

# (On) Searle on Conversation

John R. Searle et al.



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(ON) SEARLE ON CONVERSATION

# *Pragmatics & Beyond*

## *New Series*

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Herman Parret  
*(Belgian National Science Foundation, Universities of Louvain and Antwerp)*

Jef Verschueren  
*(Belgian National Science Foundation, University of Antwerp)*

*Editorial Address:*

*Linguistics (GER)*  
*University of Antwerp (UIA)*  
*Universiteitsplein 1*  
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*(On) Searle on Conversation*

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by

JOHN R. SEARLE ET AL.

compiled and introduced by

HERMAN PARRET

*Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research  
and Universities of Louvain and Antwerp*

and

JEF VERSCHUEREN

*Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research  
and University of Antwerp*

JOHN BENJAMINS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
AMSTERDAM/PHILADELPHIA

1992

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Searle, John R.

(On) Searle on conversation / by John R. Searle, et al. ; compiled and introduced by Herman Parret and Jef Verschueren.

p. cm. -- (Pragmatics & beyond, ISSN 0922-842X ; new ser. 21)

Includes index.

1. Conversation. 2. Pragmatics. 3. Speech acts (Linguistics). I. Parret, Herman. II. Verschueren, Jef. III. Title. IV. Series.

P95.45.S4 1991

306.4'4--dc20

91-43672

ISBN 90 272 5033 2 (Eur.)/1-55619-289-4 (US) (alk. paper)

CIP

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## (ON) SEARLE ON CONVERSATION: AN INTRODUCTION

**Herman Parret**

*Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research  
and Universities of Louvain and Antwerp*  
and

**Jef Verschueren**

*Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research  
and University of Antwerp*

On the occasion of an international conference, held in 1981 at the Universidade Estadual of Campinas (Brazil), where linguists and philosophers of language met to debate issues of dialogue and conversation, John Searle presented a controversial lecture. This lecture was first published in 1986 under the title *Notes on Conversation*<sup>1</sup> and was revised several times afterwards. The present volume offers the most recent version. Because of the importance of the article for conversation analysis, and for pragmatics in general, we deemed it useful to present a file composed of (i) John Searle's target article, (ii) eight original comments written from a diversity of perspectives by Julian Boyd, Marcelo Dascal, David Holdcroft, Andreas Jucker, Eddy Roulet, Marina Sbisà, Emanuel Schegloff, and Jürgen Streeck, and (iii) a 'reply to replies' by John Searle.<sup>2</sup> This file offers ideas, in the dynamics of argument and

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<sup>1</sup>In: D.G. Ellis & W.A. Donahue, *Contemporary Issues in Language and Discourse Processing*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>2</sup>The present volume can be seen as a supplement to two recent collections of articles on Searle's work: (i) Ernest Lepore & Robert Van Gulick (eds.), *John Searle and his Critics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. This book contains sections on "Meaning and speech acts," "The mind-body problem," "Perception and the satisfaction of intentionality," "Reference and intentionality," "The background of intentionality and action," "Social explanation," and "Ontology and obligation," each with replies by John Searle. (ii) Armin Burkhardt (ed.), *Speech Acts, Meaning and Intentions: Critical Approaches to the Philosophy of John R. Searle*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990. This book contains contributions by G. Falkenberg, C. Marletti, A. Burkhardt, B. Smith, J.F. Crosby, R.M. Harnish, F.W. Liedtke, W. Baumgartner, M. Bierwisch, E. Rolf, J.J. Katz, R. Wimmer, A. Reboul, and D. Münch.



## 2 *Herman Parret & Jef Verschueren*

counterargument, which will induce linguists to re-evaluate the results of some recent empirical studies in pragmatics. And philosophers will find that Searle points out a number of important problems in relation to the epistemological status of some prevailing tendencies in the field of pragmatics such as conversation analysis (in the Sacks & Schegloff tradition) and conversational logic (as introduced by Grice).

In fact, the collection of papers as a whole speaks for itself and does not require a lengthy introduction. Yet an attempt at formulating some observations from the outside, without getting directly involved in the debate, may be useful.

With his typical sense of clarity and in a strongly coherent fashion, John Searle presents two controversial theses and he makes two proposals. The theses are the following: conversation does not have an intrinsic structure about which a relevant theory can be formulated; and conversations are not subject to (constitutive) rules. The proposals are conceptual in nature rather than descriptive: the specificity of conversation in the domain of text types can be deduced from the shared intentionality involved; and for the interpretation of conversational sequences, one needs the background knowledge against which the meaning of the sequences in question is profiled. We'll comment briefly on Searle's presentation of these theses and proposals, and on the reactions from his 'critics.'

Searle develops two arguments in connection with his first thesis: first, one can discover but few 'interesting' interrelations between speech acts (henceforth SAs), i.e. if SAs are the 'units' of conversational structure, then this structure is minimal; further, conversations do not have a specific and identifiable 'point.' Every SA creates a realm of possibilities for an 'appropriate' response, i.e. a different SA. Looking at conversation, however, such systematic interrelations are few and far between. They are only to be found in adjacency pairs (such as question/answer, offer/acceptance or offer/rejection, greeting/greeting). Even in these ideal cases the connection between SAs is not always canonical. Thus the structure of the question does not necessarily determine the structure of the answer: one can respond to a question of an offer by uttering a command or an indirect SA. The class of commissives involves more strongly structured sequentiality (e.g. an offer does not count as a promise unless it is accepted), but this kind of constraint remains peripheral in relation to the large numbers of SAs to be found in a conversation. In connection with the specific 'point' of conversations Searle observes the heterogeneity of conversational exchanges. What do a doctor-patient dialogue, a conversation between lovers, a cocktail conversation, and a

philosophical debate have in common? Searle argues that the 'point' of each of these types of communicative exchange is external to the conversational structure itself.

Searle's commentators agree with much of the above. But Marina Sbisa and David Holdcroft focus on the issue of the internal structuring of conversations and they raise questions concerning the identity of a SA and the necessity of uptake: if such a necessity exists, this would grant conversational units more than a minimal structure, but in many cases it seems to be absent. Andreas Jucker remarks that the tension between the structural and the functional unity of text or discourse types must be seen on a scale and that one must accept its gradability and continuity: because conversations -- more than other types of communicative exchanges -- are dynamic and process-oriented, their organizational principles are necessarily local; also the speaker's 'point' is local and does not extend across the conversation as a whole.

Searle's second thesis -- that conversations are not subject to constitutive rules -- is even more controversial. Searle mainly rejects the idea that the regularities which are observed in conversation analysis (in the Sacks & Schegloff tradition) can be seen as the result of 'following rules' (such as the rules for conversational turn-taking). The way in which such rules are presented in the classical literature shows that what is involved is a non-falsifiable description rather than a rule. One cannot **not** follow the rule. Nor does the rule play a causal role in bringing about the corresponding verbal behavior: the behavior does not conform to the rule because of the existence of the rule. Therefore, Searle argues that the so-called rules formulated by conversation analysts are not followed by anyone and cannot even be followed.

In his comments, Emanuel Schegloff admits that it is better to abandon the language of rules and that one would be better served by the language of (possible) practices (such as turn-taking practices). But in the process, Schegloff makes a statement which would be hard to digest in a classical SA-framework, viz. the statement that verbal behavior, viewed empirically, is never generated by the 'following of a rule' if one maintains that the rule is necessarily **perceived** as a rule. Thus Schegloff turns against the legalistic contractualism which has characterized SA-theory ever since Austin. For the conversation analyst, verbal behavior is to be seen rather as a complex of generalizable practices which generate describable regularities.

John Searle does not restrict his contribution in the target article of this volume to these two critical theses. He formulates his own positive contribution to the theory of conversation in the form of two proposals which, however, are merely suggested and which are not tested with

reference to conversation as an empirical phenomenon.

First, he suggests that for a minimal understanding of conversation as a theoretical entity, it must be seen as an expression of shared intentionality. This kind of intentionality transcends the conjunction of the speakers' individual intentional states, because in fact it is the intentionality of an inclusive **We** (such as when pushing a car together, an act in which I push the car as an intrinsic contribution to the fact of pushing the car together). Searle puts forward the idea that **shared intentionality** is an important factor in the explanation of any form of social behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Several commentators accept this suggestion. Jürgen Streeck notes that finally this signals an attempt to break through the individualistic premisses of SA-theory. Starting from Mead's intuitions, he emphasizes the importance of internalizing and symbolizing the common experience in conversational interaction, and he expresses the hope that SA-theory, and pragmatics in general, will develop further in this direction. Also Eddy Roulet makes similar comments on Searle's proposal and he adds that shared intentionality is not given in advance but built up in the course of and because of the conversation. Shared intentionality is in fact the object of continuous negotiation and evaluation by the interlocutors. Consecutive units of a conversation have to be seen as moves in the direction of a '*complétude*'. Roulet posits that conversation is guided by an interactive *complétude* constraint.

Searle's second constructive proposal concerns the importance for a theory of conversation of the notion of background. The background is necessary for the mutual understanding by the interlocutors of conversational sequences. In order to understand a sequence, one has to embed the intrinsic semantics of utterances in a network of fundamental beliefs and knowledge which serve as the bedrock on which understanding is based. This background functions as a necessary context in any communicative interaction, and conversational relevance is necessarily measured with reference to it.

The problem is how to give this notion of background a clearer profile, and especially how to make it empirically operational. Some of the commentators offer useful and interesting thoughts on this matter. Marcelo Dascal, for instance, integrates the suggestion into his own cognitivist framework. And also Jucker relates Searle's proposal to the cognitive relevance of conversational sequences vis-à-vis the network of common knowledge and beliefs.

Could one agree with the general conclusion which Dascal attaches

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<sup>3</sup> The same idea is to be found in a number of other recent articles by John Searle (e.g. "Collective intentionality", ms.).

to the discussion? Dascal posits (i) that Searle is right in his defense of SA-theory and its possible extensions; (ii) that he is wrong when he rejects conversation analysis or refuses to accept it as complementary to SA-theory; (iii) that the introduction of the notions of shared intentionality and background is theoretically interesting, even though Searle does not offer a principle for filtering background knowledge, a principle which could make the notion of background empirically operational. The discussion remains open, and a partial solution may be expected from new research results obtained in linguistic pragmatics in general. The present file can be added to a classical debate concerning the complementarity or the exclusivity of different orientations within pragmatics (SA-theory, conversational logic, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, etc.). Proponents of specific approaches have a tendency to deny the complementarity of different orientations and to reduce them to their own. Searle's critical remarks about the Gricean maxims show this tendency: the maxims can either be reduced to SA conditions, or they are regularities the constraints of which are external to the conversation. But in addition to the threat of reductionism, there is another danger which is urgently to be avoided in the light of an integrated pragmatics, viz. the attitude which assigns to semantics the domain of decontextualized meaning, a domain which is autonomous and independent of the area covered by pragmatics, the contextualized meaning of verbal sequences. In the following papers, this classical problem of the delineation of semantics and pragmatics is regularly alluded to. Hence they still embody the attitude referred to. But in spite of these lingering issues (which require a much wider context for discussion), the intentions behind the publication of this conversation file may be satisfied: to revive the debate concerning the epistemological status of conversation analysis and the empirical results it produces. It could turn out that John Searle, by writing his provocative article, might again be at the basis of some important trends in present-day pragmatics -- whether or not in directions he intended.



# CONVERSATION<sup>1</sup>

**John R. Searle**

*University of California, Berkeley*

## I

Traditionally speech act theory has a very restricted subject matter. The speech act scenario is enacted by its two great heroes, "S" and "H"; and it works as follows: S goes up to H and cuts loose with an acoustic blast; if all goes well, if all the appropriate conditions are satisfied, if S's noise is infused with intentionality, and if all kinds of rules come into play, then the speech act is successful and nondefective. After that, there is silence; nothing else happens. The speech act is concluded and S and H go their separate ways. Traditional speech act theory is thus largely confined to single speech acts. But, as we all know, in real life speech acts are often not like that at all. In real life, speech characteristically consists of longer sequences of speech acts, either on the part of one speaker, in a continuous discourse; or it consists, more interestingly, of sequences of exchange speech acts in a conversation, where alternately S becomes H; and H, S.

Now the question naturally arises: Could we get an account of conversations parallel to our account of speech acts? Could we, for example, get an account that gave us constitutive rules for conversations in a way that we have constitutive rules of speech acts? My answer to that question is going to be "No." But we can say some things about conversations; we can get some sorts of interesting insights into the structure of conversations. So, before we conclude that we can't get an analysis of

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<sup>1</sup> This article originated in a lecture I gave at the University of Campinas, Brazil at a conference on Dialogue in 1981. A later version was given at a conference at Michigan State University in 1984. Much of this version is simply a transcript of the Michigan State lecture. Since that lecture was delivered without a text and without notes, it is somewhat more informal than is generally the case with published articles. The original version was published as "Notes on Conversation." in *Contemporary Issues in Language and Discourse Processing*, edited by D.G. Ellis and W.A. Donahue, Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1986. I am indebted to Dagmar Searle, Yoshiko Matsumoto, and Robin Lakoff for comments on the original transcript. I have made additions, revisions, and clarifications for this version, hence the change in the title.

conversations parallel to our analysis of speech acts, let us see what sort of regularities and systematic principles we can find in the structure of conversations.

The first principle to recognize (and it's an obvious one) is that in a dialogue or a conversation, each speech act creates a space of possibilities of appropriate response speech acts. Just as a move in a game creates a space of possible and appropriate countermoves, so in a conversation, each speech act creates a space of possible and appropriate response speech acts. The beginnings of a theory of the conversational game might be a systematic attempt to account for how particular "moves", particular illocutionary acts, constrain the scope of possible appropriate responses. But when we investigate this approach, I believe we will see that we really do not get very far. To show this, let us first consider the most promising cases, so that we can see how special and unusual they are. Let us consider the cases where we do get systematic relationships between a speech act and the appropriate response speech act. The best cases are those that are misleadingly called "adjacency pairs," such as question/answer, greeting/greeting, offer/acceptance or rejection. If we consider question and answer sequences, we find that there are very tight sets of constraints on what constitutes an ideally appropriate answer, given a particular question. Indeed, the constraints are so tight that the semantic structure of the question determines and matches the semantic structure of an ideally appropriate answer. If, for example, I ask you a yes/no question, then your answer, if it's an answer to the question, has to count either as an affirmation or a denial of the propositional content presented in the original question. If I ask you a *wh*-question, I express a propositional function, and your appropriate response has to fill in the value of the free variable. For example, from an illocutionary point of view, the question, "How many people were at the meeting?" is equivalent to "I request you: you tell me the value of X in 'X number of people were at the meeting.'" That is, genuine questions (as opposed to, e.g., rhetorical questions), in my taxonomy at least, are requests; they are directives; and they are in general requests for the performance of speech acts, where the form of the appropriate response speech act is already determined by the form of the question.

However, there are some interesting qualifications to be made to these points about questions. One is this: I said in *Speech Acts*<sup>2</sup> that questions were requests for *information*, and that suggests that every question is a request for an assertion. But that seems obviously wrong if

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<sup>2</sup> Searle, John R., *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969, pp.66.

you think about it. The point was brought home to me very forcefully when the book was in press, and one Friday afternoon a small boy said to me "Do you promise to take us skiing this weekend?" In this case, he was asking for a *promise*, not a piece of factual *information*. He was requesting me either to promise or refuse to promise, and of course, those are speech acts different from assertions.

A second qualification is this: I said that the structure of questions determines and matches the structure of answers. But an apparent counterexample can be found in the exasperating English modal auxiliary verbs. There are cases where the structure of the interrogative does not match that of the appropriate response. If I say to you "Shall I vote for the Republicans?" or "Shall I marry Sally?", the appropriate answer is not "Yes, you shall", or "No, you shall not." Nor even "Yes, you will," or "No, you won't." The appropriate answer is, oddly enough, imperative - "Yes, do" or "No, don't." That is, "Shall I?" doesn't invite a response using a modal auxiliary verb, rather it seems to require an imperative; and thus from an illocutionary point of view it requires a directive.<sup>3</sup>

A third qualification is this: Often a question can be answered by an indirect speech act. In such cases the answer may be semantically and pragmatically appropriate, even though the syntax of the answer does not reflect the syntax of the question. Thus, in an appropriate context, "How many people were at the meeting?" can be answered by any of the following:

Everybody who was invited came.  
I counted 127.  
The auditorium was full.

even though none of these sentences matches the syntactical form of the propositional function expressed in the original question. They are answers in the way the following would not normally be:

None of your business.  
How should I know?  
Don't ask such dumb questions.

There are other classes of speech acts besides questions that serve to determine appropriate responses. An obvious case is direct requests to perform speech acts. Utterances such as "Say something in Portuguese" or "Tell me about last summer in Brazil," are straightforward, direct requests

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Julian Boyd for discussion of this point.



to perform speech acts, and they thus constrain the form of a possible appropriate reply.

The above are obviously two classes of speech acts in conversations where the dialogic sequence of initial utterance and subsequent response is internally related in the sense that the aim of the first speech act is only achieved if it elicits an appropriate speech act in response. How far can we get in discovering other such classes?

Well, a third - and rather large - class, are those cases where the speaker performs a speech act that requires acceptance or rejection on the part of the hearer. For example, an offer, a proposal, a bet, or an invitation all invite a response on the part of the hearer. Their structure constrains the hearer to accept or reject them. Consider, for example, offers. An offer differs from an ordinary promise in that an offer is a conditional promise, and the form of the conditional is that the promise takes effect only if it is explicitly accepted by the hearer. Thus, I am obligated by my offer to you only if you accept the offer. Offers are commissives, but they are conditional commissives, and the condition is of a very special kind, namely, conditional on acceptance by the hearer. In the case of bets, the bet is not even fully made unless it is accepted by the hearer. If I say to you "I bet you five dollars that the Republicans will win the next election," that is not yet a completed bet. It only becomes a bet if you accept it. The bet has only been effectively made if you say "OK, you're on" or "I accept your bet" or some such.

If we consider cases such as offers, bets, and invitations, it looks as if we are at last getting a class of speech acts where we can extend the analysis beyond a single speech act, where we can discuss sequences. But it seems that this is a very restricted class. In assertions, there are no such constraints. There are indeed general conversational constraints of the Gricean sort and other kinds. For example, if I say to you "I think the Republicans will win the next election", and you say to me, "I think the Brazilian government has devalued the Cruzeiro again," at least on the surface your remark is violating a certain principle of relevance. But notice, unlike the case of offers and bets, the illocutionary point of my speech act was nonetheless achieved. I did make an assertion, and my success in achieving that illocutionary point does not depend on your making an appropriate response. In such a case, you are just being rude, or changing the subject, or are being difficult to get on with, if you make such an irrelevant remark. But you do not violate a constitutive rule of a certain kind of speech act or of conversation just by changing the subject.

There are also certain kinds of formal or institutional speech act sequences where there are rules that constrain the sequencing. Think, for example, of courtrooms, formal debates, parliamentary procedures, and

such like. In all of these cases, there are a set of extra-linguistic rules that impose a series of ceremonial or institutional constraints on the sequencing of utterances. The professionals are supposed to know exactly what to say and in what order, because the discourse is highly ritualized. The bailiff says "Everybody rise!", and then everybody rises. The bailiff then says "The Superior Court of the State of California, County of Alameda, is now in session, the Honorable J.B. Smitherby presiding," And then J.B. Smitherby comes and sits down. The bailiff says, "Be seated and come to order", and then we can all sit down. The judge then starts conducting the proceedings in a highly ritualized fashion. Any incorrect speech act is subject to an "objection" which the judge is required to rule on. But that is hardly a good example of natural discourse. On the contrary, if you sit through a court hearing you are struck by its unnatural, highly structured and ceremonial character. Nonetheless there is something to be learned about the nature of conversation in general from this example, and that is that conversation only can proceed given a structure of expectations and presuppositions. I will come back to this point later.

## II

So far it appears that traditional speech act theory will not go very far in giving us sequencing rules for discourse. So let us thrash around and see if we can find some other basis for a theoretical account. What I am going to conclude is that we will be able to get a theoretical account, but it won't be anything like our account of the constitutive rules of speech acts. I want to turn to two efforts or two approaches to giving a theoretical account, and show in what ways I think they are inadequate. They both have advantages, but they also have certain inadequacies. First, Grice's approach with his maxims of conversation, and then some work in a subject that used to be called "ethno-methodology".

Let's start with Grice.<sup>4</sup> He has four maxims of quantity, quality, manner, and relation. (This terminology is, of course, ironically derived from Kant.) Quantity has to do with such things as that you shouldn't say too much or too little. Manner has to do with the fact that you should be clear; quality has to do with your utterances being true, and supported by evidence; and relation has to do with the fact that your utterances should be relevant to the conversation at hand. I want to say that though I think these are valuable contributions to the analysis of language, they really are of limited usefulness in explaining the structure of conversation. Why? To

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<sup>4</sup> Grice, H.P., "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics, Volume 3, Speech Acts*, Peter Cole and J.L. Morgan (eds.), Academic Press, New York, 1975.

begin with, the four are not on a par. For example, the requirement of truthfulness is indeed an *internal* constitutive rule of the notion of a statement. It is a constitutive rule of statement-making that the statement commits the speaker to the truth of the proposition expressed. There is no way to explain what a statement is without explaining what a true statement is, and without explaining that anybody who makes a statement is committed, other things being equal, to the truth of the proposition that he expressed in making the statement. It is the condition of satisfaction of a statement that it should be true, and it is an internal defect of a statement if it is false. But the other Gricean features are not like that. The standards of relevance, brevity, clarity, and so on, unlike truth, are not in that way internal to the notion of the speech act. They are all *external* constraints on the speech act, external constraints coming from general principles of rationality and cooperation. It is not a constitutive rule of statement-making that a statement should be relevant to the surrounding discourse. You can make a perfectly satisfactory statement, qua statement, and still change the subject of the conversation altogether. Notice in this connection that our response to the person who changes the subject in a conversation is quite different from our response to the person who, e.g., lies.

