mistakes comparable to saying that no act was performed at all by the husband or the wife in the dialogue.

Of course, the constructive criticism would now be to suggest that the concept of act sequences be focused on, to bridge individual acts and final outcomes. There have been a number of interesting contributions that could be used for this purpose. Conversation analysts, for example, use the notion of adjacency pairs to refer to interventions that have to combine in binary constructions, such as greetings (see Schegloff and Sacks 1973). The obligatory occurrence of the

second intervention makes it a part of a larger unit, the pair. A more sophisticated concept of not necessarily adjacent pairs is implicit in Edmondson's 1981 model of spoken discourse, which is designed to capture phenomena like the one represented by the lines and arrows:

Figure 3. *Edmondson's diagram.*



To develop a proper view of act sequences that integrates conversation analysis and Edmonson's model is outside the scope of this thesis. But the direction these developments suggest will be retaken in the last section of this chapter and in Chapter 10, because it can indicate the route for interesting applications of the findings presented here.

Let us now focus on another source of confusions, besides taking sequences for acts: identifying acts with act types, which results from considering only one or two of the defining elements. This is the problem in the article by Ellis (1992) also criticized in Chapter 1. He includes orders under requests because he assumes, perhaps unconsciously, that establishing the person subjected is sufficient to distinguish one act from another. That is, he equates the whole class of initiatives to commit the hearer with one of the members of such class, namely, requests. In other words, his mistake is to ignore type of intervention and role relationship. More will be said about this in Chapter 10.

This leads us to a third source of confusion, which is inconsistent classification. What the proposed view implies is that a systematic and comprehensive division of illocutionary acts would be a four dimensional matrix. This, of course, means that we could do what Ellis attempts to do, *ie* concentrate only on one

dimension, but, again, provided that we are aware that is what we are doing. Unfortunately, most discourse analysis schemes mix dimensions inadvertedly; at some moment they classify according to one dimention and at the next according to another. Simple examples of this problem are found in the pioneering scheme by Bellack *et al* (1966). As said in Chapter 2, 'Soliciting' and 'structuring' are two of its categories. Ignoring for the moment the fact that the latter is a complex compound that involves propositional elements as well as speech act elements, whereas the former is a simple category, we can say that the two are alike, in that they focus on subjects and values. Now, 'responding', a third category, is very different, in that it focuses on the type of intervention. The reader will find similar inconsistencies in other coding schemes that followed Bellack's, including the ECS and Sinclair and Coulthard's model (see Chapter 2 for more extensive comments on these).

I think the three types of confusions cannot only be explained easily once discourse is viewed from the perspective proposed here, but also avoided. Chapter 10 indicates how.

Defense of illocutionary acts

The previous two sections consider the advantages the views proposed in this thesis have once the idea that discourse is to be studied in speech act terms has been accepted. But it is also important to see to which extent they contribute to the plausibility of the idea itself. Probably the best way of doing so is by answering rejections of the idea.

The critiques of speech acts which have had more impact on scholars are of two sorts. One claims that speech act analysis is impossible. The other that it is irrelevant.

The original proponent of the first sort of criticism was Levinson. His argument has been adopted and extended by Brown and Yule in a very influential textbook:

> An important practical drawback is expressed by Levinson (1980: 20) in the following terms: 'If one looks even cursorily at a transcribed record of a conversation, it becomes immediately clear that we do not know

> how to assign speech acts in a non-arbitrary way.' The problem with identifying speech acts should not necessarily lead the analyst to abandon their investigation. Rather, it should lead the analyst to recognise that the way speech acts are conventionally classified into discrete act-types such as 'request', 'promise', 'warn', etc. may lead to an inappropriate view of what speakers do with utterances. From the speaker's point of view several sentences (or syntactic chunks) strung together may constitute a single act.
> Thus, a fairly extended utterance may be interpreted as a warning or as an apology. On the other hand, one utterance may perform several simultaneous acts.
> Consider the following utterance of a husband to his wife:
>
> (24) Hey, Michele, you've passed the exam.
>
> He may be 'doing' several things at once. He may be simultaneously 'asserting', 'congratulating', 'apologising' (for his doubts), etc. As it is presently formulated, Speech Act theory does not offer the discourse analyst a way of determining how a particular set of linguistic elements, uttered in a particular conversational context, comes to receive a particular interpreted meaning.
>
> (Brown and Yule 1983: 233)

The main premise in this attack is that analysts have not produced an algorithm to derive a speech act from any sentence. A second premise is that, if the algorithm existed, one and only one act should be derived for every sentence. An important presupposition accompanies these premises: that analysts should have already produced the algorithm if speech act theory was sound. The central conclusion, devastating in spite of the rhetorical mitigation offered by "as it is presently formulated", is that speech act analysis cannot contribute anything to discourse analysis. The argument is apparently supported by more specific observations, such as: 1) there are cases when the speaker does not perceive what analysts would regard as individual acts, only what has been referred to here as outcomes; 2) utterance (24) is used to perform several speech acts, rather than one.