Well, one might say "So much the better for Grice." After all, what we are trying to explain is how speech act *sequences* can satisfy conditions of being *de facto* internally related, in the way I was talking about earlier, without there being necessarily any internal requirement of that relation, that is, without there being any *de jure* requirement from inside the initial speech act, of the sort that we had for such pairs as are initiated by offers, invitations, and bets. One might say: what we want are not constitutive rules of particular speech acts but precisely maxims of the Gricean sort that will play the role for talk exchanges that constitutive rules play for individual utterances. To support this we might point out that a series of random remarks between two or more speakers does not add up to a conversation. And this inclines us to think that relevance might be partly constitutive and hence explanatory of conversation in the same way that, e.g., commitment to truth is partly constitutive and hence explanatory of statement making.

The analogy is attractive, but in the end I think it fails. Given a speech act, we know what counts as meeting its conditions of success and nondefectiveness; but given a sequence of speech acts in a conversation, we don't yet know what counts as a relevant continuation until we know something which is still external to the sequence, namely its purpose. But the fact that it is a conversation does not so far determine a purpose, because there is no purpose to conversations qua conversations in the way

that there is a purpose to speech acts of a certain type qua speech acts of that type. Statements, questions, and commands, for example, each have purposes solely in virtue of being statements, questions and commands; and these purposes are built in by their essential conditions. But conversations do not in that way have an essential condition that determines a purpose. Relative to one conversational purpose an utterance in a sequence may be relevant, relative to another it may be irrelevant.

You can see this point if you think of examples. Think of what counts as relevance in a conversation involving a man trying to pick up a woman in a bar, where indirection is the norm, and contrast that with the case of a doctor interviewing a patient, where full explicitness is required. You might even imagine the same two people with the same background capacities and many of the same sentences, but the constraints of a relevant response are quite different. Thus, suppose the conversation has reached the following point:

- A. How long have you lived in California?
- B. Oh, about a year and a half.

One relevant response by A in the bar might be

- A. I love living here myself, but I sure am getting sick of the smog in L.A.

That is not relevant in the clinic. On the other hand a perfectly relevant move in the clinic, but probably not in the bar, might be:

- A. And how often have you had diarrhoea during those eighteen months?

This variability is quite general. For example in formal 'conversations' such as in a courtroom a statement may be stricken from the record as "irrelevant" or an answer as "nonresponsive". But in certain other formal conversations such as a linguistics seminar similar "irrelevant" and "nonresponsive" utterances would count as relevant and responsive. Still different standards would be applied in a casual conversation among friends.

The point I am making is: in the way that, e.g., a commitment to truth is in part constitutive of statement making, and therefore explanatory of statement making, the way that relevance is 'constitutive' of conversation is not similarly explanatory of conversation; because what constitutes relevance is relative to something that lies outside the fact that it is a

conversation, namely the purposes of the participants. Thus, you can't explain the general structure of conversation in terms of relevance, because what counts as relevance is not determined by the fact that it is a conversation. The fact that a sequence of utterances is a conversation, by itself, places no constraints whatever on what would count as a relevant continuation of the sequence.

We can now state this point more generally, that is, we can now make a general statement of the limitations of relevance to the analysis of conversational structure. Consider the syntax of "relevant." Superficially we might say: a speech act can be said to be relevant (or irrelevant) to a topic or issue or question. But once we see that, for example, a topic must be, as such, an object of interest to the speaker and hearer, we can now state a deeper syntax of "relevant." A speech act can be said to be relevant (or irrelevant) to a purpose, and a purpose is always someone's purpose. Thus, in a conversation, the general form would be: a speech act is relevant to the purpose P of a hearer H or a speaker S. Now, the problem is that there is no general purpose of conversations, *qua* conversations, so what will count as relevant will always have to be specified relative to a purpose of the participants, which may or may not be the purpose of the conversation up to that point. If we insist that it be relevant to the antecedently existing purpose of the conversation, then the account will be circular because the criteria of relevance are not independent of the criteria of identity of the particular conversation; and if we don't require relevance to the conversational purpose, then anything goes provided it is relevant to some purpose or other. That would put no constraints on the structure of actual talk exchanges.

Suppose, for example, I am having a conversation with my stock broker about whether or not to invest in IBM. Suppose he suddenly shouts, "Look out! The chandelier is going to fall on your head!" Now is his remark relevant? It is certainly not relevant to my purpose in investing in the stock market. But it certainly is relevant to my purpose of staying alive. So, if we think of this as one conversation, he has made an irrelevant remark. If we think of it as two conversations, the second one which he just initiated being about my safety, then he has made a relevant remark. But in neither case does relevance explain the general structure of conversations. Rather, the purpose of particular conversations explains what counts as relevant to that purpose, but it doesn't even explain what counts as relevant to that conversation, unless "that conversation" is defined in terms of that purpose.

Of the Gricean maxims, the most promising for explaining the structure of conversations seems to be relevance, and I have therefore spent some time discussing it. His maxims concerning quantity and manner

don't seem to me plausible candidates for the job, so I will say nothing further about them. They both concern efficiency in communication, but they do not provide an adequate apparatus for getting at the details of conversational structure. Efficiency is only one among many constraints on talk sequences of the sort we have in conversation.

Though I think that the Gricean maxims are very useful in their own realm, they won't give us, for conversation, anything like what the rules of speech acts give us for individual speech acts.

Let us now turn then to the efforts of some sociolinguists who have studied the structure of conversation, as they would say, "empirically". One such effort at explaining the phenomenon of turn-taking in conversations is provided in an article by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson.<sup>5</sup> They think that they have a set of rules, indeed, "recursive rules", for turn-taking in conversations. They say,

The following seems to be a basic set of rules governing turn construction providing for the allocation of a next turn to one party and coordinating transfer so as to minimize gap and overlap. (1) For any turn at the initial transition relevance place of an initial turn construction unit: (a) If the turn so far is so constructed as to involve the use of a current speaker's select-next technique, then the party so selected has the right, and is obliged to take next turn to speak, no others have such rights or obligations and transfer occurs at that place. (b) If the turn so far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a current speaker's select-next technique, then self-selection for next speakership may, but need not be instituted. First speaker acquires rights to a turn and transfer occurs at that place. (c) If the turn so far is constructed as not to involve the use of a current speaker's select-next technique, then the current speaker may but need not continue unless another self-selects. (2) If at the initial transition relevance place of an initial turn constructional unit neither 1a nor 1b is operated, and following the provision of 1c current speaker has continued, then the rule set a-c reapplies at the next transition relevance place, and recursively at each next transition relevance place until transfer is effected.

That is the rule for conversational turn-taking. Now, I have puzzled over this for a while, and my conclusion (though I am prepared to be corrected) is that that couldn't possibly be a rule for conversational turn-

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<sup>5</sup> Sacks, H., Schegloff, E.A., and Jefferson, G., "A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation," *Language*, 1974, 50, pp.696-735.

taking simply because nobody does or could follow it. The notion of a rule is, after all, rather closely connected with the notion of following a rule. And I want to argue that nobody does or could follow the turn-taking rule. Now what exactly does the rule say when it is stated in plain English? It seems to me they are saying the following: In a conversation a speaker can select who is going to be the next speaker, for example, by asking him a question. Or he can just shut up and let somebody else talk. Or he can keep on talking. Furthermore, if he decides to keep on talking, then next time there is a break in the conversation, (that's called a "transition relevance place") the same three options apply. And that makes the rule recursive, because once you have the possibility of continuing to talk, the rule can apply over and over.

Now, as a description of what actually happens in a normal conversation, that is, a conversation where not everybody talks at once, the rule could hardly fail to describe what goes on. But that is like saying that this is a rule for walking: If you go for a walk, you can keep walking in the same direction, or you can change directions, or you can sit down and stop walking altogether. Notice that the walking rule is also recursive, because if you keep on walking, then the next time you wonder what to do, the same three options apply - you can keep on walking in the same direction, you can change directions, or you can sit down and quit walking altogether. As a *description* of what happens when someone goes for a walk, that could hardly be false, but that doesn't make it a recursive *rule* for walking. The walking rule is like the Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson rule in that it is almost tautological. It is not completely tautological because there are always other possibilities. When walking, you could start jumping up and down or do cartwheels. In talking, everybody might shut up and not say anything, or they might break into song, or they might all talk at once, or there might be a rigid hierarchical order in which they are required to talk.

But the real objection to the rule is not that it is nearly tautological; many rules are tautological and none the worse for that. For example, systems of constitutive rules define tautologically the activity of which the rules are constitutive. Thus, the rules of chess or football tautologically define chess or football; and similarly, the rules of speech acts tautologically define the various sorts of speech acts, such as making statements or promises. That is not my real objection. The objection to this kind of "rule" is that it is not really a rule and therefore has no explanatory power. The notion of a rule is logically connected to the notion of following a rule, and the notion of following a rule is connected to the notion of making one's behavior conform to the content of a rule because it is a rule. For example, when I drive in England, I follow the rule: Drive on the left-hand side of the road. Now that seems to me a genuine rule. Why is it a rule?

Because the content of the rule plays a causal role in the production of my behavior. If another driver is coming directly toward me the other way, I swerve to the left, i.e., I make my behavior conform to the content of the rule. In a theory of intentionality, we would say that the intentional content of the rule plays a causal role in bringing about the conditions of satisfaction. The rule has the world-to-rule direction of fit, that is, the point of the rule is to get the world, i.e., my behavior, to match the content of the rule. And it has the rule-to-world direction of causation, i.e. the rule achieves the fit by causing the appropriate behavior.<sup>6</sup> This is just a fancy way of saying that the purpose of the rule is to influence people's behavior in a certain way so that the behavior matches the content of the rule, and the rule functions as part of the cause of bringing that match about. I don't just *happen* to drive on the left-hand side of the road in England. I do it *because* that is the rule of the road.

Notice now a crucial fact for the discussion of the conversational turn-taking rule. There can be extensionally equivalent descriptions of my rule-governed behavior not all of which state the rules that I am following. Take the rule: Drive on the left-hand side of the road. We might describe my behavior either by saying that I drive on the left, or, given the structure of English cars, by saying that I drive in such a way that on two-lane roads, while staying in one lane, I keep the steering wheel near the centerline and I keep the passenger side nearer to the curb. Now that actually happens in British cars when I drive on the left-hand side of the road. But that is not the rule that I am following. Both "rules" provide true descriptions of my behavior and both make accurate predictions, but only the first rule - the one about driving on the left - actually states a rule of my behavior, because it is the only one whose content plays a causal role in the production of the behavior. The second, like the Sacks, Schegloff, Jefferson rule, describes a consequence of following the rule, given that the steering wheel is located on the right, but it doesn't state a rule. The so-called rule for conversational turn-taking, like much similar research I have seen in this area, is like the second rule statement and not like the first. That is, it describes the phenomenon of turn-taking as if it were a rule; but it couldn't be a rule because no one actually follows that rule. The surface phenomenon of turn-taking is partly explicable in terms of deeper speech act sequencing rules having to do with internally related speech acts of the sort that we talked about before: but sometimes the phenomenon of turn-taking isn't a matter of rules at all.

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<sup>6</sup> For a further explanation of these notions, see Searle, John R., *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.



Let us go through the cases. Case A: "Current speaker selects-next speaker." Well, speakers hardly ever directly select a subsequent speaker. People don't normally say in conversation "I select you to speak next," or "You talk next." Sometimes they do. If a master of ceremonies gets up and introduces you as the next speaker, then you are selected to talk next. He has certainly selected you to talk. But such cases are not very common. What normally happens, rather, is that the speaker asks somebody a question, or makes him an offer. The 'rules' that determine that the second person is to speak aren't rules of "speaker selects-next technique", but they are consequences of rules governing questions or offers. The surface phenomenon of speaker selection is not the explanation; the explanation is in terms of the rules for performing the internally related speech act pairs. The "speaker selects-next" rule is not a rule; it is an extensionally equivalent description of a pattern of behavior which is also described, and more importantly explained, by a set of speech act rules.

Now consider the second case. Case B: Next speaker self selects. That just means that there is a break and somebody else starts talking. That "rule" says that when there is a break in the conversation anybody can start talking, and whoever starts talking gets to keep on talking. But I want to say that doesn't even have the appearance of being a rule since it doesn't specify the relevant sort of intentional content that plays a causal role in the production of the behavior. As we all know, the way it typically works in real life is this: Somebody else is talking and you want very much to say something. But you don't want to interrupt the speaker because (a) it's rude and (b) it's inefficient, since with two people talking at once it's hard to get your point across. So you wait till there is a chance to talk and then start talking fast before somebody else does. Now, where is the rule?

Case C is: current speaker continues. Again, I want to say that is not a rule, and for the same reason. No one is following it. It just says that when you are talking, you can keep on talking. But you don't need a rule to do that.

Perhaps one more analogy will help to clarify the main point I am trying to make. Suppose that several researchers in ethnomethodology made empirical observations of an American football game and came up with the following recursive clustering rule: organisms in like-colored jerseys are obliged and have the right to cluster in circular groups at statistically regular intervals. (Call this the 'law of periodic circular clustering'.) Then at a "transition relevance place", organisms in like-colored jerseys cluster linearly (the law of linear clustering). Then linear clustering is followed by linear interpenetration (the law of linear interpenetration). Linear interpenetration is followed by circular clustering, and thus the entire system is recursive. The precise formalization of this

recursion could also be stated with temporal parameters. The Sacks-Schegloff-Jefferson "rule" is like the "law" of clustering in that it finds regularities in phenomena that are explainable by other forms of intentionality. A statement of an observed regularity, even when predictive, is not necessarily a statement of a rule.

One final remark about the nature of "empirical" evidence before concluding this section. Many researchers feel that a serious study of conversation must proceed from transcriptions of real conversations that actually took place. And of course they are right in thinking that many things can be learned from studying actual events that cannot be learned from thinking up imaginary conversations alone. But it is also important to keep in mind that where theory is concerned the native speaker takes priority over the historical record. We are only willing to accept and use the transcriptions of conversations in our native culture to the extent that we find them acceptable or at least possible conversations. If some investigator came up with an impossible conversation we would reject it out of hand because we are masters of our language and its culture, and the fact that an impossible conversation might be historically actual is irrelevant. Thus the following is OK:

- B. I don't know whether you have talked with Hilary about the diary situation.
- A. WELL she has been EXPLAINING to me rather in rather more general TERMS ...mmm...what...you are sort of DOING and...
- B. ... what it was all...about...yes.
- A. I gather you've been at it for nine YEARS..
- B. ...mmm...by golly that's true yes yes it's not a long time of course in the..uh..in this sort of...work..<sup>7</sup>

Because we recognize it as an intelligible fragment of a possible conversation. But if A had responded:

- A. Whereof therefore maybe briny very was could of should to be.

or B had said:

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<sup>7</sup> From Svartvik, J., and R. Quirk (eds.), *A Corpus of English Conversation*, Lund: Gleerup, 1980, pp.408-411 as cited in Wardhaugh, Ronald, *How Conversation Works*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, pp.202-203.

B. UGGA BU BUBU UGGA

We would at the very least require some further explanation before taking the "data" seriously. The fact that the events had actually occurred would be by itself of no more theoretical interest than if one of the participants had just collapsed from a heart attack or the other had thrown up. To be of theoretical interest, the "empirical" facts have to accord with our inner abilities and not conversely.

III

Well then, if such "rules" are no help to us, let us go back to the beginning of our discussion. I said that it would be nice if we could get a theory of conversation that matches our theory of speech acts. I am not optimistic. I have examined two directions of investigation, but I think that neither gives us the sorts of results we wanted. The hypothesis that underlies my pessimism is this:

*The reason that conversations do not have an inner structure in the sense that speech acts do is not (as is sometimes claimed) because conversations involve two or more people, but because conversations as such lack a particular purpose or point.*

Each illocutionary act has an illocutionary point, and it is in virtue of that point that it is an act of that type. Thus, the point of a promise is to undertake an obligation; the point of a statement is to represent how things are in the world; the point of an order is to try to get somebody to do something, etc. It is the existence of illocutionary points that enables us to get a well defined taxonomy of the different types of illocutionary acts.<sup>8</sup> But conversations don't in that way have an internal point simply in virtue of being conversations. Consider the similarities and differences between the following talk exchanges:

A woman calling her dentist's office to arrange an appointment.

Two casual acquaintances meeting each other on the street and stopping to have a brief chat in which they talk about a series of

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<sup>8</sup> Searle, John R., "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts," in *Language, Mind and Knowledge*, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Vol. XI, K. Gunderson (ed.), University of Minnesota Press, 1975. Reprinted in *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*, Cambridge University Press, 1979.

subjects (e.g. the weather, the latest football results, the president's speech last night).

A philosophy seminar.

A man trying to pick up a woman in a bar.

A dinner party.

A family spending a Sunday afternoon at home watching a football game on television and discussing the progress of the game among various other matters.

A meeting of the board of directors of a small corporation.

A doctor interviewing a patient.

Now, what are the chances of finding a well defined structure common to all of these? Are they all "conversations"?

Of course, they all have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but then, so does a glass of beer; that is not enough for an internal structure. The literature on this subject is partly skewed by the fact that the authors often pick telephone conversations, because they are easier to study. But telephone conversations are unusual in that most people, adolescents apart, have a fairly well defined objective when they pick up the phone, unlike two colleagues encountering each other in the hallway of a building, or two casual acquaintances bumping into each other on the street.

Though I am pessimistic about certain sorts of accounts of conversation, I am not saying that we cannot give theoretical accounts of the structure of conversation or that we cannot say important, insightful things about the structure of conversation. What sort of apparatus would we use to do that? Here I want to mention a couple of features that I think are crucial for understanding conversation, and indeed, for understanding discourse generally.

One of the things we need to recognize about conversations is that they involve shared intentionality. Conversations are a paradigm of collective behavior. The shared intentionality in conversation is not to be confused with the kind of iterated intentionality discussed by Steven Schiffer and David Lewis, which involves what they call "mutual knowledge". In the case of mutual knowledge, I know that you know that I know that you know...that p. And you know that I know that you know that I know...that p. Schiffer and Lewis try to reduce the shared aspect to an

iterated sequence, indeed, an infinite sequence of iterated cognitive states about the other partner. I think that their analysis distorts the facts. *Shared* intentionality is not just a matter of a conjunction of individual intentional states about the other person's intentional states. To illustrate this point I will give a rather crude example of shared intentionality. Suppose you and I are pushing a car. When we are pushing a car together, it isn't just the case that I am pushing the car and you are pushing the car. No, I am pushing the car as part of *our* pushing the car. So, if it turns out that you weren't pushing all along, you were just going along for a free ride, and I was doing all the pushing; then I am not just mistaken about what you were doing, but I am also mistaken about what I was doing, because I thought not just that I was pushing (I was right about that), but that I was pushing as part of *our* pushing. And that doesn't reduce to a series of iterated claims about my belief concerning your belief about my belief about your belief, etc.

The phenomenon of shared collective behavior is a genuine social phenomenon and underlies much social behavior. We are blinded to this fact by the traditional analytic devices that treat all intentionality as strictly a matter of the individual person. I believe that a recognition of shared intentionality and its implications is one of the basic concepts we need in order to understand how conversations work. The idea that shared intentionality can be entirely reduced to complex beliefs and other intentional states leads to those incorrect accounts of meaning where it turns out you have to have a rather large number of intentions in order to perform such simple speech acts as saying "Good-bye", or asking for another drink, or saying "Hi" to someone when you meet him in the street. You do, of course, require some intentional states, but once you see that in collective behavior, such as conversations, the individual intentionality is derived from the collective intentionality; the account of the individual intentionality is much simpler. On the pattern of analysis I am proposing, when two people greet each other and begin a conversation, they are beginning a joint activity rather than two individual activities. If this conception is correct, then shared intentionality is a concept we will need for analyzing conversation.

Now, there is another concept I think we need for understanding conversation, and indeed, for understanding language generally, and that is the notion of what I call "the background." Now, let me work up to that briefly. Take any sentence, and ask yourself what you have to know in order to understand that sentence. Take the sentence: "George Bush intends to run for president." In order fully to understand that sentence, and consequently, in order to understand a speech act performed in the utterance of that sentence, it just isn't enough that you should have a lot

of semantic contents that you glue together. Even if you make them into big semantic contents, it isn't going to be enough. What you have to know in order to understand that sentence are such things as that the United States is a republic, it has presidential elections every four years, in these elections there are candidates of the two major parties, and the person who gets the majority of the electoral votes becomes president. And so on. The list is indefinite, and you can't even say that all the members of the list are absolutely essential to understanding the original sentence; because, for example, you could understand the sentence very well even if you didn't understand about the electoral college. But there is no way to put all of this information into the meaning of the word "president". The word "president" means the same in "George Bush wants to run for president" as in "Mitterrand is the president of France". There is no lexical ambiguity over the word "president", rather, the kind of knowledge you have to have to understand those two utterances doesn't coincide. I want to give a name to all of that network of knowledge or belief or opinion or presupposition: I call it "the network."

If you try to follow out the threads of the network, if you think of all the things you would have to know in order to understand the sentence "George Bush wants to run for president", you would eventually reach a kind of bedrock that would seem strange to think of as simply more knowledge or beliefs. For example, you would get to things like: people generally vote when conscious, or: there are human beings, or: elections are generally held at or near the surface of the earth. I want to suggest that these 'propositions' are not like the genuine belief I have to the effect that larger states get more electoral votes than smaller states. In the way that I have a genuine *belief* about the number of electoral votes controlled by the state of Michigan, I don't in that way have a belief that elections go on at or near the surface of the earth. If I was writing a book about American electoral practices, I wouldn't put that proposition in. Why not? Well in a way, it is too fundamental to count as a belief. Rather it is a certain set of stances that I take toward the world. There are sets of skills, ways of dealing with things, ways of behaving, cultural practices, and general know-how of both biological and cultural sorts. These form what I am calling "the background", and the fact that part of my background is that elections are held at or near the surface of the earth *manifests itself* in the fact that I walk to the nearest polling place and don't try and get aboard a rocket ship. Similarly the fact that the table in front of me is a solid object is not manifested in any belief as such, but rather in the fact that I'm willing to put things on it, or that I pound on it, or I rest my books on it, or I lean on it. Those, I want to say, are stances, practices, ways of behaving. This then for our present purposes is the thesis of the back-

ground: all semantic interpretation, and indeed all intentionality, functions not only against a network of beliefs and other intentional states but also against a background that does not consist in a set of propositional contents, but rather, consists in presuppositions that are, so to speak, preintentional or prepropositional.

To further illustrate the relevance of this point for semantic interpretation, consider the different interpretations given to verbs of action. Consider, for example, sentences of the form: "X cut Y." The interpretation that one attaches to "cut" alters radically in different sentences even though the semantic content doesn't alter. Consider the sentences:

- (1) Sally cut the cake.
- (2) Bill cut the grass.
- (3) The barber cut Jims hair.
- (4) The tailor cut the cloth.
- (5) I just cut my skin.

The interesting thing for our present discussion about these sentences is that the same semantic content occurs in each of them with the word "cut" but is interpreted differently in each case. In 1-5, the word "cut" is not used ambiguously. Its use in these cases contrasts with sentences where it is used with a genuinely different meaning such as "The president cut the salaries of the professors" or, (one of Austin's favorites), "Cut the cackle!" or "He can't cut the mustard." In these cases, we are inclined to say that "cut" is used to mean something different from what it is used to mean in 1-5. But that it has the same meaning in sentences 1-5 is shown by the fact that the standard tests for univocality apply. So for example, you can have a conjunction reduction: For example, "General Electric has just invented a new device which can cut cakes, grass, hair, cloth, and skin." But if you then add "...and salaries, cackles, and mustard", it seems like a bad joke. But though "cut" means the same in 1-5, it is interpreted quite differently in each case. And thus, the semantic content by itself cannot account for the fact that we understand those sentences in radically different ways. We can see that we understand the occurrences in different ways if we consider analogous occurrences in directives. If I say "Bill, go cut the grass" and Bill goes out and stabs the grass with a knife, or attempts to slice it up the way one would a cake, or takes a pair of scissors to it, there is an important sense in which Bill did not do what I asked him to do. That is, he did not obey my literal and unambiguous request.

How is it that we are able to understand the word "cut" in sentences 1-5 so differently given that it has the same semantic content in each occurrence? Someone might claim - indeed, I have heard it claimed - that it is part of the literal meaning of the verb that we interpret it differently in different verbal contexts. "Cut" with "grass" as direct object is interpreted differently from "cut" with "cake" as direct object, and thus the explanation would be given entirely in terms of the interaction of semantic contents.

But that explanation by itself won't do either, because if we alter the background in the right way, we could interpret the "cut" in "Cut the grass" as we interpret "cut" in "Cut the cake". For example, in California there are firms that sell instant lawns. They simply roll a lawn up and load it into your pickup truck. Now, suppose I am the manager of one of these sod farms and you order a half an acre of grass, and I tell my foreman "Go out and cut half an acre of grass for this customer". If he then gets out the lawnmower and starts mowing it, I'll fire him. Or imagine that we have a bakery where we have a super strain of yeast that causes our cakes to grow up all the way to the ceiling and for that reason we have to employ a man to chop the tops off the cakes. Suppose I tell him "Watch out they are going toward the ceiling again. Start cutting the cakes!" If he then starts cutting the cakes in neat slices, I'm going to fire him as well. I want to say there is no obvious way that the traditional context free conception of semantic interpretation of sentences can account for the indefinite range of such facts.<sup>9</sup>

What then is different about these different sentences? What enables us to interpret them differently? Well, we have certain background practices. We know what it is to cut grass; we know what it is to cut cake; and we know that each is quite different from cutting a cloth. But those are human practices. The knowledge we have about such matters is either knowledge from the network or is so fundamental that it is not quite right to construe it as a propositional "knowing that..." at all. These are just ways we have of behaving.

Now notice a further point. There are many syntactically acceptable English sentences containing the word "cut" that we can't interpret at all. Suppose I say to you "Go cut that mountain!" or "Sally cut the coffee." In the sense in which we interpret 1-5 effortlessly, I don't know how to interpret these other examples. I can *invent* an interpretation for each of these, but when I do that, what I do is invent a background practice that

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this and other examples, see Searle, John R., "The Background of Meaning", in *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, J.R. Searle, F. Kiefer, and M. Bierwisch (eds.), Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980, pp.221-232. Also, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Chapter 5.



fixes an interpretation. It doesn't take much imagination. Suppose we run a big freeway building crew and we are making interstate highways. We have two ways of dealing with mountains; we either level them or we cut right through them. So if I say to my foreman "Go cut that mountain", he just cuts a freeway right through it.

Many of my students immediately attach a metaphorical interpretation to "Cut the coffee." They interpret it as meaning: dilute the coffee in some way. But we could invent other interpretations. We could invent literal interpretations if we imagine ourselves engaging in certain sorts of practices. Notice that in the case of "The president cut the salaries", we immediately give it a metaphorical interpretation. But with a little ingenuity and an idiosyncratic president, we could give a literal interpretation. Suppose the salaries are always in the form of wads of dollar bills and an eccentric president insists on cutting the end off of each person's salary before handing it over. This would be an odd case, but we could in such a case imagine a literal interpretation of "cut". Now why is it that we so effortlessly attach a metaphorical interpretation as the normal case? The answer, I believe, is that we always interpret a sentence against a background of practices and within a network of other beliefs and assumptions which are not themselves part of the semantic content of the sentence. We assume that the speaker's utterance makes sense, but in order to make sense of it we have to fit it into the background. In this case, the metaphorical interpretation fits the background easily, the literal interpretation requires generating a new background.

One of the ways in which the background is crucial for understanding conversation is in the role that the background plays in determining conversational relevance. We saw earlier that relevance was in general relative to the purpose of the conversation; but we can now, I believe, deepen that point if we see that the purpose itself, and what constitutes relevance relative to that purpose, will depend on the shared backgrounds of the participants. One reason that we cannot get a non-circular account of "relevant" just by looking at a conversation is that what the participants in the conversation take as relevant, what counts as relevant, will always be relative to the cognitive apparatus they bring to bear on the conversation. That is to say, it will always be relative to their network and background.

In order to illustrate the operation of the background in the production and comprehension of conversation, I want to consider an example from real life. The following conversation took place on British television immediately after the conservative party victory that brought Mrs. Thatcher to power as Prime Minister for the first time.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> My attention was called to this conversation by Philip Johnson-Laird.

- First Speaker: I think you know the question I'm going to ask you. What's the answer?  
Second Speaker: We'll have to wait and see.  
First Speaker: Would you like to?  
Second Speaker: It all depends.

Two things are clear from this brief snatch of conversation. First, the amount of information contained in the lexical meanings, that is, in the semantic contents of the words and sentences uttered, is very minimal. Literally speaking, neither party says much of anything. Secondly, it is clear that the two participants understand each other perfectly well, and that a great deal is being conveyed. Now what is it that the two speakers have to know in order to understand each other so well on the basis of such minimal semantic content? And, what would we have to understand as spectators in order to understand what was being communicated in this conversation? Well, we might begin by listing the propositional contents which were known by British television viewers as well as by the two participants and which enabled them to understand the conversation. The list might begin as follows: The first speaker is Robin Day, a famous British television news broadcaster. The second speaker is Edward Heath, the former Conservative Prime Minister. It is well known that Mr. Heath hates Mrs. Thatcher and Mrs. Thatcher hates Mr. Heath. Now, the question on everyone's mind at the time of this conversation was, "Would Heath serve as a minister in a Thatcher cabinet?" It is obvious that the conversation construed simply as a set of utterances carrying literal semantic content is unintelligible. The natural temptation is to assume that it is made intelligible by the fact that these additional semantic contents are present in the minds of the speaker, the hearer, and the audience. What I am suggesting here is that they are still not enough. Or rather, that they are only enough because they themselves rest on a set of capacities that are not themselves semantic contents. Our ability to represent rests on a set of capacities which do not themselves consist in representations.

In order to see how this works, let us imagine that we actually plugged in the semantic contents that we think would fix the interpretation of the conversation. Suppose we imagine the participants actually saying,

- First Speaker: I am Robin Day, the famous British television news broadcaster.  
Second Speaker: I am Edward Heath, the former British Conservative Prime Minister, and I hate Mrs. Thatcher, the present British Conservative Prime Minister. She hates me, too.

Now, if we plug in such semantic contents as these, it looks as if we have converted the conversation from something that is almost totally mysterious on the face to something that is completely intelligible on the face. But if you think about it for a moment, I think you will see that we have not overcome our original problem. The original conversation was intelligible only because the participants and the viewers had a lot of information that wasn't explicit in the conversation. But now this new conversation is similarly intelligible only because the participants and the observers still have a lot of information that is not explicit in the conversation. They understand the conversation as revised only because they understand what sorts of things are involved in being a Prime Minister, in hating other people, in winning elections, in serving in cabinets, and so on. Well, suppose we plugged all that information into the conversation. Suppose we imagine Heath actually stating a theory of the British government, and Day actually stating a theory of human hostilities and their role in personal relationships. So now we imagine the conversation enriched in something like the following fashion:

- First Speaker: Hatred normally involves a reluctance to engage in close association with or appear to be accepting favors from the hated person.
- Second Speaker: The authority of the Prime Minister in the British constitution has altered considerably since the days when the Prime Minister was considered *primus inter pares*, prior to the time of Walpole. The Prime Minister now has an authority which enables him or her to appoint and dismiss cabinet ministers almost at will, an authority tempered only by the independent popularity and political standing of other members of the party in the country at large.

Now that is the sort of thing people have to know in order to understand this conversation properly. But even if we plugged all of these propositions into the conversation, even if we filled in all of the information which we think would fix the right interpretation of the original utterances, it would still not be enough. We would still be left in our original position where the understanding of the conversation requires prior intellectual capacities, capacities which are still not represented in the conversation.

The picture we have is this. We think that since the original semantic contents encoded in the literal meaning of the sentences uttered

are not at all sufficient to enable communication to take place, then communication takes place because of prior collateral information which speaker, hearer, and observer possess. This is true as far as it goes, but the problem still remains. The prior collateral information is no more self-interpreting than the original conversation. So it looks as though we are on the start of a regress, possibly infinite. The solution to our puzzle is this. Both the original utterances and the prior collateral information only function, that is, they only determine their conditions of satisfaction, against a background of capacities, stances, attitudes, presuppositions, ways of behaving, modes of sensibility, and so on, that are not themselves representational. All interpretation, understanding, and meaning, as well as intentionality in general, functions against a background of mental capacities that are not themselves interpretations, meanings, understandings, or intentional states. The solution to our puzzle, in short, is to see that all meaning and understanding goes on against a background which is not itself meant or understood, but which forms the boundary conditions on meaning and understanding, whether in conversations or in isolated utterances. In the conversation we considered from British TV, the richness of the shared background enables a very minimal explicit semantic content to be informative and even satisfying to the participants and the audience. On the other hand some of the most frustrating and unsatisfying conversations occur between people of radically different backgrounds, who can speak at great length and achieve only mutual incomprehension.



## THE ACT IN QUESTION

Julian Boyd

University of California

"The beginnings of a theory of the conversational game," Searle says, "might be a systematic attempt to account for how particular "moves," particular illocutionary acts, constrain the scope of possible appropriate responses." (Searle, *Conversation*) I would like to explore in this paper just such a set of illocutionary acts and responses using an example which Searle himself mentions - namely *Shall I* questions and possible responses to them.

*Shall I* questions are peculiar because an appropriate verbal response contains no modal at all unless, as we shall see, it is self-addressed. Thus in the standard face-to-face situation neither *You shall* nor *You will* is an appropriate response to a question like *Shall I call Mary tonight?* The answer to the very same question when self-addressed, however, *does* contain a modal. If I ask myself in my heart *Shall I call Mary tonight?* the resolution after deliberation is expressed as either *I will* or *I won't*. Exactly how this asymmetry fits into the usual *shall* and *will* rules is not clear in the handbooks but an explanation can be found I think in the picture of indirect speech acts provided by Searle (Searle 1979, 1983).

The *shall* and *will* rules distinguish speech acts entirely on the basis of whether an intention or a belief is being expressed. This is why neither *You shall* nor *You will* is an acceptable answer to a *Shall I* question. *You shall* expresses intention and is used to do things like make promises or threats. *You will* is a prediction and expresses a belief. But *Shall I* questions are not questions about either belief or intention. A *Shall I* question asks the hearer whether he or she *wants* the speaker to do the act in question. *Shall I* questions question desire.

Desire figures into the *shall* and *will* rules indirectly as what Searle calls a sincerity condition. Requests and commands, it will be remembered, require that the speaker, when sincere, *want* the thing requested or commanded, just as, in the examples above, promises and threats require that the speaker (when sincere) intend the act and predictions (when sincere) require the belief of the speaker.

What happens when sincerity conditions are violated is illustrated quite nicely by Searle using an adaptation of Moore's paradox. One cannot

consistently say, for example, *I promise to go, but I don't intend to*, or for the purposes of this paper *I promise to go, but I won't* (where *won't* expresses intention). Similarly, and for the same reason, one cannot say *Please shut the window, but I don't want you to*, or *Will you shut the window, but I don't want you to*. On the other hand, and again for the same reason, it is consistent to say *I will go, but I don't want to* as well as *Will you go, even though I know you don't want to?* The point of these examples is to show that willing (intention) and wanting (desire) are quite distinct at least in English grammar. Confusion, however, is quite common in explanations of *shall* and *will* question-and-answer sets. This is because sometimes intention or desire is the sincerity condition of the speech act and sometimes intention or desire is the intentional state which is being either questioned or expressed. We characterize *Will you* questions as requests because of the desire of the speaker, not that of the hearer. But we characterize *Shall I* questions by the desire of the hearer, not the speaker. The intention in a *Shall I* question is in the question itself as the sincerity condition.

*Shall I* questions and *Will you* questions are in fact exactly the reverse of each other, both with respect to the sincerity conditions of the speaker and with respect to the intentional content being questioned. *Will you?* has as its sincerity condition the *desire* of the speaker but itself questions the intention of the hearer: *Shall I?* has as its sincerity condition the *intention* of the speaker, but questions the *desire* of the hearer. The *Will you* request, in other words, says *I want you to do it, if you will. Are you willing?* The *Shall I* proposal says *I will do it, if you want me to. Do you?* It follows that the self-addressed *Shall I* question means *I will, if I want to - but do I (really) want to? Shall I?* in both cases expresses the willingness of the speaker to do the act in question, but makes doing it contingent on desire, in the one case, someone else's desire, in the other case, one's own.

The first part of a hearer's response to a *Shall I* question - *Yes. (I want you to)* or *No. (I don't want you to)* is the sincerity condition of a command. Since such transactions require mutual recognition that a proposal is being made and that a command is being licensed, it is entirely appropriate for the hearer immediately after saying *Yes* or *No* to issue without fear of being impolite the command itself. Some of the parallels can be summarized in diagram form:

The Question	<i>Shall I?</i>	<i>Will you?</i>
The Sincerity Condition of the Speaker	Intention	Desire
The Questioned Intentional State	Desire	Intention
The Response: 1. The Intentional State	Other Addressed: <i>Yes. I want you to.</i> Self Addressed: <i>Yes. I want to.</i>	<i>Yes. I will</i>
2. The Corresponding Speech Act	Other Addressed: The Command <i>Do it.</i> Self-Addressed: The Resolution <i>I will.</i>	The Promise (or other appropriate commissive)
3. The Act Itself	The speaker just does the act in question	The hearer just does the act in question

The last row, concerning the act itself as a possible response is simply to show how very closely tied the verbal and the non-verbal action are in these exchanges. *I will* is the verbal response both to *Will you?* and to self-questioning *Shall I?* The intentional state which *I will* expresses is the necessary antecedent of any deliberate action.

This necessary connection between intention and action makes possible omitting certain steps in such transactions. Strictly speaking, for example, a hearer might respond to a *Will you open the window?* request first, by saying *O.K., I will open the window, since you want me to* and then by actually opening the window. More elaborately, a speaker might, after offering to open the window with a *Shall I open the window* proposal and having received a positive answer from the hearer, respond: *O.K. I will open the window since you have said you want me to and since your wanting me to was the very reason I was looking for in order to decide whether or not*



*to open the window and besides your wish is my command anyway, and so, I have determined to open the window.* He then opens the window.

Spelling out the steps in this way I believe makes clear how similar such dialogues (especially the self-addressed ones) are to little pieces of practical reasoning. The major premise, so to speak, of self-questioning *Shall I?* is the (understood) willingness to do the act. The minor premise, the theoretical inquiry, in the simplest case, is the factual question *whether* one wants to do the act. In more complicated cases, the minor premise involves sorting among conflicting desires for the best one or the one believed to be best. The conclusion, the end of the deliberation, is *I will*. This *I will* Searle calls the prior intention. But the verbal declaration of a prior intention, as we have seen, need not be expressed. One can just do the act in question. Searle has quite aptly called this presentation of the intention through the action, the intention-in-action. It is this curious mixture of verbal and non-verbal acts which is sometimes said to be a feature of practical reasoning. Thus, judging from even such minimal conversations as the *Shall I* question and its possible responses, it seems likely that a theory of conversation will be at least as complicated as that very complicated problem, a theory of practical reasoning.

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## ON THE PRAGMATIC STRUCTURE OF CONVERSATION

Marcelo Dascal  
*Tel Aviv University*

### I

The art of answering lies in the ability to restrict the scope of the question. Consider the question "are conversations structured?". What are we to understand by 'conversation' and 'structure' in this question? Some 'conversations' (e.g. a doctor-patient consultation; a round-table debate; a cross-investigation of a witness) are obviously 'structured' (i.e. they have a clear sequencing pattern, a more or less well-defined purpose and topic, and more or less accepted criteria of relevance). Others (e.g. a casual chat; a spontaneous philosophical discussion; a husband-wife quarrel) seem to be, by the same standards, rather 'unstructured'. John Searle, in his article "Conversation", skillfully restricts the scope of the question about the structure of conversation and undertakes to propose and justify an answer to it. It is my purpose here to pay tribute to Searle's endeavor, by taking issue with his way of restricting the question, criticizing his answer, and suggesting an alternative one.

"Traditional speech act theory, says Searle, is largely confined to single speech acts". Can one extend it beyond its self-imposed limits? Can we, in particular, "get an account of conversations parallel to our account of speech acts?" These are the questions Searle chooses to address. Obviously they are not equivalent to the more general (and more vague) question "are conversations structured?". Searle's negative answer to *his* questions, therefore, does not imply a denial of *any* structure to conversations. It implies only that, for him, the principles according to which conversations are organized, whatever they may be, are neither an "extension" of nor "parallel" to those that organize single speech acts.

Searle does not distinguish between the two versions of his question. But he should. For they lead to different hypotheses about the relationship between speech act theory and the theory of conversation, with significantly diverse *prima facie* plausibilities. Assuming, as one perhaps should, that speech acts *qua* units of linguistic behavior are the *components* of conversations, the idea of *extension* suggests that any adequate description

of the latter's organization must take into account those properties of the former by virtue of which they can be concatenated or otherwise put together. Generally speaking, this corresponds to the plausible idea that a *structured* whole (as opposed to a mere aggregate) is, at least to some extent, bound together by interrelations linking its parts to each other by virtue of their *intrinsic* properties. Thus, just as the chemical valencies of its atoms are one of the factors that explain the structure of a molecule, so too one should plausibly expect the intrinsic properties of speech acts (e.g. their illocutionary points, conditions of satisfaction, etc.) to be one of the factors determining the structure of conversations, in so far as the latter are not randomly assembled sets of speech acts. But it is rather *implausible* to expect also that there is some sort of parallelism between the structure of single speech acts and conversations. For, in general, we do not expect, as did Leibniz, for one, that the whole be structurally analogous to its parts.<sup>1</sup> No doubt it would be nice if it were so, for it would allow for an enormous parsimony in explanatory principles. But we know that molecules are not structured in the same way as atoms, cells are not structured like molecules, words are not structured like phonemes, sentences are not structured like words, and so on. In each of these cases the structured whole displays both characteristic properties and organizational principles not present in their components. This is what one should expect in the case of conversations as well.