The main premise is true and the second one is a matter open to discussion. The first observation requires empirical support which is not provided and all the evidence that could be adduced in a deliberation like Brown and Yule's or the present one is contrary to it. The presupposition and the second observation are

definitely mistaken and, therefore, should be regarded as evidence of the need for more speech act theory, rather than less. The conclusion is unacceptable.

Let us take the observations and the presupposition first, and then the question about the number of acts per sentence. That in certain conversations speakers only perceive outcomes would mean that they do not react to the individual acts within those conversations. However, examples like Mallea's dialogue and our most basic intuitions tell us that the model speaker does fine tune his interventions to the changing deontic scene and that deviations from this behaviour are either failures or intentional refusals to conform, as opposed to normal conduct, which is what Brown and Yule's characterization implies.

Other sorts of evidence in support of the reality of speech acts for speakers have been provided at different points in this and previous chapters. One is the recognition certain jokes reveal of coherence as distinct from other types of unity. Another is the variable meaning of speech act verbs, which, like 'bet', can refer either to individual proposals or to final outcomes.

Now, Brown and Yule's description of (24) reveals the types of confusions that have justified this thesis. The simultaneous performance of two or more acts could become problematic if it led to a violation of coding principles or if the acts were contradictory. But these situations could arise only if the acts were in the same domain. At best, 'assertion' is a dissertation act, if not a part of one. 'Congratulating' belongs in the perlocutionary domain and 'etc.' is meaningless. The only illocutionary act left is 'apologizing'. So, even if we accepted the second premise, the observation would not warrant the conclusion.

Turning to the presupposition, what the original distinctions by Strawson, Austin, Searle and Widdowson tell us is that neither propositions nor acts are contained in sentences. Therefore it is not rational to demand that analysts produce derivational algorithms, let alone expect these to have been produced already. If they are at all possible, they will be obtained after successful complex analyses have provided data for building them, and they cannot be established as requirements prior to simple analyses.

The correct scientific strategy at this moment is to demand criteria to verify or falsify the identification of acts by the analyst. And although some of these

criteria will probably involve experimental and qualitative research of production and reception, some others will have to be built into the analysis itself, because there has to be evidence in the discourse; acts leave traces. But the only way to arrive at such trace criteria will be by improving our theoretical frameworks, rather than renouncing them. In fact, the kind of definitions arrived at in this chapter take us very near to the criteria. The type of intervention implies insertion in the context provided by other acts and, hence, forces explanatory cogency.

Let us now take the critique that claims that speech act analysis is not relevant. It has been put forth by Sperber and Wilson. In a most trascendental book, they say:

> A crucial assumption behind this pragmatic programme is that the assignment of every utterance to a particular speech-act type is part of what is communicated and plays a necessary role in comprehension. What is surprising is how little attention has been paid to justifying this assumption. It is one thing to invent, for one's own theoretical purposes, a set of categories to use in classifying utterances of native speakers, or to try to discover the set of categories that native speakers use in classifying their own utterances. It is quite another to claim that such classification plays a necessary role in communication and comprehension. To see the one type of investigation as necessarily shedding light on the other is rather like moving from the observation that tennis players can generally classify strokes as volleys, lobs, approach shots, cross-court backhands and so on, to the conclusion that they are unable to perform or return a stroke without correctly classifying it.
>
> (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 244)

To this, after a brief description of how speech acts constitute a game of bridge, they add:

> However, the study of bidding is part of the study of bridge, not of verbal communication. Generally speaking, the study of institutional speech acts such as bidding, or declaring war, belongs to the study of institutions.
>
> (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 245)

Again, the attack is supported on unwarranted and false assumptions. Among these, for example, is the idea that the main concern of speech act theory has been the decoding process. It has not...yet. Its main concern has been what, using Sperber and Wilson's term, might be called 'institutional meaning' of utterances. Therefore, someone who aimed to demonstrate that speech acts are not a legitimate object of study for anyone interested in communication would have to show that what speakers do when they speak is not done. That person would, in turn, have to explain coherent but non cohesive and unconnected responses, among other communication phenomena, without using the notion of speech act. But the very examples Sperber and Wilson give show that people do do things with words and that interlocutors not only understand what is being done, but they also respond to it.