Though he examines various forms of the extension hypothesis (by focusing on the *sequential* relations of speech acts in a conversation), the real target of Searle's criticism is not the idea of extension, but that of structural parallelism. This will become apparent as we proceed. Yet, given the *prima facie* implausibility of such an idea, why bother to criticize it at all? I think Searle's intuition in undertaking this task is basically sound: certain acclaimed forms of theorizing about conversation, in terms of 'constraints', 'rules' and 'logic', seem to imply such a parallelism; any such implication must be shown to be wrong - indeed, nearly absurd - in order to clear the way for an account of conversations that does not misrepresent the nature of their 'structure'. Among other things, such an account should persuade us that, though conversations are not structured by principles similar to those that govern speech acts, it still makes sense to conceive of

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<sup>1</sup> This idea is one of the ruling principles of Leibniz's rationalism, and it is illustrated everywhere in his system. For instance: "...the *optimum* is found not only in the whole but also in each part...; "the smallest parts of the universe are ruled in accordance with the order of greatest perfection; otherwise the whole would not be so ruled" (*Tentamen Anagoricum* [1696]; Loemker 1969: 478]; "In this respect compound beings are in symbolic agreement with the simple" (*Monadology* [1714] # 61; Loemker 1969: 649).

them as *composed of* speech acts, thus vindicating the value of the latter as actual units of linguistic behavior. Unfortunately, by paying too little attention to the idea of extension and focusing on parallelism, which he rightly rejects, Searle fails to produce such a vindication. And by assuming that granting *any* 'internal' structure to conversations would imply accepting some form of the proscribed parallelism, he leaves us with no account whatsoever of the structure of conversation. The baby thus slips away with the bath water. But, as usual, it is highly instructive to see how this happens, because it might help us to save the baby.

## II

Three kinds of theories of conversation are criticized by Searle, though only two are referred to their actual proponents. The first consists in viewing conversation as a Wittgensteinian language game, where the moves are speech acts. Each move constrains the set of possible and appropriate ensuing moves. A question requires an answer, an offer requires an acceptance or a rejection, etc.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, Searle observes, such constraints seem to be quite specific, going beyond the specification of the appropriate kind of illocutionary point of the countermove. For example, yes/no and wh-questions seem to establish also the semantic and syntactic structure of appropriate answers, and bets are not even "fully made" unless followed by the hearer's acceptance. Cases such as the latter show not only that the conversational sequence is constrained by its component speech acts, but also that sometimes only the sequence ensures the "completion" of a single speech act.<sup>3</sup> Yet, according to Searle, such cases of "internally related" sequences of speech acts are rather exceptional, and consequently the Wittgensteinian approach yields little prospect as a way of extending the analysis beyond the single speech act. Searle's prime counterexample is the ubiquitous speech act of assertion, which, *per se*, seems neither to constrain nor to be constrained by surrounding speech acts.

The discussion of assertion brings us to the second kind of theoretical account rejected by Searle, namely Grice's "logic of conversation". He concentrates his attention on the maxim of relevance, which he considers to be the Gricean maxim "most promising for explaining the

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<sup>2</sup> For a theory of this kind, see Holdcroft (1978). For a treatment of relevance in this spirit, see Holdcroft (1987).

<sup>3</sup> This fact, by the way, casts doubt on the choice of speech acts as *independent* units of analysis.

structure of conversations". Searle first claims that "it is not a constitutive rule of statement-making that a statement should be relevant to the surrounding discourse". In this, relevance contrasts with the 'essential conditions' for assertion (e.g. commitment to truthfulness). If a speech act satisfies these conditions, it qualifies as a successful and nondefective assertion, regardless of whether it is relevant or not to the preceding and following bits of discourse. In this sense, relevance, in so far as it is required, is viewed by Searle as an 'external' constraint on assertion (and other speech acts as well): violations of this constraint (e.g. when one abruptly changes the subject of the conversation) do not *per se* disqualify a statement as "perfectly satisfactory", though they may be perceived as rude or otherwise "inappropriate".

But couldn't relevance, though not constitutive of assertions and other single speech acts, be constitutive of conversations? Searle rejects this possibility on the grounds that the relevance of a conversational sequence is not a function of its being a "conversation". In his own forceful words:

"you can't explain the general structure of conversation in terms of relevance, because what counts as relevance is not determined by the fact that it is a conversation. The fact that a sequence of utterances is a conversation, by itself, places no constraints whatever on what would count as a relevant continuation of the sequence".

In order to explain the undisputed fact that we do judge conversational sequences in terms of relevance, Searle calls attention to the "deep syntax" of *relevant*. A speech act in a conversation, he says, is relevant not to a topic, an issue or a question, but to a purpose of (one of) the participants. Conversations as such have no general purpose; hence what constrains relevance in any given conversation is something "outside the fact that it is a conversation, namely the purposes of the participants". Since any number of different purposes can animate the participant at any point in a conversation, it is not surprising to observe a similar variability in the judgments of relevance based on them. Thus, a given remark may be interpreted as a deliberate change of topic initiating *another* conversation, or as conveying an implicature *within* the same conversation, or as a digression, or simply as a casual lapse in irrelevance, depending on the purpose (and other mental states) one assigns to its utterer. I think it is this extreme context-dependence of relevance that, ultimately, makes Searle believe that it is "external" to conversation and not sufficiently tight anyway to function as a "structural" principle - both good reasons for him to conclude that it cannot be *constitutive* of conversational structure.

The third approach rejected by Searle is the ethnomethodologists' account of turn-taking in conversations. His objection is that the so-called turn-taking "rules" are not rules at all, but at best descriptions of regularities that can be observed in conversations. They are not rules because they are not the kind of thing people *follow*. That is to say, people's behavior is not even partly caused by the *intention* to conform to the rule; it just *happens* to display the kind of regularity described by the "rule". In this, the turn-taking "rules" differ radically from speech act rules. Therefore, even if the former provide correct descriptions of some aspects of conversations, they cannot form the basis for an account of conversational structure that is either an extension of or parallel to speech act theory.<sup>4</sup>

Through his critique of the 'wrong' approaches, we are now in a position to appreciate what kind of account Searle is in fact condemning. The Wittgensteinians are wrong because their notion of a speech act defining a "space of possible countermoves" is not generalizable. The Griceans are wrong because the constraints they work with - notably relevance - are not "intrinsic" to conversations as such but come from the "outside". The ethnomethodologists are wrong because what they propose are not "rules". An account of the structure of conversation, in order to be really analogous to the account of speech acts, would have to overcome all of these shortcomings. It should explain conversational structure on the basis of *general*, strictly *intrinsic*, and properly so called *rules*. Such rules would be *constitutive* in that they would *define* the notion 'conversation' in general, and provide the basis for a taxonomy of types of conversation. Conformity to the rules would then be the criterion for a 'successful', 'non-defective', or, more generally, 'well-formed' conversation.

Though Searle's ostensive model for such an (impossible) account of conversation is speech act theory, it might as well have been syntactic or semantic theory. For example, Searle's claim that a relevant continuation is not constrained by what precedes it in a sequence of utterances can be contrasted with the fact that, if an expression in a sentence is a transitive verb, this *does place* very definite constraints on the expressions

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<sup>4</sup> I think ethnomethodologists would not disagree with Searle in this respect. As far as I can recall, both in Urbino (1979) and Campinas (1981), Schegloff argued that speech act theory is *irrelevant* to the analysis of conversations, and should be *replaced* by another kind of analysis (e.g. the turn-taking one), which neither emulates nor extends, nor even employs the concepts of speech act theory. If Searle indeed succeeds in proving, as he purports to do in the present article, that conversations are not structured, neither in terms of, nor analogously to, speech acts, he is in fact providing support for Schegloff's contention. They would still be at odds, of course, about the role of intentionality and, consequently, about whether the term "rule" as applied to turn-taking is a misnomer or not.

that may follow it in the sentence. These constraints, of course, are those formulated in the *rules of grammar*. What Searle is telling us, therefore, is that there are no *rules of conversational relevance* analogous to rules of grammar. Thus, Searle's argument, if correct, amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that there might be such a thing as a "grammar" of conversation.

### III

I have no qualms with such a *reductio*. As a matter of fact, when the first proposals to develop a "text-grammar" were made, I criticized them on the grounds that the notion of "(sentence)-grammar" is not an appropriate model to follow in attempting to explain the structure of texts (cf. Dascal and Margalit 1974). Furthermore, the arguments used in that criticism were very similar to Searle's, namely: (a) sequential 'grammatical' constraints on texts (e.g. anaphoric co-reference) are very restricted in scope, and (b) the 'coherence' (or any other measure of the 'well-formedness') of a text is not an intrinsic property of the text, but a function of the context as well. I think that criticism remains valid today: in fact, much of the work that still bears (inertially) the name "text-grammar" has significantly departed from the originally intended analogy, and became, more palatably to me, "pragmatic" in spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Though I agree with the rejection of the grammatical model (and, for similar reasons, of the speech act model) as inadequate for the analysis of conversational structure, I disagree with some of the arguments Searle employs to support such a rejection, as well as with the implications, both implicit and explicit, that he draws from it. In a nutshell, the disagreement lies in our divergent views on *why* the grammatical and speech act models fail. For Searle, the main reason is that, unlike speech acts, "conversations as such lack a particular purpose or point". This may well be true, as far as it goes. But, to my mind, there is a deeper reason, namely: the structure of conversations is essentially *pragmatic*, whereas the grammatical and

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<sup>5</sup> For a recent survey of (part of) the field of "text grammar", see Charolles *et al.* (1986). Other suggestions for theorizing about big chunks of discourse in terms of the grammatical model and/or the speech act model are 'story grammars' for narrative structure and 'macro speech acts' for texts and conversations. Both call attention to the important *pragmatic* fact that there are 'global' or 'macro' intentions of an author or speaker that should be identified as part of the process of comprehension of discourse. But they collapse when they press too hard their underlying analogies, by trying to spell out conditions of 'well-formedness' or of 'satisfaction' for the realization of those intentions. For a classical example of a 'story grammar', see Rummelhart (1975). For an application and discussion of Habermas's notion of a 'macro speech act', see de Almeida (1985).

speech act analogies suggest that it is (or should be) *syntactic* and/or *semantic*.

Let me elaborate. Conversations - and other forms of discourse - are prime examples of the *use* of language. As such, they fall naturally within the domain of pragmatics, broadly conceived as a theory of the use of language. Now, such a theory is a theory of what people *do* with the structures that are available to them in their language. Though it must, of course, take into account linguistic structures of all sorts, it is *not* a theory of those structures, but of how they are put to use. And they are typically put to use, in communication, to convey *speakers' meanings*. A pragmatic theory of the use of language in communication is, therefore, essentially a theory of how people use linguistic structures in order to convey and understand speakers' meanings. Syntax, semantics, *and* speech act theory all describe different and complementary aspects of linguistic structure, all of which are instrumental in letting speakers convey speakers' meanings and hearers understand them.

Consider, for example, the point of view of the hearer. On the whole, one can say that the combined result of syntax, semantics, and speech act theory is to yield, for any given utterance with which the hearer is confronted, first (one or more) *sentence meaning(s)*, and then, with the help of contextual information that fills in the 'gaps' in sentence meaning(s) and disambiguates them, (one or more) *utterance meaning(s)*. Such "meanings" include the specification of illocutionary force, on the strength of Searle's insistence that only the formula 'F(p)' (illocutionary force + propositional content) fully represents the meaning of an utterance (see Searle 1975a). They also include those items of contextual information required by the eventual presence of deictics and other context-oriented expressions in the sentence uttered. But, contrary to current beliefs, neither of these facts (assignment of illocutionary force and incorporation of contextual information) ensures that the process of interpretation comes to a halt with utterance meaning. For, as we all know, it is always possible that the *speaker's meaning*, i.e. what is intended to be conveyed by the utterance, differ from the utterance meaning. The latter is only an initially plausible *hypothesis*, based on the application of the rules of language, about what the former may be. To determine whether the speaker's meaning is in fact nothing but the utterance meaning or something else is precisely the business of *pragmatic interpretation*. And the task of a pragmatic theory is to account for the means whereby this is achieved. Some, but not all, of these means are certainly the Gricean maxims, notably the maxim of relevance.



Armed with this all too brief sketch of what I take pragmatics to be about,<sup>6</sup> we can now proceed to discuss the details of my disagreement with Searle, with a view to possible ways of overcoming it. I will first consider speech act theory and then conversation, in order to see how they compare with respect to Searle's external/internal dichotomy, the role of relevance, and the kind of 'rules' that apply to them.

Speech act theory, in so far as it analyzes and classifies illocutionary forces, and considers how they are in principle attached to certain linguistic expressions, is *not* a pragmatic theory, in the sense described above. This simply means that, *per se*, speech act theory does not yield *speakers' meanings*.<sup>7</sup> In order to do so, it needs complementation. Searle acknowledges this fact at least with respect to one class of acts, which require relevance and other Gricean maxims to be correctly interpreted, namely indirect speech acts (Searle 1975b). He distinguishes between the 'primary illocutionary act' (the one ultimately intended) and the 'secondary illocutionary act' (the one whose performance only serves the purpose of conveying the former). The latter is also called 'literal', while the former is 'nonliteral' or simply 'indirect'. It would seem natural to describe the latter as the actual *speaker's meaning* and the former as the *utterance meaning* which, though *playing a role* in conveying the speaker's meaning, is not part thereof. The terminology 'literal' vs. 'nonliteral' is suggestive in this respect. In Searle's account of metaphor, the 'metaphorical' or nonliteral meaning is ascribed to the level of speaker's meaning, while the literal meaning (whether 'defective' or not) of the metaphorical utterance is "not really meant", but serves just as a means to somehow convey the metaphorical meaning (Searle 1979). This terminology also suggests that the 'secondary illocutionary act' is assigned on the basis of purely semantic considerations, which govern literal meanings in general. These considerations need to be supplemented by pragmatic ones in order to determine the primary illocutionary act, i.e. the actual speaker's meaning. But Searle is committed to the view that there is a radical difference between metaphor and indirect speech acts, for he believes that *both* the literal and nonliteral acts are performed whenever one performs an indirect speech act. Thus, if I say, in a crowded bus, "Madam, you are stepping on my foot.", intending it as a request for the lady to alleviate my pain, I am,

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed account and comparison with other conceptions of pragmatics, see Dascal (1983). It should be clear that, in the context of this article, I am discussing only *sociopragmatics*, not *psychopragmatics*.

<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I continue to exemplify my claims mainly by reference to the point of view of the hearer or interpreter.

according to Searle, making *both* a literal assertion *and* a nonliteral request. This is surely a strange doctrine. For, why should one say that an assertion was *actually made* if it does not correspond to the speaker's *actual* point in uttering his utterance? To be sure, from a narrow semantic/speech-act-theory point of view, one can identify it as an assertion (if it fulfils the essential conditions). And this fact surely plays a role in its actual interpretation as a request. But communicatively it is this actual interpretation that matters. Searle's problem is that he views speech act theory as "pragmatic" when it isn't really, for it doesn't reach, *per se*, the level of speaker's meaning. A speech act is made only when it corresponds to the speaker's meaning, not when it fulfils some formal conditions. You may *go through the motions of statement-making* but you only make a statement if this is the *actual* point of your going through those motions. And there is no way to determine what the actual point is except by pragmatic means.

It is essential to realize that the need for 'pragmatic complementation' does not arise only in cases of indirectness. Even when the actual speaker's point coincides with the 'literal' point of the utterance, the determination of this fact involves the use of the same pragmatic principles that are operative when they do not coincide. In this sense, the speaker's point (which is a part of the speaker's meaning) lies *always* beyond the scope of speech act theory *per se*. In so far as it is the speaker's point that represents her actual purpose in performing the speech act, such a purpose is, in Searle's terminology, always "external" vis-à-vis the point "initially" ascribed to her utterance by speech act theory. Yet, in so far as communicatively what really matters is the *actual* point, what is external from the narrow semantic/speech-act-theory point of view turns out to be in fact the "internal" core of the communicative process.

Similarly, the means whereby speaker's meaning is determined will be considered 'external' if looked at from a semantic point of view, while they will become 'internal' if looked at from a pragmatic point of view. Thus, relevance considerations may indeed be assumed to be 'external' to the question whether a given utterance fulfils the conditions for qualifying as an assertion.<sup>8</sup> But they are 'internal' if looked at from a pragmatic point of view, i.e. regarding the question whether a given utterance *in fact* conveys, in the context of its use, an assertion. In this connection, my early distinction (see Dascal 1977) between "semantic relevance" and "pragmatic relevance" should be better understood as meaning that, in interpreting an utterance, you first try to assign to it, as its speaker's meaning, the straightforward semantic interpretation of the utterance. If this assignment

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<sup>8</sup> For an account of some linguistic phenomena that seem to imply the existence of *semantic* constraints on relevance, see Brockway (1981).

fails to comply with the requirement of relevance (among others), you then proceed to look for alternative interpretations. That first try is 'semantic' only in the sense that it hypothesizes as the speaker's meaning the semantic interpretation. But this hypothesis is already a pragmatic one, in that it is a hypothesis about the speaker's meaning, and consequently the relevance testing is from the outset "pragmatic".

We can now apply the preceding remarks to conversation. Let me grant, for the sake of the argument, that Searle is correct in claiming that, unlike speech acts, conversations as such have no intrinsic point. In the light of what was said above, to call attention to this fact is simply to say that conversations differ from speech acts in that there is no set of *semantic* or, more generally, *formal* conditions that specify their "point" or some equivalent, broader notion. As I read it, what this claim amounts to is that, whereas if I am confronted with an utterance of a certain form I can make an initial, educated guess about its illocutionary force based exclusively on my semantic knowledge (which includes my internalized speech act theory), no corresponding guess can be made regarding sets of utterances, because no corresponding semantic knowledge exists. Consequently, whatever hypotheses are made concerning the "point" of a conversation, including the very determination of whether it is at all a conversation, are in a sense *immediately pragmatic*. For they stem directly from the level of actual speakers' meanings, without going through the intermediary conversational equivalents of sentence and utterance meaning. In this sense, conversations as such appear to be 'pure' pragmatic phenomena. They make use, of course, of linguistic structures of all sorts, but *as such* they do not have, themselves, a 'linguistic' structure.

If this is correct, then it comes as no surprise that whatever significant structure conversations have should be found primarily at the pragmatic, rather than at the syntactic or semantic/speech-act-theory level. Obviously, from the latter point of view, such structure will appear to be 'external'. But from a pragmatic point of view - which is the one that really matters if conversations are indeed purely or mainly pragmatic phenomena - it will surely qualify as 'inner structure'. Apart from the terminological quibble, what this implies is that the principles that account for conversational organization are pragmatic principles, and that their level of organization is essentially that of speakers' meanings. Let us spell out these implications.

One important factor in terms of which conversation is structured is what I have proposed to call 'conversational demand' (Dascal 1977).

Utterances in a conversation are typically reactive.<sup>9</sup> What each utterance reacts to is what its speaker perceives as the 'demand' placed upon her at that stage of the conversation. Normally, it is the immediately preceding utterance that has most weight in determining the conversational demand to which the next utterance should react. Accordingly, we tend to judge the 'appropriateness' of a given contribution to a conversation in terms of how well it matches the preceding utterance. For example, were the lady to whom I addressed my indirect request to remove her weight from over my foot to reply (without moving), "Yes, indeed.", her response would be normally perceived as grossly inappropriate. This brief exchange is hardly a 'conversation', but it clearly shows that we normally expect utterances in a conversation to concatenate or match not at the level of utterance meaning (or 'literal illocutionary act', in Searle's terms, but at that of speakers' meaning, i.e. pragmatically. The expectation of a fit, at this level, is so strong that one often interprets a misfit as being merely apparent, and reinterprets either the conversational demand or the speaker's meaning of the response so as to restore the fit. In this way, some of the so-called implicatures are generated. For instance, one may reinterpret the woman's response - in the example above - as conveying the speaker's meaning "I don't care." or "I am doing it on purpose." Such reinterpretations, however, require support from additional contextual information (e.g. my knowledge that the woman hates me). They thus bring into the account of the concatenation, in a natural and organic way, those other 'purposes' of the speakers that Searle considers 'external'. This shows, once more, that the pragmatic concatenation of adjacent utterances in a conversation goes well beyond a simple fit between their illocutionary points (and propositional contents). Just as an initial misfit can be overruled by further contextual information, so too an initial fit can be eventually replaced by a 'deeper' fit in the light of additional evidence. Participating in a conversation requires being constantly on the lookout for reasons that might justify less obvious interpretative alternatives. But this only means that one must make constant use of the full set of pragmatic interpretation tools. One such tool is, as indicated, the expectation that each utterance meet the conversational demand to which it reacts. But, strong as it is, such an expectation is only a *presumption*, i.e. it is *defeasible*. Consequently, though it is certainly one of the principles in terms of which conversation is organized, both its

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<sup>9</sup> Hermeneuticists and, more recently, "problematologists" (cf. Meyer 1986), contend that every speech act is only understandable as a reaction to some explicit or implicit "question" or "problem". But one needs not go as far as this in order to realize the importance of the role of the 'reactive' nature of utterances in *conversations*. For a comparison between hermeneutics and pragmatics, see Dascal (1989).

openness to contextual reinterpretation and its defeasibility imply that the structure it imposes on conversations cannot be described in terms of conditions of 'well-formedness'.

The conversational demand is, of course, related to the illocutionary (speaker's) point of the utterance that establishes it. But it is not *determined* by it, for it is, usually, much more specific. This is why the notion of conversational demand is much more suitable to account for fine-grained conversational concatenation than the notion of a set of "possible countermoves" attached (in the conversation-as-a-game paradigm) to certain types of illocutionary point. The need for a fairly specific identification of the conversational demand for the conversation to proceed is illustrated by the pervasiveness of clarificatory requests such as "What do you want me to say?", "Why did you say that?", "You certainly don't want to know that, do you?", "Why do you ask?", as well as by comments such as "I know exactly what you would like me to say." Consider the following conversation between two students, which I overheard:

- Eli: How is it going, Ilana?  
 Ilana: Tell me what you want to know, and I'll tell you.  
 Eli: Have you come this morning?  
 Ilana: Whether I have come this morning?...Don't worry, the lecture was bullshit.

Clearly, in her first reply, Ilana seeks a more precise definition of Eli's conversational demand. She wants him "to get to the point". In her second reply, she pauses to infer what demand lies behind Eli's question, and replies accordingly. In both cases, she does not see in the ostensive illocutionary points and propositional contents of Eli's utterances (which might well be Eli's actual speaker's meanings, at this initial stage of the conversation), respectively 'phatic opening' of a casual chat and 'request for information about Ilana's matinal presence somewhere', the actual conversational demand. Consequently, her reactions do not enact any of the 'possible countermoves' corresponding to those ostensive points. Nevertheless, her reactions are pragmatically understandable (both to her interlocutor and to an observer) because they concatenate with what she perceives to be the actual conversational demand to which she is supposed to respond.

Basically, it is by reference to the conversational demand that relevance comes to play a role in the structuration of conversation. Searle is right in claiming that the 'deep syntax' of *relevant* is 'relevant to a purpose'. He may also be right in pointing out that conversations as such have no purpose, so that 'relevant to the conversation' is a vacuous

expression. But at each stage of a conversation there is a more or less well defined conversational demand to which the ensuing utterance is expected to relate. The expression 'relevant to the conversational demand' is, therefore, perfectly meaningful and quite definite at any given point of a conversation. It may thus serve to characterize a *general* pragmatic constraint on the sequential organization of conversations. Much of what was said above about the expectation of appropriateness applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to relevance. As a *presumption*, it is defeasible, so that its violation does not entail 'ill-formedness'. Nevertheless, it is a strong presumption, to wit the fact that even digressions must somehow comply with it, albeit 'marginally' (see Dascal and Katriel 1979). To wit also the fact that it is on the basis of such a presumption that indirect speech acts and other forms of indirectness are understood.

Searle points out that there is an uncomfortable 'circularity' in the relationship between relevance and purpose, which would seem to disqualify relevance as a significant constraint on conversations:

... the problem is that there is no general purpose of conversations, qua conversation, so what will count as relevant will always have to be specified relative to a purpose of the participants, which may or may not be the purpose of the conversation up to that point. If we insist that it be relevant to the antecedently existing purpose of the conversation, then the account will be circular because the criteria of relevance are not independent of the criteria of identity of the particular conversation; and if we don't require relevance to the conversational purpose, then anything goes provided it is relevant to some purpose or other. That would put no constraints on the structure of actual talk exchanges.

If I understand it well, part of the difficulty pointed out by Searle is due to the fact that he places himself in the position of an observer of a conversation (later on he speaks of "just by looking at the conversation"), who has to decide whether a given contribution at a given point is relevant or not, exclusively on the basis of what he observes. In order to decide, he must be able to know to what purpose it is supposed to be relevant. But conversations don't have purposes that you can discover "just by looking at them". So, the purpose must be that of one (or both) of the participants. Yet, in order to decide what that purpose is, all you have to go by is the participants' contribution to the conversation, and you can only assign a purpose to a participant by assessing the relevance of her particular contribution(s). If you were allowed to draw on additional information (e.g. if you knew more, from independent sources, about the participants'

motivation, background, etc.), you might be able to break the circle, at least tentatively. And if you were yourself a participant, you would at least know *your* purposes. But the problem would in fact persist, even under these improved conditions. For, even then, you can never know for sure whether a given 'bizarre' response of your interlocutor is due to a misunderstanding of the conversational demand, or to a deliberate purpose not to relate to it, or to mere casual irrelevance, or else that it is ultimately relevant under some criterion you didn't think of.

The circularity in question, however, is not peculiar to the case at hand. It is in fact an instance of the general indeterminacy arising from situations in which, given a piece of behavior (with or without additional evidence), you have to determine the values of two or more intentional variables underlying that behavior. We are familiar with the fact, pointed out by Davidson (1975), that assignment of meaning depends on the assignment of belief, and vice-versa. Interpretive problems such as these are *practically* solved by strategies that involve the use of presumptions. In this sense, the presumption of relevance is on a par with other principles of interpretation such as the principles of charity (Davidson) and rationalization (Lewis). The fact that all of them are only presumptions is what ensures that it is possible on occasion to go against them. If, for instance, on independent grounds we have good reasons to assume that an interlocutor is not relating to the conversational demand (which she does not even bother to identify, since, say, she is clearly paying attention to some event outside the conversation), then there is no point in trying to reinterpret her remark as hiddenly relevant (i.e. as conveying an implicature). Still, it is the availability of the presumptive strategies, which form part of the accepted communicative practice, that allows one to break the circle by forming initially plausible interpretative hypotheses.

To insist that the principle in terms of which much of our communicative activity is possible organizes that activity 'externally' is like to insist that the presumption of innocence or the principle of reliance on precedents organize legal practice 'externally' or 'non-constitutively' wherever they are, though traditionally followed, not explicitly formulated in some law.<sup>10</sup> It is characteristic of human practices that, even when they are regulated by explicit conventions or rules, the *use* of such rules is in turn guided by the reliance of the participants upon non-explicit principles, which constitute the 'tradition' within which the practice is possible. But it is a mistake to assume that, because they are non-explicit and non-formal, such principles are less important in accounting for the 'structure' of the

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<sup>10</sup> For other, more direct connections, between pragmatics and legal practice, see Dascal and Wróblewski (1989 and forthcoming).

practice than the formal rules. In some cases - and conversation may be one of them - they are even *more* important.

#### IV

Let me turn now to the positive things Searle has to say about "what holds conversations together", namely shared intentionality and the role of the background. I accept nearly everything Searle says about the importance of these two factors in structuring conversations. But I disagree with his interpretation of their role as 'external' and as supporting the difference he tries to establish between modes of structuration of speech acts and conversations. In fact, on closer inspection it will become apparent that the roles of shared intentionality and the background support rather what I have said so far about the pragmatic character of the structure of conversations, and about the need for a similar pragmatic account of speech acts.

Let us begin with shared intentionality. Unfortunately Searle's remarks on this topic are very brief. But they convey an important insight that can be further developed. The insight is that conversations are, typically, *genuine* forms of *collective* action. What this means is that underlying each individual contribution to a conversation there is not only an individual I-intention, but also a collective, we-intention. Thus, intentionality is 'shared' in conversation not by the fact that the participants all have the same I-intention or purpose, but by the fact that the intentional contents of their I-intentions, even though they may differ, all refer to some (common) we-intention. In this, conversation, *qua* *collective action*, differs from a sum of individual actions having the same I-intentional content, as when a group of hikers, upon the beginning of a thunderstorm, all run to take cover under the same roof. Compare this to a platoon storming a hill, where, though each soldier has a different I-intention and performs a different action, all share the we-intention of jointly storming the hill.

Within this general characterization of the shared intentionality of conversation, several gradations can be found. At the barest minimum, the we-intention shared by participants in a conversation is that of just cooperating-in-the-conversation, say, with the sole phatic purpose of 'communicating', as in how-are-things-going? or the-weather-is-nice kinds of conversations. Even this minimum, however, is sufficient to require that underlying each contribution there be an I-intention conforming to the we-intention, e.g. by identifying, addressing, and eventually matching the 'conversational demand' at each stage. Other talk-exchanges may have much more specific we-intentions, e.g. jointly solving a problem, taking



decisions, etc. One can also distinguish between 'overt' we-intentions, i.e. those actually shared by all participants, and 'covert' ones, in which the intentions of some 'dominant' participants determine the course of the conversation, without the others being aware thereof. This in turn can be made in a deliberately 'manipulative' way (e.g. when a teacher induces students to discuss a topic without telling them that their performance is going to be used, say, as a leadership selection test) or not.

What emerges from the elaboration of an account of the various forms of shared intentionality in general is in fact a fairly definite *typology* of forms of collective action.<sup>11</sup> Based on it, a corresponding typology for kinds of conversations, along the lines suggested above, might be developed. If so, then invoking shared intentionality as a characteristic feature of conversations, shows exactly the opposite of what Searle claims in the opening remarks of part III of his essay. For, instead of a disanalogy, a striking analogy emerges between speech acts and conversations in this respect. Speech acts are generally characterized by their illocutionary point, which is an I-intention. Their taxonomy is based on the different forms such an I-intention can take, through the variation of a certain number of fixed parameters (cf. Vanderveken 1985). Conversations appear to be generally characterized by having a 'cooperative purpose', which takes the form of a shared we-intention of its participants. A taxonomy for them can be developed by considering the varieties of we-intentions and their interrelations with the participants' I-intentions. How this taxonomy will ultimately look like, and whether it will be based on a set of fixed parameters, depends on the further development of the theory of collective behavior and its application to conversation. But this does not detract from the initial plausibility of the analogy.

Such a rapprochement between speech acts and conversations, however, seems to call for a revision of an assumption made earlier in this essay. You will recall that I accepted, "for the sake of the argument", Searle's claim that conversations as such have no point or purpose. I interpreted this as meaning that conversations are 'purely pragmatic' phenomena. It now appears that, like speech acts, they have also some 'semantic' structure. For, shared we-intentions, just like I-intentions, have 'conditions of satisfaction'. Therefore, they impose 'formal' constraints on conversations. Yet, by insisting that the structure of conversations is primarily pragmatic, what I am stressing is the fact that these are constraints on the *pragmatic interpretations* of the speech acts that constitute the conversation. Thus, the cooperative we-intention of a participant in a conversation is only satisfied if it properly addresses the

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<sup>11</sup> For further suggestions along these lines, see Dascal and Idan (1989).

conversational demand established by the *speaker's meaning* of her interlocutor's utterance, rather than addressing merely its 'literal illocutionary point'. The discovery that these constraints are 'formal' does not obliterate the fact that they apply to pragmatic objects. On the other hand, it supports the claim that the structure they impose on conversations is as 'internal' as anything can be.

Let us turn now to the role of the background. According to Searle, the background consists of essentially inarticulate, and therefore non-representational, 'knowledge', that underlies all forms of representing (Searle 1983: 143ff.). In so far as conversations involve the use of representations (e.g. linguistic representations), the role of the background cannot be ignored in an account of conversational organization. Furthermore, as Searle's sample analysis of a TV conversation demonstrates, the role of the background cannot be eliminated by the addition of explicit information to the body of the conversation. No matter how explicit a conversation is, it still relies, for its proper functioning, on an implicit background.

All this is unobjectionable. What puzzles me, however, is why does Searle single out the role of the background in the context of a discussion of the structure of conversations. After all, as Searle himself emphasizes, the background plays an indispensable role in *all* forms of representation, single speech acts included. Its role in conversations, therefore, is not *differential*. Furthermore, in the light of his previous insistence that whatever structure conversations have is 'external', singling out the background as one of the factors that structure conversations implies that such a factor is 'external'. But then, since no form of representation is self-sufficient, but rather is 'enabled' only by reference to the background, one must conclude that all forms of representation are in fact 'externally' structured. In particular, speech acts, whose definitory intentional contents also become definite only by reference to the background, can no longer be said to be 'internally' structured. In this way, the alleged difference between the 'internal' structure of speech acts and the 'external' structure of conversations vanishes, *precisely* by invoking the role of the background.

It seems to me that my previous discussion provides a straightforward solution for this puzzle. The intervention of the background is indeed essential for the *use* of any form of representation. In fact, the background is just one of the sources of 'contextual information' in terms of which the process of *pragmatic interpretation* is conducted.<sup>12</sup> The essential implicitness or nonrepresentational character that Searle assigns

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<sup>12</sup> Searle himself distinguishes the background from the 'network'. For further distinctions of types and roles of contextual information, see Dascal and Weizman (1987).

to it makes it especially fit to comprise the principles and assumptions that constitute the 'tradition' within which the practice of using specific types of representations is possible, for such principles are, as I have argued, a matter of 'knowing how', not of 'knowing that'.

If the role of the background is, thus, essentially pragmatic, it makes sense to say that it is 'external' only if one assumes that representations have also a background-independent, 'semantic' characterization, which would deserve the name of 'internal'. I believe one must make such an assumption, for otherwise one would slip into the untenable position I have dubbed 'contextualism' (Dascal 1981). And I believe that Searle, by insisting on the 'inner' structure of speech acts as contrasted with the 'external', background-determined, structure of conversations, is in fact withdrawing from his earlier (Searle 1978) commitment to contextualism, and acknowledging the need for a semantic account of speech acts (and, perhaps, of other forms of representation as well). The reason for stressing the *essential* role of background in conversations is now apparent: their structure depends, as was shown above, on the *pragmatic*, i.e. background-dependent, aspects of speech acts, not on their semantic aspects alone.

It seems to me that the preceding argument might be extended to the rest of Searle's theory of intentionality. For, the main thrust of that theory is the attempt to characterize very specific conditions of identity of mental states. In this sense, it seeks a 'semantic' theory of such states. The intervention of the background should be seen not as affecting these identity conditions, but rather the *use* of those states in cognitive processes, i.e. it would belong to a 'pragmatic' theory of such processes. If this application of the pragmatic/semantic distinction to our mental life is possible, and if one further assumes that language is (part of) the background of our cognitive processes, then that part of the pragmatics of mental life that deals with the role of language in it would certainly be the lion's share of what I have called 'psychopragmatics' (Dascal 1983: 45ff.).

## V

In all good novels, the opening sentence is a tell-tale indication of what is to follow. So too in Searle's essay. "Traditionally - Searle begins - speech act theory has a very restricted subject matter". It is indeed this restricted character of traditional speech act theory that leads Searle to conclude that there is no significant 'parallelism' between the structures of speech acts and conversations, and that there is no way in which the theory of the former can be 'extended' in order to form the core of the theory of the latter. However, as soon as one recognizes the need to complement traditional speech act theory with a genuinely pragmatic counterpart, not

only such an extension becomes possible, but even some interesting parallelisms emerge.

The restricted speech act theory belongs to *langue* - as Searle (1969: 17) rightly insists - because it affords a *semantic* theory about aspects hitherto neglected of the meaning of utterances. Its principles do not resemble those of conversation because the latter are essentially *pragmatic* principles governing the *use* of language. Yet, as soon as speech acts are considered not *in abstracto* but as concrete pieces of linguistic behavior, they become, just as any other "part of language", subjected to the pragmatic constraints of use. In this sense, any account of the structure of linguistic elements must be liable to be *integrated* (a better word than "extended") into an account of the use of language. In this way, principles of "use", such as the notion of relevance, become necessary for interpreting any structural element of language: grammatical, phonemic, referential, *and* illocutionary force ambiguity are all disambiguated in the context of use by appeal, among other things, to the notion of relevance. Pragmatics is everywhere, not only in conversation, though conversation is perhaps unique in that its structure depends directly on the pragmatic interpretation of its constituent speech acts.

Conversations - just as other forms of discourse - are prime examples of the *use* of language. Single speech acts considered *in abstracto* - just as isolated sentences - are structural units of *langue*. The former are organized by genuinely pragmatic principles, while the latter are organized by grammatical/semantical principles. This is why the latter have 'constitutive' rules, while the former haven't. In a strict sense, the latter are liable to 'structural' explanations, while the former require 'functional' ones. This does not mean, however, that, in a laxer sense, conversations (and other forms of discourse) do not have 'structure'. Just as functionalism is the mistake that consists in trying to explain everything in language functionally, constitutivism is the opposite mistake, namely that of trying to deny 'structure' or 'organization' of what cannot be explained by restricted 'structural' principles. Both are inverted forms of reductionism. Searle's critique of constitutivism in the analysis of conversations is a step in the right direction, and is consonant with his anti-reductionist stance in matters of intentionality. But it should be complemented by a clear acknowledgment of both, the limitations of constitutivism per se, and the possibilities of a genuine pragmatic account of the 'structure' of conversations.

Searle and Davidson (1985) are right in claiming that the principles that regulate conversations (and communication in general) are not "conventions" (Davidson) or "constitutive rules" (Searle). But they are wrong if they take this to imply that conversations have no organizing principles, or that such principles do not grant them 'inner' structure.

Davidson is also right in contending that even the use of single speech acts - in fact, the use of language in general - is not accountable for in terms of conventions or constitutive rules. Though one must agree with Searle that speech acts *qua* units of language are also structured by such constitutive rules, he should be prepared to admit that, *qua* units of language use, they are further structured - in a no less 'inner' way - by pragmatic principles.

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## SEARLE ON CONVERSATION AND STRUCTURE

**David Holdcroft**  
*University of Leeds*

Searle says that he is not sceptical about the possibility of giving a theoretical account of the structure of conversation.<sup>1</sup> But to the question "Could we ... get an account that gave us constitutive rules for conversations in a way that that we have constitutive rules for speech acts?" his answer is 'no'. (p.7) Later he says that he is going "...to conclude that we will be able to get a theoretical account, but it won't be anything like our account of the constitutive rules of speech acts." (p.11) But I must confess that I was unable to discover what that alternative account is. So that my discussion will be devoted to a discussion of Searle's reasons for answering the question above about parallels negatively, and the conclusions he draws from them. (Hereafter I shall refer to this question as the 'key question'.)

Searle has four main grounds for answering the key question negatively:

(a) There are few interesting sequential relations between speech acts. So if speech acts are to be the elements of conversational structure, such structure is at best minimal.

(b) Attempts to explain conversational structure in terms of the conversational maxims proposed by Grice, and in particular the maxim of relevance, fail because conversations do not have "...an essential condition that determines a purpose." (p.13) Searle thinks that this is the most important reason for answering the key question negatively, i.e., "they [conversations] lack a particular purpose or point." (p.20)

(c) What look like rules often turn out to be mere regularities, so that it is all too easy to suppose that one has described an interesting structure when he has merely described a pattern of behaviour from which

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<sup>1</sup> I assume that we are not just talking about conversation in the sense of an informal exchange between parties who treat each other as equals, and that 'conversation' is often being used as a generic term of art of which there are various types, e.g., consultations, debates, negotiations and, in the ordinary sense of the word conversations. It is I hope clear from the context which use is in question.



it would be impossible to diverge. This is Searle's main criticism of the well known Sacks-Jefferson-Schegloff rule of turn taking, but is perhaps meant to apply more generally to ethnomethodologists' descriptions of conversational structure.

(d) The role played by what Searle calls the 'background' is such that what constitutes relevance to the purposes of a conversation "...will depend on the shared background of the participants." (p.26) This is a point which, in Searle's view, deepens point (b): "One reason that we cannot get a non-circular account of 'relevant' just by looking at a conversation is that what the participants take as relevant, what counts as relevant, will always be relative to the cognitive apparatus they bring to bear on the conversation." (p.26)

My own attitude to the key question is rather ambivalent. For I think that an account of conversation could not be expected to exactly parallel that of speech acts, for a reason which I discuss at the end of section 1. But that much agreement is outweighed by the fact that I both think that most of Searle's arguments fail to establish his conclusion, and find myself much more in sympathy with positions that he rejects. Moreover, in the last resort, it seems to me that the important question is whether these accounts are defensible, rather than whether they parallel Searle's account of speech acts.

So though I think that, given his conception of a speech act, the arguments Searle brings in support of (a) are substantially correct, I shall argue that this does not show that conversations do not have structures. Clearly, (a) would show this to be so only if the elements of conversational structure had to be Searlean speech acts, which Searle does not show to be the case. Indeed, many accounts of conversational structure allot only a modest role to speech acts, so conceived, in their account of that structure, and this I want to argue is correct. Hence, I can accept most of the points Searle makes in support of (a), but deny that they show that conversations are not structured by specifically conversational strategies.