The worst assumption in the attack is that the speech act "programme" claims speakers consciously classify acts. To base the conclusion that speech act theory should be left out of communication studies on this assumption is like concluding that grammar is irrelevant for the study of language because grammarians claim that speakers classify sentences the same way they do, or like rejecting Sperber and Wilson's theory on the grounds that they say speakers explicitly identify explicatures and implicatures. Just as Sperber and Wilson do not say so, nor grammarians equate knowledge of grammar with knowledge about grammar, speech act analysts have never claimed that speakers necessarily theorize while they speak, let alone attributed their theories to speakers.

The only valid conclusion that can be drawn from Sperber and Wilson's views is one mentioned earlier in this chapter, namely that the student of communication is not well equiped to carry out certain communication studies, and, therefore, interdisciplinary efforts may be necessary. To study bridge communication, besides a discourse analyst, a bridge expert would certainly be required. A detailed investigation might even require other people, such as a game theoretician. But this does not grant the exclusion of speech act analysis, nor "the study of institutions", from research about communication.

It is interesting to observe here that Sperber and Wilson themselves use speech act insights. In the best exposition of their own theory, that the most relevant interpretation of an utterance is that which yields more implications at the lowest processing cost, they say:

> As always, the speaker must have some reason for thinking that this surplus of information will be relevant, and more relevant than any alternative information she could provide. She may know, for example, that the hearer is wondering what drink to offer Susan.
>
> (Sperber and Wilson 1986b: 383; my emphasis)

Further on, they add:

> The indirect answer (2b) simultaneously *refuses* the *offer* of coffee and *explains* the refusal, thus saving the hearer the time he might have spent speculating...
>
> (Sperber and Wilson 1986b: 383; my emphasis)

The authors almost explicitly recognize that they are using a notion of relevance more complex than their definition suggests. Clearly, it is not only the benefit/processing-cost relation which determines it, but also (mainly?) the deontic context that establishes the obligation to answer offers and explain refusals. In this connection, it would seem that the first mention of the speech act issue, "she *may* know, *for example*, that the hearer is *wondering* what drink to offer" (my emphasis), is both a device to introduce the topic and a mechanism to avoid its proper recognition as part of the object of study.

Putting the defense in the authors' tone, it is one thing not to want to focus on speech acts, or one's definitions of relevance not being capable of handling them. It is quite another to argue in an acceptable way that speech acts are irrelevant.

Applications

The inevitability of speech acts directs us to an application in the classroom of the insights in this chapter: the use of what teacher and students do as teacher and students. The organization of the various types of activities, *eg* expositions, group work, or evaluation, offer opportunities for practising offers, requests, or-

ders and many other illocutionary acts, possibly including nominations and appointments, as will be suggested in Chapter 10.

The roles of teacher and student are often implicitly degraded by communicative forms of teaching which advocate their substitution for "authentic" characters, such as those of buyer and seller. However, in so far as these roles are constitutive of the social set of activities called 'education', and people participating in it do not only play, but actually assume them, one can hardly find less artificial settings to work with speech acts than the classroom interaction.

There is, so to speak, a sociology of the classroom, which probably operates all the time, even when students are involved in character play. And this sociology might determine learning outcomes. Indeed, the most important result of the Xochimilco study commented on in Chapter 2 was that students participating in one kind of interaction had opportunities to practise a wider variety of illocutionary acts than students participating in another (as well as more opportunities for practising).

If the exploitation of teacher-student and student-student interaction as pedagogic material is a plausible idea, then, perhaps increasing the students' involvement in classroom affairs and classroom management might also contribute to their effectively doing more things with words. And if this is so, then, reflecting on and discussing about classroom events would probably also have possitive effects on learning. But this would require appropriate conceptual frameworks that focus on the relevant aspects of discourse. The use of this chapter's findings for such purposes is another of the themes of Chapter 10.

Summary

The idea that illocutionary acts create and modify deontic contexts has been developed, and four types of elements to define those acts systematically have been isolated. These are: intervention, value, subject and role. The resulting view has been employed to clarify coding confusions, defend speech act analysis and suggest that classroom interaction be used as pedagogic material.