Whereas (a) is a point that I accept, whilst denying that it shows what Searle takes it to show, (b) is one that I reject. For on the basic question at issue here Searle seems to me to be right. If the only structure conversations could have was externally imposed by, for instance, the structure of the tasks that participants were engaged in, then though they would indeed have structures, they would not derive from the 'rules' of conversation or from specifically conversational strategies. So one could hardly maintain that conversations are structured in the relevant sense, and accept (b). Moreover, since Searle thinks that (d) deepens the point about purposes made by (b), rejection of (b) commits me either to denying the importance of what Searle calls the background, or to denying that the

existence of the background shows what Searle takes it to show. The first of these options would indeed be difficult to defend, and I shall argue for the latter.

As for (c), Searle is, of course, right to insist that any account of conversational strategies or 'rules' must be wary not to describe what in fact are only regularities as rules. However, this point is of more limited generality than the others, since it merely states a condition that any proposal must meet, without showing that there is no proposal that could meet it. Indeed, it seems to me that Searle's criticisms of the rule of turn taking are far from decisive, but to restrict my focus I shall not discuss this matter any further here - particularly since others more expert than myself will comment on it.

It is now time to defend my position. In section 1 I shall argue that though Searle is right to claim that there are very few interesting relations between speech acts as he conceives of them, that does not show that conversations are not structured. Next in section 2 I shall set out the case for denying Searle's claim (b) that all conversational goals are externally imposed. This will lead on to a discussion of the support provided for (b) by (d). As indicated above, my position will be that though Searle is right to stress the importance of background its existence does not show what he takes it to show. The final section will conclude with some brief remarks about the prospects for a theoretical account of conversational structure.

### **1. Speech act sequencing and conversational structure**

The main point of this section will be to argue that though Searle is right above the limited scope for generalisations about relations between speech acts as he conceives of them, it does not follow that there is no conversational structure. For it remains possible that there are more complicated structures involving speech acts than the relatively simple linear structures that he discusses. But to begin with I would like to raise some preliminary issues.

#### *(i) Traditional theories of speech acts*

The opening section of Searle's paper, perhaps not wholly seriously, seems to entertain the possibility of performing a speech act in complete isolation from what precedes and follows it, leading him to comment that "Traditional speech act theory is thus largely confined to single speech acts." (p.7) Whilst it is true that speech act theory has had relatively little to say in detail about the integration of speech acts into conversations, Searle's remark is misleading if it suggests that this was so because it was generally supposed that there was nothing to say.

There are three reasons why this is so. First, as is well known, Austin held that normally the successful performance of an illocutionary act required uptake, i.e., the recognition by H of the illocutionary force of S's intended act. (Austin 1962: 117) This requirement itself has nothing to say about relations between acts. But from an epistemological point of view it is clear that it is very unlikely that uptake will be achieved unless H can relate S's utterance in some way to the conversational context - which brings me to my second point.

Clearly, there are many names of illocutionary forces which an utterance, or series of utterances, can possess only if it stands in a certain relation to some other utterance which is already part of the conversational context. Very clear examples are: 'deny', 'accept', 'add', 'concede', 'illustrate', 'interject' and 'withdraw'. No realistic theory of speech acts could restrict its attention just to single speech acts when confronted with utterances having one of these kinds of illocutionary force. For the act performed by such utterances must be related in appropriate ways both to some earlier act, and to itself described differently. Thus for me to illustrate your point you must have made a claim; and since to illustrate a point one must do something else, e.g., report or describe, then my act must fall under some other description as well as that of being an illustration.

Austin called the kind of acts we are talking about 'expositives', which he characterised as acts which "...are used in acts of exposition involving the expounding of views, the conducting of arguments, and the clarifying of usages and references." (Austin 1962: 152) Austin's classification was, of course, tentative, and he expressed anxieties about this kind of act:

...expositives [are troublesome] because they are enormously numerous and important, and seem to be included in the other classes and at the same time to be unique in a way that I have not succeeded in making clear to myself. It could be that all aspects are present in all my classes. (Austin 1962: 161)

The way in which they are unique, I suggest, is that unlike other names of illocutionary force they pertain to the dimension of discourse, specifying types of functional role that an act otherwise classifiable, e.g., as statement, verdict or commissive can have in a discourse. I will try to develop this suggestion in section 2; but whether it is correct or not, it is clear that many acts do have the kind of force in question and can hardly be discussed in complete isolation from their conversational context.

The third reason why Searle's remark that traditional speech act theory is largely confined to single speech acts is misleading is that quite a number of authors have in fact tried to develop an account of speech acts which allots an important role to contextual knowledge and, in some cases, if not all, knowledge of what has already occurred in the conversation and its overall goals. (Bach and Harnish 1979; Clark and Clark; Edmondson 1981; Holdcroft 1978, 1979) Clark and Clark, for instance, draw attention to the way in which content is organised topically, a typical form of organisation consisting of given information followed by new, so that the way in which a speech act is formulated provides clues to the ways in which it is meant to be related to a larger context. Failure to pay attention to this type of organisation can lead to serious misunderstanding.<sup>2</sup>

Bach and Harnish for their part present an extremely well worked out account of illocutionary acts according to which the communicative success of a particular act depends on the recognition by H of S's illocutionary intention; a position which is, of course, fully in accord with Austin's view about uptake which was discussed above.<sup>3</sup> (Bach and Harnish 1979: 15) To recognise S's illocutionary intention H has, on Bach and Harnish's account, to be able to carry out a number of inferences which make use of information, which is mutually believed, about the context. At a certain stage in this process H is confronted with a choice between a number of different inferential strategies depending on whether he thinks it reasonable to assume that S is using his words literally, and whether he thinks S is following a direct or indirect strategy in formulating his illocutionary act. (Bach and Harnish 1979: 60ff.) Bach and Harnish go on to stress, correctly in my opinion, that the particular strategy H adopts will depend on views he has about the coherence and appropriateness of a particular interpretation in the context. Thus they write that

Without a shared conception of the nature, stage, and direction of the talk-exchange, H could hardly tell whether S meant what he had said. What is said may well be in and of itself perfectly reasonable but conversationally inappropriate if construed literally or as S's complete contribution to the talk-exchange at that point. (Bach and Harnish 1979: 62)

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<sup>2</sup> For an interesting example of the effects of thematising the same propositional content in different ways see (Brown and Yule 1983: 128)

<sup>3</sup> There are other important respects in which Bach and Harnish, rightly in my view, differ from Austin, most notably over the question whether illocutionary acts are conventional.

So on their view, there simply is no possibility of first identifying a speech act and then asking whether or not it belongs to a wider context; for to do the first thing one has to do the second.

A view broadly in agreement with that of Bach and Harnish was also argued for in (Holdcroft 1978 and 1979) This stresses the importance of contextual determinants of illocutionary force, such as the relative status of S and H, the question whether either is an authority on the topic in question, the place of the utterance in the discourse etc. So that to recognise S's illocutionary intention, H will on this account too have to be able to relate S's utterance to a wider context. (Holdcroft 1979; 485)

However, an example Searle gives to illustrate one of his points challenges this position:

...if I say to you "I think the Republicans will win the next election" and you say to me "I think the Brazilian government has devalued the Cruzeiro again", at least on the surface your remark is violating a certain principle of relevance. But notice, unlike the case of offers and bets, the illocutionary point of my speech act was nonetheless achieved. I did make an assertion, and my success in achieving that illocutionary point does not depend on your making an appropriate response. (p.10)

Searle's point is, I take it, that in spite of my uncooperative reply he has succeeded in making a statement; and this in turn shows that the sort of view sketched above of speech act recognition is simply mistaken.

Of course, we could hardly say that this is an example of a conversation, given my response. So *a fortiori* this could not be cited as an example of a conversation in which the elements bear no relation to each other. But I do not see any difficulty from the point of view that I have been discussing with the idea that in the circumstances described Searle has made a statement. For the example would be a counterexample to that view only if the statement could be attributed to Searle without considering its conversational context at all, or without Searle's illocutionary intention being recognised. But neither of these things has been shown to be so. Reading the description of the example one simply assumes that the utterance occurs at a position at which the speaker is able to introduce a topic and elicit a comment, and that I do indeed understand him, which is all that the view that I have been defending requires. My failure to go on in an appropriate way, does not mean that he has not made an acceptable conversational move. If, however, one supposes that he in fact responded to me as I am described as responding to him, then the case is completely

altered, for ruling out misunderstanding or extremely subtle indirection, it is indeed difficult to know what he is doing.

Perhaps Searle would disagree, for after having said that "...on the surface your remark is violating a certain principle of relevance", (p.10) he later adds: "But you do not violate a constitutive rule of a certain kind of speech act or conversation just by changing the subject." (ibid.)

Now if by 'changing the subject' is meant introducing another topic for discussion, then perhaps this could be an extremely clumsily executed case of changing the subject. But in that case, I am making a recognised conversational move, however ineptly, expressive of a willingness to talk but about something else; so after all we have related the utterance to a larger context. But if saying whatever comes into my head is meant to count as changing the subject, so that when Searle responds "Oh. I didn't know that their inflation was that bad", I continue "Les Miserables is a great success", etc. then surely no conversational moves at all can be attributed to me, and what we are dealing with is not a conversation. Moreover, in the absence of a conversational context I see no reason to suppose that I have made a statement.

One final point: unless some importance is attached to context in our account of speech acts, a weight would be put on the notion of speaker's intentions which it could not possibly bear. Interestingly, in his theory of indirect speech acts Searle relies crucially on "...the principles of conversation operating on the information of the hearer and speaker" to establish that a sentence has an ulterior illocutionary point. (Searle 1979: 47) But if the principles of conversation come into play in such cases, then they will also have to come into play in the so called 'direct' cases, for what makes the straightforward interpretation acceptable in these cases is surely its appropriateness to the context; it is only when that interpretation is not appropriate that we are driven to seek another 'indirect' interpretation. So that on his own theory, it should be no more possible to identify a speech act without relating it to its context than it is on Bach and Harnish's account.

It might be objected at this point that it is important to distinguish an account of the nature of speech acts from one of their identification. But from the point of view that I am defending no such separation can be made. For uptake is necessary for the successful performance of an act, which means that H must recognise S's illocutionary intention. But this he cannot do unless he can relate S's putative act to the context.

Of course those who think context is important may be right on this point and still lose the argument, if Searle is right about the nature of conversational goals; but that is a matter for Section 2.

(ii) *Speech act taxonomy and levels of description*

In the context of our discussion a key question about speech act taxonomy is whether there is a class of acts which indicate the relations that an act can stand in to other speech acts, or other items, in the context.

In Austin's view, as we saw earlier, the answer to this question is 'yes'. He called the acts in question 'expositives', and for convenience I repeat his description of them, namely, that they are acts which

...make plain how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation, how we are using words, or in general are expository. Examples are 'I reply', 'I argue', 'I concede', 'I illustrate', 'I assume', 'I postulate'. (Austin 1962: 152)

This class is, Austin argues, both large and important. However, in one of the many passages in which he concedes that his classification is both tentative and the source of puzzles, he points out that many of the acts he classes as expositives seem to belong to another major category as well:

...expositives...seem both to be included in the other classes and at the same time to be unique in a way that I have not succeeded in making clear even to myself. (ibid.)

This is a point which he illustrates at some length later:

Examples which may well be taken as verdictives are: 'analyse', 'class', 'interpret', which involve exercises of judgment. Examples which may well be taken as exercitives are: 'concede', 'urge', 'argue', 'insist', which involve exertions of influence or the exercise of powers. Examples which may well be taken as commissives are: 'define', 'agree', 'accept', 'maintain', 'support', 'testify', 'swear', which involve assuming an obligation. Examples which may well be taken as behabitives are: 'demur', 'boggle at', which involve adopting an attitude or expression of feeling. (Austin 1962: 16)

It seems to me that Austin's puzzlement arises because he thinks of expositive verbs as names of acts rather than of illocutionary forces, and hence thinks that the integrity of his classification is threatened by the examples of double classification that he cites. Now this would indeed be so if an act was doubly classified on the same dimension. For in that case it would have contradictory properties, e.g., both count as a representation that a certain state of affairs held and an attempt by S to get H to bring that state of affairs about, so that it would have to have conflicting

directions of fit. However, no such problem arises if the double classification involves separate dimensions, e.g., one concerned with direction of fit, and one with the relation of the act in question to other acts. Moreover, it is clear that normally to be classifiable in the latter way, that is to have relations to other acts, an act must be classifiable in the former way. For, at least in a wide range of cases, I cannot indicate the relevance to the conversation of what I am doing without doing something else as well; e.g., I cannot just illustrate a point you made, I must also describe or report a happening. It is, of course, true that there exist what might be called 'pure expositives' such as "I object to that", which indicate my stand without citing the grounds of my objection; (contrast this with "But he has no experience" where in objecting I do state my grounds). But most expositives are not like that; they require a content clause which specifies the content of an independently identifiable act.

The upshot of this discussion is that Austin's expositive verbs are not normally names of illocutionary acts, but of illocutionary forces which an act can have only if it is classifiable in some other way. I should add that the view I have attributed to Austin, namely, that illocutionary acts can be doubly classified, is similar in broad outline to views reached by others working in this area who have been concerned to integrate an account of speech acts into one of discourse structure. (Edmondson 1981; Klammer 1973; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) Sinclair and Coulthard, for instance, write:

It is place in the structure of the discourse which finally determines which act a particular item is realising, though classification can only be made of items already tagged with features from grammar and situation. (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 29)

However, Searle has taken a different view about expositives. He criticises Austin on the grounds that many expositives belong to other classes; and though conceding that there are a few examples of which this is not true, he argues that their existence "...is really not sufficient to warrant a separate category, especially since many of these - 'begin by', 'turn to', 'neglect', are not names of illocutionary acts at all." (Searle 1979: 11) In his own classification Searle treats expositives as a sub class of assertives, i.e., as members of that class whose illocutionary point is "...to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case..." (Searle 1979: 12) They are assertives "...with the added feature that they mark certain relations between the assertive illocutionary act and the rest of the discourse or the context of utterance..." (Searle 1979: 13)



But this position is, I think, seriously mistaken. For it has the extraordinarily implausible implication that it is only in the case of assertives that issues of how a given act relates to others arise. Surely we can withdraw directives as well as assertives; conclude by issuing a commissive as by asserting something; reply by issuing a directive as well as by asserting something, etc. Indeed, what Searle says about questions concedes that any category of act whatsoever can occur as a response. (p.8)

Now it may be that Austin merely wished to draw attention to the fact that an act classifiable as an expositive must also be classifiable as belonging to another category, which, we have argued, is indeed so. But it would be patently invalid to argue from this that anything classifiable as belonging to another category must also be classifiable as an expositive. Even so the remark that "It could well be said that all aspects are present in all my classes", (Austin 1962: 152) suggests that Austin at least entertained this second possibility.

The issues that arise when considering the plausibility of this possibility are complex. But at the least it is plausible to suppose that even if an act does not call for a response, or is not itself a direct response to one that does, it is even so necessary to know this to understand its role in the conversation or discourse. So that in the case of every speech act one must know how it is meant to relate to other speech acts in the conversation to understand its role. That is I think the truth contained in the suggestion that every act is doubly classifiable.

Examples of acts which either call for or are responses to other acts, and hence require double classification if I am right, are the members of adjacency pairs. But it is clear that when taking his turn speaker may perform various other acts which though they themselves do not call for a response, or are not themselves direct responses, are related to acts of the speaker which do. So that as well as considering relations between acts in different turns, it is necessary to consider relations between acts in the same turn. In the following example a teacher is testing the knowledge of his class of road signs:

- T:     What's the next one mean? You don't see that one around here. Miri.  
 C:     Danger falling rocks.     (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 67)

Sinclair and Coulthard argue that the teacher's second utterance has a quite different status from his first, in that whilst his first utterance calls for a response, his second does not but proffers a clue. But to do this the

second utterance has to be related to the first, since the clue is a clue to the question asked.

Similar distinctions are defended in (Edmondson 1981; and Reichman 1985), so that Sinclair and Coulthard are not alone in distinguishing relations between acts in different turns from ones between acts in the same turn. They propose a classification which distinguishes a principle act within a speaker's move, which they call a 'head' act, which either calls for a response or is itself a response, from acts related to it but which do not call for a response.<sup>4</sup> Thus they describe the structure of moves made in conversation in terms of acts, and that of exchanges between speakers in terms of moves. Their proposals are neither uncontroversial nor unproblematical. (see Edmondson 1981: 66-73) But it is difficult to see how justice can be done to the need to consider in the case of every act how it relates to other acts, either in the same move or a different one, without proposing some kind of hierarchical structure of the kind that they propose.

In conclusion there are three points that I would like to urge: first, that to understand the role of any speech act in a conversation it is necessary to know how it is meant to relate to other acts in the conversation. This is true not only of acts which themselves call for a response, or are a direct response to acts which do. Second, that as well as relations between acts in different moves we need to consider relations between acts in the same move. Third, that to accommodate these points something like

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<sup>4</sup> Sinclair and Coulthard explicitly distinguish their concept of an act from Searle's concept of an illocutionary act, so that there is an evident danger of ignoring theoretical differences underlying the use of the same terminology. (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 14) In particular they argue for a double classification of acts in terms of what they call *situation* and *tactics*:

*Situation* here includes all relevant factors in the environment, social conventions, and the shared experience of the participants. ...

The other area of distinctive choice, *tactics*, handles the syntagmatic patterns of discourse: the way in which items precede, follow and are related to each other. It is place in the structure of the discourse which finally determines which act a particular grammatical item is realizing, though classification can only be made of items already tagged with features from grammar and situation. (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 28)

However, it seems to me that the factors they group together under situation in their account are very similar to those used to classify illocutionary acts, the expository dimension apart, which involves the sort of factors they group under tactics. So there seems to be scope for rapprochement.

the kind of hierarchical structure proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard is needed.

(iii) *Speech act sequencing*

In the light of the previous discussion, it would seem that, at the very least, Searle's case is not proven. For even if he is right, as I think he is, about the lack of interesting sequential relations between speech acts as he conceives of them, that would only refute those whose theories of conversational structures depend on their being such relations. Since most theories known to me posit more complicated structures than these, they remain untouched by Searle's criticisms at this point. They may well be wrong, but nothing he says shows that they are.

Setting on one side his discussion of Grice's proposal, to which his fundamental objection is that there are no purely conversational goals, Searle's discussion of structure seems to me to be seriously hampered in three respects. He considers only relations between speech acts, and of these only ones between speech acts in successive turns. Moreover, his taxonomy of speech acts is one, which by treating Austin's category of expositive forces as merely a sub-category of assertives, leaves very little scope for relations between speech acts. So it is hardly surprising that Searle comes to a negative conclusion; for it is fairly obvious that if we restrict ourselves to acts described by his taxonomy, there are indeed very few interesting relations between them. Thus typical examples of assertives, commissives and directives can occur in many different positions, though their functional role in these positions may well be different. Sometimes they may call for a response, or be part of a move that does so; on other occasions they may be a response, or part of a move that is, etc. So the attempt to state regularities just in terms of these categories is doomed to failure.

Indeed, it seems to me that what Searle describes as an obvious principle, viz., "...that in a dialogue or a conversation, each speech act creates a space of possibilities of appropriate response speech acts" (p.8) is, though plausible at first sight, in fact not true. For many speech acts are not performed to create such space but for other reasons; that is one reason why the attempt to describe sequential relations between acts just in terms of these categories fails.

It is, of course, true that nothing I have said shows that it is possible to give an account of the structure of conversation which parallels the account Searle gave of speech acts; and it would be difficult to show that this can be done. But I cannot see that the requirement that the two accounts should strictly parallel each other is reasonable. For, on Searle's account of speech acts the essential condition that determines a purpose

as a consequence relates a content to the world by specifying a direction of fit. (Searle 1979: 4) So that to have an essential condition we have got to have a content to relate to something. And whilst there is no shortage of contents in a conversation, they all seem to be contents of particular acts performed by particular speakers, which, if Searle is right, all have their own essential conditions. The requirement that there should be a strictly analogous essential condition for a conversation as whole, calls, as far as I can see for a 'shared' content over and above the contents of the separate acts. But surely there is no such thing.

It may be, however, that all that Searle requires of the essential condition in the case of conversations is that it specifies a purpose that is in some sense internal to conversations, but not that that condition itself determines a direction of fit. In that case the issues raised are those to be discussed in the next section.

## **2. Conversational goals and the background**

### *(i) External and internal goals*

It is a truism of the philosophy of action that one and the same action may be differently described, and that under different descriptions it will have different conditions of successful performance. For instance, more has to happen for me to light a match than for me to rub it against a matchbox, even though I lit it by rubbing it.

Turning to speech act theory it is therefore not surprising to discover that one and the same act may be both an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act, and that what has to be true for it to fall under the latter description is more than what has to be true for it to fall under the former, even though the perlocutionary act is performed by performing the illocutionary act. For me to convince you of something, for example, you have to change your beliefs in some substantive way, whereas for me to state that very same thing no such change is necessary, apart from that change in your beliefs necessary to secure uptake. So qua statement there is no particular perlocutionary purpose that my act must have, even though tokens of that illocutionary act type will be usually be uttered with some perlocutionary intent or other. Hence, it might be said that relative to its classification as an illocutionary act of a given type any perlocutionary purposes one may have are external to it, and that the only goals that are not external to it are those that must be achieved for it to be an illocutionary act of that type.

The way of using 'external' sketched above is mine; but it seems reasonable since it relativises what is internal/external to a particular classification of an act, and applies to illocutionary acts in a way which

makes it reasonable to bracket out perlocutionary purposes when theorising about illocutionary acts. Searle's point then is that in the case of conversations the only purposes are external, so that there can be no theory of specifically conversational goals.

Now certainly it will be invariably possible to cite a long list of external purposes which the participants in a given conversation have. But that proves little, since it will be invariably possible to do an analogous thing when a given illocutionary act is performed. Moreover, since one and the same action or activity, such as a conversation can be described in many different ways, the fact that one can cite numerous external purposes is neither surprising nor a ground for pessimism, since it is obviously very difficult to show that there are no descriptions under which it, or parts thereof, have only externally imposed goals. So it is not difficult to see how a debate whether conversations have only external goals could end in a stand off.

Before continuing the discussion it is, therefore, worth trying to say as clearly as possible what is true of the internal purposes possessed by speech acts in virtue of having an illocutionary point, since it would be unreasonable to demand more of conversational purposes than of these. Clearly, the description of an illocutionary point does not require a vocabulary peculiar to speech act theory; the point of directives for instance "...consists in the fact that they are attempts ... by the speaker to get the hearer to do something." (Searle 1979: 13) So even if the description of conversational purposes does not draw on a specialized vocabulary, that is not a reason for supposing that they cannot be internal. Second, it is plausible to suppose that if illocutionary acts do have purposes specified by their essential condition, one can indeed bracket off a study of these purposes merely from one of the external purposes of persons performing tokens of these acts. Third, there is a question of some importance whether the purposes in question are ones which speakers themselves must have when performing their acts. I agree with Searle that "It is a constitutive rule of statement-making that the statement commits the speaker to the truth of the statement expressed." (p.12) But I am not clear that that commitment must have been amongst his aims, since he is held to be so committed whatever they are. However, I cannot see how to settle this issue, so that all I can do here is note that it makes a difference which view is taken.

Returning to the issue of conversational goals, in an attempt to clarify the issues involved, I want first to investigate whether there is some systematic way of bracketing off the purposes of conversationalists qua conversationalists from the myriad other aims they have. Since I think that the answer to this question is far from clear, I want then to go on to ask

whether when engaging in specific conversational routines there is some systematic way of bracketing off the purposes of conversationalists qua conversationalists from the other purposes they may have. The answer to this second question is I think 'yes'; and this is sufficient to make the project of a theory of conversation viable.<sup>5</sup>

If 'conversation' is used as a generic term of which there are particular types such as debates, negotiations, interrogations, then it is presumably the purposes of participants in the latter that are in question, just as when studying illocutionary acts our interest is in the purposes of persons performing types of such act. Now in some cases it is by no means obvious that one cannot distinguish the goals which participants have individually, from a collective goal that they must share to engage in the activity in question. Parties to a negotiation, for instance, will each want to do as well for himself as possible, so that in this respect their interests are certainly opposed. But to enter into a negotiation each must try to reach an agreement by discussion, and be willing to accept that agreement as binding. So in this case there does seem to be a collective goal that participants must have, which might be a candidate for an essential condition.

But there is an obvious difficulty with trying to generalise this example, namely that we lack a taxonomy of types of discourse. Though there are in English many verbs which look like plausible candidates for names of discourses, they do not suggest a taxonomy in the way in which speech act verbs undoubtedly have. Moreover, if we consider some intuitive discourse types, then the kind of distinction made in the case of negotiations is very hard to draw. For instance, using 'conversation' non-generically as a name of an informal type of spoken interaction between individuals treating each other as equals, the search for an internal as opposed to external purposes does not look very promising, as Searle points out. Moreover, if there are internal purposes in these cases it seems to me that they would have to involve the participants in treating each other as equals with equal discourse rights, doing which would involve using specific strategies such as topic negotiation, and preference organisation. So I think that the answer to the first question is at present simply unclear, because of the lack of a taxonomy of discourse types. In some cases it seems that a distinction between internal and external purposes might be made. In others it is not clear how to do so unless the former involve, at least in part, a commitment to certain forms of organisation. Hence the importance of my second question.

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<sup>5</sup> Because if this is so, then one can characterise different types of conversation in terms of the choices of strategy that they involve.

It would be surprising if there was no intermediate level of organisation between the participant's speech acts and their external purposes. For that would mean that whatever structure their conversation had could only be a reflection of those external purposes. For instance consider the following simple sequence:

*Merritt, 1976: 333*

- |    |                              |        |
|----|------------------------------|--------|
| A: | May I have a bottle of Mich? | ((Q1)) |
| B: | Are you twenty one?          | ((Q2)) |
| A: | No.                          | ((A2)) |
| B: | No.                          | ((A1)) |
- (Levinson 1983: 304)

The only reason on the view in question for treating (Q2 A2) as an insertion sequence embedded in the sequence (Q1 A1) would be that the shopkeeper initiated it with the purpose of checking whether B was entitled to buy drink. But that this is an insertion sequence, so that when it terminates the participants will expect the conversation to revert to the point at which it was initiated, is something that is recognisable even though one does not know what external purpose the speaker had in initiating the subsequence. And this suggests that structural properties of the sequence are being used to mark relations between different stretches of the sequence; so that it would be understood in this way whatever B's intentions.

It might be said at this point that even if this is so, the only purposes speaker's have are external ones, upon the grounds that B can surely ask his question (Q2) at that point without any thought of initiating a sub-sequence? But I am not sure that to attribute that goal to B involves any more difficulty than would the attribution of the purpose of placing himself under an obligation to someone who has no intention of keeping his promise. In neither case need any explicit thoughts be involved. What shows that B and A are aware that this is a sub-sequence is that neither sees (Q2) as irrelevant, both see it as being asked under the umbrella of (Q1), and both expect to revert to the main topic when the subordinate one is closed.

The example is but one of many, e.g., topic introduction, the marking of topic boundaries, repair, pre-requests etc. (for a general survey and detailed references see Levinson 1983: chap.6) For in each of these cases it seems to me that there is a strong case for attributing to speakers purposes internal to their conversational activity, whatever other purposes they may have. One can for instance study the strategies used to introduce

topics, without pursuing the question why speakers are interested in their topics, or what they hope to gain from their introduction.

One reason why these examples are especially interesting is that they are areas in which it is reasonable to expect there to be purely conversational strategies and goals if there are any at all. For, as has often been pointed out, conversation involves sophisticated coordination in real time, so that it would be surprising if there was no 'management system' specific to it. In this connection, it is interesting that work in Artificial Intelligence on speech act recognition which relied on the identification of speaker's external goals soon felt the need to develop theories of specifically conversational goals such as plan introduction and clarification, as well as theories of the specific ways in which goals are ordered hierarchically in discourses. (Litman and Allen 1984; Grosz 1978) In other words, the importance of specifically conversational forms of organisation soon became clear.

If, as I have argued, the answer to my second question is 'yes', then the study of conversation in the generic sense should break down into many separate studies, as has in fact happened. If meanwhile the question 'What is conversation?' still seems difficult to answer, this does not show that the approach taken is erroneous, any more than the elusiveness of the question 'What is a language?' shows that it was a mistake to investigate questions of syntax, morphology and phonology separately.

(ii) *Context*

Here I can do no more than state a puzzle. Many writers on the structure of discourse have stressed the importance of the background. (Brown and Yule 1983; Garfinkel 1972; Labov 1972) So, if Searle is right, there must even so be something that they failed to notice which undermines their enterprise. But the difficulty is that, as far as I can see, the thing which he claims does undermine their enterprise threatens not only to do this, but also to undermine speech act theory, and I would think Cognitive Science too. The crucial passage is:

One reason why we cannot get a non-circular account of "relevant" is that what the participants in the conversation take as relevant, what counts as relevant, will always be relative to the cognitive apparatus they bring to bear on the conversation. That is to say, it will always be relative to their network and background. (p.26)

Now suppose that "Be relevant" can have a local purpose, e.g., repair, and that one can, as I have argued, bracket off such local purposes from the global aims of participants. Even so, if Searle is correct, I must have lost



the argument since it is surely impossible to deny that what counts as relevant is relative to the background, in that the belief that the latter has changed will change my conception of what is relevant.

Now the problem is that if that does show that standard views about conversational structure are misconceived, then there would seem to be something wrong with speech act theory also. For what counts as an attempt to get someone to do something is similarly relevant to network and background. Given the numerous ways in which one might formulate a request in English, changes in beliefs about the background will certainly lead to a different view about what S is doing. Moreover, as far as I can see, a similar point applies to the example about the television interview; if we cannot spell out everything that is relevant to our interpretation of what is said, how can we spell out everything relevant to our interpretation of the speech acts performed? Surely both theories face the same difficulties at this point.

Perhaps part of the answer to the difficulties Searle raises about the relation of a conversation to its background, is that the background is not simply a matter of 'brute' facts but itself contains knowledge of conversational strategies and procedures which enable speakers to understand what parts of it are and are not relevant. But such a reply would not seem open to Searle, and it remains unclear to me what his solution could be.

### **3. Conclusion**

Though he has undoubtedly produced much food for thought, it does not seem to me that Searle has shown that current approaches taken to conversational analysis are mistaken in principle. Speech act theory itself developed originally as a philosophical theory before linguists, sociologists and workers in artificial intelligence became interested in a variety of questions which are not themselves philosophical: How do members of different societies conventionalise indirect acts? What illocutionary force indicating devices do different languages employ? What role do speech acts play in language learning? What strategies do hearers employ when identifying speech acts? Though empirical questions these seem well defined, in part because of the relative clarity of the over-arching philosophical theory, and in particular Searle's own work. The origins of the analysis of conversation by contrast are diverse; some of these are philosophical, but many are not. There are numerous different approaches, many of which are both limited and lead to only tentative generalisations - or indeed to a refusal to generalise at all. Moreover, there is no over-arching theory in this case which is anything like as well entrenched as is speech act theory. So the overall situation is very untidy; though often, it

seems to me, different terminology tends to obscure agreement. But nice though it would be to have a philosophical basis, I remain unconvinced that the very large numbers of attempts to identify tractable problems and work on them are all mistaken in principle.

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## CONVERSATION: STRUCTURE OR PROCESS?

**Andreas H. Jucker**  
*University of Zurich*

In the first part of his paper, Searle considers speech act theory as a possible candidate for an adequate methodology for the investigation of the structure of conversations, but finds it inadequate, because it does not even correctly predict question-answer sequences. Answers may not be expressed in the form of assertions; they can have a different modal structure than their corresponding questions; and they can be indirect. From this evidence Searle concludes that speech act theory does not account for sequences of speech acts and even less so for entire conversations.

Such an attempt to apply the methodological tools of speech act theory to an analysis of conversations must either be based on the assumption that speech acts and conversations are similar kinds of objects or it is an attempt to establish via the appropriate methodological tool what kind of objects conversations actually are.

Imagine a do-it-yourself man who wants to cut something in two. He tries out various implements for cutting things, such as a kitchen knife, a pair of scissors, a saw, and an axe. Eventually, when he has found out which is the best implement for what he actually wants to cut, he expects that he will be able to tell whether he is going to cut a piece of paper, a piece of cloth, a wooden board, a piece of metal or something else. Might it not be a better solution for him to find out first what he wants to cut and then go on to decide which might be the best cutting implement?

Thus I suggest that we should begin by analysing our object under investigation, and then decide on that basis what analytical tools are most appropriate, even though this decision is obviously far less straightforward than deciding on the most appropriate implement for cutting, say, a piece of paper.

I take it to be fairly uncontroversial to understand speech acts as functional units. What counts as a speech act is decided on pragmatic grounds. They are defined by the "appropriate conditions," by the "intentionality" of S, and by "all kinds of rules [that] come into play." (Searle, p.7) Structural considerations are not taken into account at all.

Utterances (1) to (3) are all requests for information, even though the form used in (1) is interrogative, in (2) imperative, and in (3) assertive:

- (1) Can you tell me the way to the station?
- (2) Please, tell me the way to the station!
- (3) I would like to know the way to the station.

The same form can also be used for different speech acts.

- (4) Do you think this here is a parking space?

The form of the utterance (4) may be used for quite different speech acts, depending on S and H and on the actual circumstances. If uttered by a car owner to a passer-by, it may be a simple request for information; if uttered by a policeman, it might be a warning; and if uttered by the farmer on whose land H's car is parked, it might be a threat. In all these cases the actual form of the utterance is irrelevant. What counts are the conditions, the situation, the intentions etc.

Sentences, on the other hand, are characterised by relations of dependency and constituency. They can be broken up into smaller units, i.e. clauses, which can be further broken up into phrases and these again into words. Among the constituents of sentences there exist manifold relationships. Thus sentences are quite clearly structural units.

It is still a matter of great controversy whether conversations are objects on a par with sentences or with speech acts. Are they structural or functional entities, or both, or neither? Without an answer to this question any attempt to find the most appropriate analytical tools must remain futile.

It is perfectly plausible that languages are tightly patterned at the lower levels of phonology, morphology and syntax, and that discourse is more loosely constructed. Nevertheless, it is quite obvious that menus, stories and conversations have beginnings, middles and ends, and that is already a structural claim. (Stubbs 1983: 5)

Searle compares this structural claim with the equally 'structural' claim that a glass of beer has a beginning, a middle and an end (p.21). However, there are considerable differences. The beginning and the end of, let us say, a fairy tale are clearly distinguishable. "Once upon a time there was ..." and "They lived happily ever after" can not be exchanged. The first and the last gulp of a glass of beer, on the other hand, are not

distinct from a structural point of view even though they may be quite different from a beer drinker's point of view.

Before I can go on to discuss the viability of structural claims for conversations, the term 'conversation' needs some further clarification because Searle does not provide any definition at all.

Conversations are interactive; there must be at least two participants actively contributing to it, and the contributions are unscripted, that is to say not planned, at least not in their exact wordings, before the start of the conversation. They contrast, for instance, with job interviews, school lessons, chaired discussions broadcast on radio, business meetings, or church sermons.

In some way, conversations are also the most basic type of discourse

the commonest use of language, a pervasive phenomenon of everyday life (...). If only because of its massive occurrence, spontaneous unrehearsed conversation must provide some kind of baseline or norm for the description of language in general. (Stubbs 1983: 10)

However, conversations are also untypical of a lot of naturally occurring discourse in that they are less structured and have fewer constraints than for instance interviews, classroom exchanges or academic seminar discussions.

The term 'discourse' is more general than 'conversation' and refers to naturally occurring, interactive spoken language. It excludes written language and non-interactive spoken language such as news broadcasts, soliloquies and certain types of academic lectures.

Texts are the written counterparts of discourses. They are usually thought of as real world objects which can be read, photocopied, cut up or burnt or stored on a computer disk. Discourses, on the other hand, are usually taken to be of a different nature, more ephemeral, happening at a particular time and at a particular place, and they do not exist any longer. In the case of texts, we are thinking of the product whereas in the case of discourses, we tend to think of the process.

However, we should be prepared to look at both, texts and discourses from both points of view. Texts are not only a product. Prior to the existence of a text as a real world object (i.e. marks on a piece of paper or on a computer screen), there will have been a process of constructing that text. And a conversation equally leaves its marks in our world of real objects in the form of acoustic signals, which can be recorded and preserved.

Nevertheless, there are important differences. When texts reach their addressee, they already exist in their entirety. The reaction of the reader cannot be taken into account any more. The same may be true for monologues that have been prepared and are either read out or recited strictly according to a previously conceived plan. But here deviations are possible. An orator may change his or her tone of voice, the speed of delivery and various other things according to the reaction of the audience.

Discourses, and in particular conversations, only come into existence through the interaction of two or more people who may have completely diverging goals and intentions. At the beginning of a conversation it is very often not clear to any of its participants how long it is going to last and what its final result will be, if indeed there is one.

A lot of work that has appeared during the last twenty years or so in fact assumes that both texts and discourses are structural entities requiring analytical tools borrowed from sentence grammar. Most prominent among these approaches is what came to be known as 'discourse analysis'. This term has been quite well defined by Levinson (1983: 286-294), but it is also used in a more general sense to include all approaches that deal with units larger than sentences. Therefore I shall follow the practice of Jucker (1986) and call this approach 'speech act sequencing'. This term is less likely to cause confusion and it is descriptively more adequate. Proponents of approaches that fall within this category claim that discourses consist of well-defined units of a lower level in very much the same way as sentences consist of clauses, clauses of phrases, phrases of words and so on. Furthermore there are rules which govern possible and impossible sequences of these units, just as sentence grammar distinguishes between well-formed and ill-formed sequences of words or phrases.

Sinclair & Coulthard (1975), for instance, adopt a Hallidayan type of grammar, in which units of one level always combine to form units of a higher level and split up into units of a lower level within a strictly hierarchical system. In their analysis of classroom language, they distinguish five levels; 'lesson', 'transaction', 'exchange', 'move' and 'act'. The most serious weakness of this approach lies in the fact that the sequencing rules must be stated over functional units, such as particular types of moves or acts.

[O]bligatory sequencing is not found between utterances but between the actions which are being performed. It is not the linguistic form of interrogative which demands the linguistic form declarative, but rather requests for action which demand responses -

to be complied with, put off, or refused. (Labov & Fanshel 1977: 70).

There must be a mapping procedure which relates actual utterances, as they are produced in discourses, to their underlying actions. Without such a procedure it is impossible to check whether the sequencing rules as established by the discourse analyst are actually followed in any given discourse. Such a mapping procedure cannot be found because utterances may have more than one function, for example if they are ambiguous or more or less intentionally indeterminate as to their illocutionary force, as for instance in example (4) above, where more than one interpretation is possible. If (4) is uttered by a policeman, its force could range from more or less friendly advice to a warning or even a threat. It may even be intended by the speaker to be ambiguous between a range of interpretations. In the face of this it is clear that there cannot be a mapping function which maps utterances unambiguously onto speech actions and vice versa.

A further stumbling block for such a procedure is the fact that the set of possible speech actions is not finite. If rules are to have any explanatory power at all, they must be stated over a finite set of units (or a set of units that is reducible to a finite set according to well-defined procedures), and there must be a well-defined procedure that maps these units onto actual utterances and vice versa. (For a more detailed critique of this kind of approach see Levinson 1983: 286-294 and Jucker 1986: 54-60).

It should follow, then, that texts are not structural products in the same way that sentences are, and that therefore the structural tools which are used in sentence grammars cannot be adopted for the analysis of conversations.

Conversationalists have stored in their brains a very large set of assumptions. Assumptions about the world they live in, about their particular society, about themselves, and about their experiences. They will also have assumptions about each other. Before one of them even has a chance of letting loose an acoustic blast, they will have formed some opinion of each other. They will have decided whether they have met before, and if so whether they know each other well, and if not they will judge from each other's appearance what kind of person the other is likely to be, in terms of sex, age, likely status etc. This information is of relevance before the first acoustic blast occurs. A complete stranger will not be addressed in the same way as an intimate friend. At this stage of the conversation, before it has actually started, it may be altogether unclear how long they are going to talk to each other, and what the subject matter



is going to be. Maybe they have met by chance, and only a moment ago they were not even aware of each other.

The very first acoustic blast, when it finally occurs, issued by one of the participants, let us say Mary, will make manifest some assumptions to Peter, and this will immediately modify his cognitive environment, i.e. his set of assumptions and in particular his assumptions about Mary. When the first acoustic blast is over, Peter may start speaking (he may do so because we are dealing with conversations and not just with isolated speech acts). Peter's first utterance will already be based on his cognitive environment as enlarged by the acoustic blast issued by Mary.

According to relevance theory, as established by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (e.g. 1981, 1986), every utterance comes with a tacit guarantee of its own optimal relevance, that is to say, the speaker always assumes that what he or she has to say will be worth the addressee's while to process. The cognitive effect is worth the processing efforts it incurs for the hearer. The speaker might of course be wrong in this assumption (there are enough bores around to prove this point), but even people considered to be bores by others, assume that their contributions are relevant and worth the processing effort.

The cognitive environment which a speaker brings to bear on conversations and which is constantly enlarged and modified during the process of a conversation corresponds to some extent to the notions of 'background' and 'network', as postulated by Searle. According to Searle, the network comprises the propositional beliefs that are directly necessary to understand an utterance, whereas the background comprises those assumptions and beliefs that are too basic to be needed directly for the interpretation of utterances but which are necessary if the network propositions are spelt out in detail. In relevance theory such a distinction is not made, because the difference between beliefs that are directly necessary and those that are very basic and only indirectly necessary is gradual rather than clear-cut. The distinction is not made between necessary and unnecessary beliefs, but between degrees of manifestness. Some assumptions are more manifest and others less so. By uttering Searle's sentence "George Bush intends to run for president" (p.22), the speaker assumes that the hearer also holds certain beliefs, such as "the United States is a republic" and "it has presidential elections every four years", but there can be no certainty. On the basis of previous political discussions with the hearer, for instance, the speaker may have very strong evidence that the hearer shares these beliefs. The assumptions "people generally vote when conscious" and "there are human beings" are indeed so trivial that it is very unlikely that the speaker will ever see any reason to doubt that the hearer shares them.

In this way, relevance theory can account for conversations if they are taken to be processes rather than products, processes in which the aims of the participants can change or shift. What is relevant to the participants changes continually along with the changing set of background assumptions. Every participant at every moment of the conversation processes a great number of stimuli; visual, oral and others. Some of these stimuli are ignored because they are taken to be irrelevant, such as a faint noise of a car passing by outside. Others are taken to be relevant, such as verbal contributions by our conversational partners. Such stimuli - whether they are part of the conversation as such or whether they are incidental - may change the notion of relevance for one or all the participants. In Searle's example of his conversation with his stockbroker, this becomes particularly clear. They discuss whether or not to invest in IBM. In this context all sorts of contributions might be more or less relevant, such as the following:

- (5) An investment in IBM might improve your cash-flow.
- (6) An investment in Apple Macintosh might improve your cashflow.
- (7) Do it now!
- (8) Why don't we talk about something else?

These remarks are relevant in the given context to the extent that they add to the set of assumptions the addressee has already stored in connection with the question whether to invest in IBM or not. Utterances (5) and (7) in this connection might suggest that the addressee should in fact invest in IBM whereas (6) and (8) probably indicate the opposite. So what about the utterance

- (9) Look out! The chandelier is going to fall on your head!

Apparently, Searle's stockbroker has just processed a visual stimulus, i.e. he has noticed that the chandelier is about to fall down. This stimulus is obviously strong enough to change the notion of relevance for the stockbroker, and he has good reasons to assume that Searle will find it worth his while to process this utterance. There is no need, then, to assume that this is a new conversation with a new goal. The important point is that a non-linguistic stimulus has changed the notion of relevance for both participants. It hardly needs mentioning that the notion of relevance is not the reason for this abrupt shift in the conversation; relevance does not "explain the structure of conversation". Rather, it is the falling down of the chandelier which is the reason for the shift in the conversation. But the notion of relevance explains why it is the most

relevant thing for the stockbroker to shout out as soon as he sees the chandelier being about to fall down. He can safely assume that it will be of more immediate relevance for Searle to know that he should jump out of the way than to know whether or not to invest in IBM.

Thus conversations are process oriented rather than structure oriented. However, conversations are not necessarily typical of discourses in general. It is therefore not permissible to apply conclusions about the presence or absence of structure from conversations to more restricted types of discourse and vice versa.

Levinson (1979) introduced the useful notion of 'activity type', which is more general than 'discourse type' because it also includes social events to which verbal exchanges are only incidental, as for instance a game of football or the task of repairing a car in a garage. Levinson takes the notion of 'activity type'

to refer to a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with *constraints* on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions. (Levinson 1979: 368, his emphasis)

The notions 'goal-defined' and 'constraints on allowable contributions' are of particular interest here. They do not apply to all activity types or discourse types in the same manner. A courtroom exchange certainly has a fairly well-defined goal; there are a great number of constraints on the allowable contributions. In conversations, on the other hand, there are few constraints; and its goal (or intention or function) will hardly be defined or definable at all.

There are further variables, concomitant with these two, as summarised in table 1.

All these variables represent the extreme points on scales. Some variation is certainly possible but generally speaking all of them tend to go together so that, for instance, discourse types with few constraints will also be loosely structured and mainly process oriented, whereas discourse types with many constraints tend to be tightly structured and only marginally process oriented.

Individual discourse types will vary as to their exact position on the scales between these extremes. Conversations naturally tend very much towards the left hand side of the scales in table 1, whereas examinations in a courtroom (see Atkinson & Drew 1979) are situated towards the opposite end. One obvious difference between the two is the roles of the participants and, concomitant with this, the turn order and the types of turn that may occur.

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-process oriented	-structure oriented
-few constraints on allowable contributions	-many constraints on allowable contributions
-relatively free turn order	-relatively fixed turn order
-contributions largely determined by previous contributions	-contributions often not determined by previous contributions
-local organisation principles	-global organisation principles
-multiple and mainly local goals	-few and mainly global goals

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**Table 1:** Endpoints of the feature scales characterising unconstrained discourse types (conversations) vs highly constrained discourse types (e.g. courtroom examinations and political interviews).

All the persons present in a courtroom are assigned clearly defined roles within the proceedings and the right to speak and the allowable contributions are inseparably linked with the individual roles. The examination of witnesses is a part of the courtroom proceedings that is characterised by an exchange that is largely, but not exclusively, restricted to two parties in spite of the great number of persons present.

Basically the examining counsel asks questions and the witness answers them, even if both of them try to do various other things at the same time, such as accusing, denying, or justifying. The question-answer sequence may occasionally be broken, but even these occasions follow strict patterns. The non-examining counsel may interrupt the question-answer sequence in order to object to a question by the examining counsel, or the judge may interrupt and ask the witness questions, in which case he or she becomes the examining party in the question-answer sequence and temporarily replaces the examining counsel. Objections by the non-examining counsel can break into the question-answer sequence, but they can also come after the completion of the question-answer sequence. They are directed to the judge, who has to rule on them as in the following example (quoted by Atkinson & Drew (1979: 63)):

- (10) C: A:nd did you live with anyone  
W: Yes I did  
C: A:nd (.) whom did you live (with)

- W: Ezra Maclean  
 C: n who is Ezra Maclean  
 (2.2)  
 OC: [(je )  
 W: [ The ma:n I live with  
 OC: I *object* to that question  
 J: Well (.) er:h I think that uh ...<sup>1</sup>

Such interruptions, if they are successful and if they break in before the witness has produced an answer, may forestall the answer altogether. If the objection is rejected by the judge, the witness will have to give an answer and thus complete the question-answer pair initiated by the examining counsel.

The witness, too, may interrupt the question-answer sequence but only to ask for clarification if a question appears to be unclear. This only suspends the question-answer sequence without violating it, as in the following example (Atkinson & Drew 1979: 64-65):

- (11) C: A:nd (4.2) You knew at *that* time of cour:se (2.1)  
 about the trouble that had (1.7) gone on betwee:n  
 Mister Rooney an (.) Mister McClean  
 (1.7)  
 W: Yih mean pu(h)-ah earli }er in the day,  
 C: (stabbing)  
 (starting)  
 W: earlier in the day=  
 C: =Yes  
 W: Yes

Thus all the participants are assigned well-defined roles with well-defined speaking rights.

News interviews are similarly clear in their distribution of speaking rights. Interviewer and interviewee ask questions and give responses, respectively. As I have shown elsewhere (Jucker 1986: 99-117), the syntactic form of questions is only of marginal importance for establishing the function of the interviewer's utterance. They are understood *qua* being interviewer's utterances as attempts to elicit a response from the interviewee. There must be clear and unequivocal syntactic and/or prosodic

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<sup>1</sup> The letter C stands for (examining) counsel, W for witness, OC for other (non-examining) counsel, and J for judge.

evidence to assign to utterances by interviewers and interviewees other functions than those predicted by the format of an interview.

In this way a fixed turn order goes together with the many constraints on the allowable contributions, whereas discourse types with few such constraints will have a fairly free turn order. Interviewers, who are nominally in charge of the direction an interview takes, can prepare all their questions in advance and ask one after the other whatever the responses of the interviewee turn out to be. Interviewees often fail partly or completely to supply the information which the interviewer tries to elicit, even if they appear to respond to a particular question. In these cases the interviewer has got the option to repeat the initial question or to take up some particular point from the interviewee's answer. An analysis of a small sample corpus of 347 questions in 70 news interviews (excluding the initial questions of every interview) revealed that just over half of them are not related to the preceding answer in the form of cohesive ties. The interviewers bring up entirely new topics, within the overall topic of the interview (Jucker 1986: 126).

In natural conversations it is not possible for any of the participants to prepare all their contributions before the conversation even starts, because every utterance, apart from the first one, is determined by the cognitive environment of the speaker as enlarged and modified by all the previous contributions in the discourse, as has been pointed out above.

There are more extreme types of spoken language in which all or most of the utterances are predetermined, such as church sermons. The individual verbal contributions are not determined by the previous contributions. But in such extreme cases we are not dealing with interactive discourse types any more.

Once it is recognised that different types of discourse vary so much as to the number of constraints and all the concomitant features mentioned above, it is not surprising that researchers reach entirely different conclusions depending on the types of spoken language they investigate.

Ethnomethodologists, also called conversation analysts, deal with natural and unrestricted conversations, and therefore they concentrate on fairly local phenomena, such as adjacency pairs (e.g. Levinson 1983, ch.6), preference organisation (e.g. Pomerantz 1984), or repair mechanisms (e.g. Owen 1983).

Researchers whose work falls within the category of speech act sequencing as defined above, on the other hand, investigate the global structure of entire discourses and therefore they choose types of discourse with more constraints, such as school lessons (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975), psychotherapy sessions (Labov & Fanshel 1977), or political interviews (Blum-Kulka 1983; Jucker 1986).

Because of the process orientation of conversations, they cannot have a unified purpose or goal. Conversationalists may bring widely varying intentions and goals to a particular conversation. They do not have mutual knowledge about each other's aims; they can only have assumptions about each other's aims with varying degrees of evidence for them. These assumptions will be either strengthened or weakened in the process of the conversation on the basis of the individual contributions. This, however, may not only change the speakers' awareness of each other's aims and goals but also change the personal goals of the individual speaker.

In the following example, Mary comes up to Peter in the staff room during a break, greets him and asks him whether he is busy. Peter answers something like the following:

(12) I haven't finished my handout for my next lesson yet.

This utterance makes manifest a number of assumptions. If Mary knows that the lesson Peter refers to is about to start in ten minutes, and if she can safely assume that Peter assumes that she knows this, she can infer that he is indeed very busy. On the other hand, if she does not know whether his lesson starts in ten minutes or in two hours, the inference that he is very busy is less strong.

By the principle of relevance, however, she can assume that Peter meant his utterance to be relevant to her query and that he, therefore, is in fact busy. Thus she has got fairly strong but not unequivocal evidence for the assumption (12a)

(12a) Peter is busy.

But this assumption may change her "purpose" or "intention" for this conversation. She wanted to discuss a problem about next year's curriculum with Peter, but this would require more time, and therefore she changes her "intention" and terminates the conversation with some ironic remarks on Peter's habit of preparing his lessons at the very last moment.

Discourse types with more constraints on the allowable contributions are usually goal-defined (cf. Levinson's (1979: 368) definition of 'activity types' cited above). It is the aim of courtroom proceedings to establish the guilt or innocence of a defendant; of news interviews to broadcast the opinion of somebody connected with a newsworthy issue; and of school lessons to educate the pupils (whatever these aims may mean in detail!). Without these goals the entire discourses would not exist. However, this criterion, too, should be seen as a scale which ranges from discourse types with a fairly well-defined global goal and many not so well-defined local

goals (such as accusing, evading, or justifying in a courtroom context) to discourse types with very vague and elusive global goals, such as 'maintain a good relationship with the interactant(s)'.

From what I have said above, it follows that I endorse Searle's claims that conversations do not have an inner structure and that they lack a particular purpose or point (p.18), but I do it for reasons that are different from his. Conversations are process oriented, the cognitive environments of the interactants are not predictable because, on the one hand, they depend on the interactants' individual histories and experiences, and, on the other hand, they are continually enlarged and modified during the process of the conversation. For this reason the recognisable structural properties are of a local nature (as investigated by ethnomethodologists), and the intentions and the goals of the interactants may be subject to considerable modification during the conversation. These features contrast with discourse types that are goal-defined with many constraints on allowable contributions and fairly fixed turn order. These discourse types are more structure oriented as is evident from the literature on speech act sequencing.

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## ON THE STRUCTURE OF CONVERSATION AS NEGOTIATION

**Eddy Roulet**  
*University of Geneva*

John Searle bases his thought, in *Conversation*, on the fact that speech act theory is restricted to the description of isolated speech acts, whereas discourse consists of sequences of speech acts, be it in the monologue of a single speaker or in the dialogue between two speakers. Searle puts aside the problem of the relations between speech acts in monologue - a very interesting problem (to which we will have to come back later) - to ask whether speech act theory may be extended to give an account of conversation.

Searle admits right away that it is not possible to get an analysis of conversation parallel to his analysis of speech acts, but he thinks that one can observe in conversation certain regularities that may be useful to get an account of its structure.

The first regularity, obvious for Searle, is the way in which each initiative speech act constrains the scope of possible appropriate reactive speech acts, be it the different answers possible to a question or the different reactions appropriate to a request.

Searle's observation is not so obvious for those who are used to work on everyday conversations. As a matter of fact, they rarely find questions, answers, requests or rejections which are restricted to a single speech act. Consequently, we must admit that the problem of the relations between a question and an answer, or a request and a rejection does not concern single speech acts, but complex entities, consisting of several speech acts and of other constituents, as we will see later. Those complex entities are generally called *moves*<sup>1</sup>. This observation has brought us to the

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<sup>1</sup> This confusion, or this reduction, of levels of analysis reminds us of what happened in the field of grammar, when subject or complement functions were attributed to nouns instead of noun phrases; in the same way as grammarians used to work on the proposition and word levels, neglecting phrases and their structure, pragmatists tend to develop the study of exchanges and speech acts and disregard the analysis of moves and of their structure.

conclusion, having admitted Wunderlich's (1978) distinction between *initiative illocutionary functions* (like question or request) and *reactive illocutionary functions* (like answer or rejection), that those functions are features of moves, and not of speech acts.

One can see that Searle's theory brings indirectly a first contribution to the description of the structure of conversation. It gives us the concept (i.e. illocutionary function) which allows us to characterize the relations between moves. However, he ignores another fundamental aspect of the structure of conversation, i.e. the relations between speech acts in moves.

After this digression on the importance of the move level, let us return to the question of the contribution of a study of sequences, like question-answer, to the description of the structure of conversation. Although Searle is pessimistic as to the contribution of such an approach (except for the description of institutional sequences like courtroom dialogues), Auchlin & Moeschler have given (in chap. 3 of Roulet *et al.* 1985) a tentative formulation of the different constraints, concerning the theme, the propositional content, the illocutionary function and the argumentative orientation, which govern the relations between initiative and reactive moves. They have also shown that these constraints contribute to a better understanding of two fundamental aspects of conversations: coherence and closing of moves and exchanges.

Even though Searle doubts that speech act theory can bring an interesting contribution to the analysis of conversational structures, he does not come to the conclusion that such an analysis is impossible and he investigates further in two other fields: Grice's work on maxims of conversation (Grice 1975) and the ethnomethodological study of turn-taking in conversation (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974).

As for Grice's maxims of conversation, Searle admits that they have brought an interesting contribution to the study of language, but he affirms that they are of limited usefulness in explaining the structure of conversation. I will not develop this point, as I totally adhere to his opinion. Grice, as far as linguists are concerned, has notably contributed to the understanding of implicatures - he has given excellent instruments for improving our analysis of degrees of implicitness and, consequently, our description of types (denominative, indicative, potential) of illocutionary markers (cf. Roulet 1980), but he does not contribute to the understanding of the structure of conversation.

As for the turn-taking rules formulated by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, Searle writes quite pertinently that, even if they predict well the options available to the participants in a conversation, however they have no explanatory value. In fact, a turn is a unity which pertains to the surface structure of conversation, since it is uniquely marked by a change of

speaker and does not necessarily coincide with the speech activities (like questions, answers, requests, etc.) of the speakers. Thus, a speaker may well, in the same turn, utter a first move (for instance an evaluation), which closes the preceding exchange, and a second move (a question), which opens the next exchange. Even if these two moves belong to the same turn, there is no direct functional relation between them: each move is functionally related to the other moves of the exchange to which it belongs. On the other hand, a request move may extend on many turns if it is interrupted by gambits of the hearer or followed by subordinate exchanges aiming at completing the initial request. Consequently, it is not surprising that a description of the rules governing turn-taking contributes very little to the study of conversational structures.

Thus, Searle comes to the conclusion that these two approaches of conversation, Grice's maxims and ethnomethodological turn-taking rules, do not contribute more than speech act theory does to a description of conversational structures.

Returning then to the question of the difference between speech act and conversation structures, Searle points out a fundamental dissimilarity that forbids a uniform approach and that may help us to grasp the specificity of conversation: unlike speech acts, conversations, as such, lack a particular purpose or point which would refer to an individual intentionality; but they present rather the interesting feature of constituting forms of shared collective behavior, characterized by a *shared intentionality*. Searle comes thus to the conclusion that "a recognition of shared intentionality and its implications is one of the basic concepts we need in order to understand how conversations work."

Unfortunately, in spite of his marked interest for problems of intentionality, Searle does not develop this idea, which I find quite enlightening; rather, he investigates at greater length another important dimension of conversation, called "the background", which plays a crucial part in the determination of conversational relevance. I will not elaborate on this point, which has recently been the object of very sophisticated hypotheses in the theory of relevance (see Sperber & Wilson 1986 and, for an application to conversation, Moeschler 1988). I will instead return to the hypothesis concerning shared intentionality, which seems to me more promising for the description of conversation structure.

In his paper, Searle introduces the notion of shared intentionality by comparing different types of talk exchanges and looking for what they have in common. Although it is new with regard to his preceding writings on this theme (Searle 1983) and would certainly require an elaboration in this theoretical framework, he does not further specify what he means by this notion. Without tackling this philosophical problem which is beyond

my competence, I will take as a starting point the simplest types of talk exchanges mentioned by Searle, those which only involve two speakers: A woman calling her dentist's office for an appointment, A doctor interviewing a patient, Two casual acquaintances meeting each other on the street, and A man trying to pick up a woman in a bar. Those types of dialogues have been the object of much empirical work and may thus contribute to our understanding of conversation structures.

What is striking in those types of dialogues is that the shared intentionality mentioned by Searle is not a given at the beginning of the conversation, except as a shared global principle (like Grice's principle of cooperation) and, at least in the two first cases, as a shared global aim defined by the institution (i.e. to fix an appointment or to prescribe a treatment). In each verbal interaction, a shared intentionality must be built by both speakers on the basis of their individual intentionalities and potentialities; this shared intentionality is, therefore, a constant object of negotiation between the speakers.

This activity of negotiation is easily perceptible in all the phases of a conversation, be it in the opening, the transaction itself or the closing (see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1984); therefore, it is tempting to make the hypothesis that this activity determines the structure of any verbal exchange<sup>2</sup>.

One may state intuitively that any negotiation consists of at least three phases: a proposition, a reaction and an evaluation phase. The proposition may lead to a positive or negative reaction only if it is clear and complete, that is, only if it satisfies what I call an *interactive complétude constraint*. Thus, to take a simple instance of negotiation, if an itinerant dealer offers me a carpet, I can react by an acceptance or a rejection only if I know at least its price; if the dealer does not mention the price in his offer, I will have to open another, secondary, negotiation to get the price, and it is only when this secondary negotiation will be closed that we can get back to the main negotiation. In the same way, an incomplete reaction or an incomplete evaluation will lead to the opening of secondary negotiations. Moreover, an incomplete proposition, reaction or evaluation in the secondary negotiation will lead to the opening of a tertiary negotiation, and so on. This process is then a first source of recursivity in the development of a negotiation.

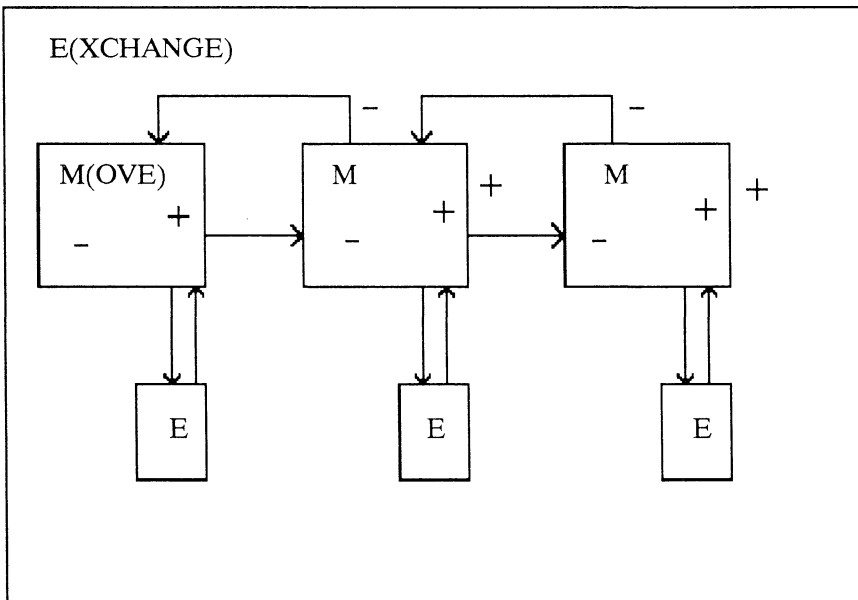
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<sup>2</sup> In the present state of conversation studies, very little is known of the structure of conversations involving more than two speakers and, as far as those are concerned, we also still do not know very much about the relations between the major exchanges in long dialogues. This is the reason why we limit here our study to the exchanges in short dialogues. Nevertheless, we make the hypothesis that this approach should be progressively extensible to more complex types of conversations.

Furthermore, a negotiation can come to a close only if the two participants come to an agreement (be it an agreement on the fact that they don't agree), that is, only if it satisfies what I call an *interactional complétude constraint*. If I refuse to buy the carpet because I judge the price fixed by the dealer excessive, he can reiterate his offer either by rejecting my objection or by lowering the price, thus starting afresh the negotiation. This game, which may last long, in fact until I accept the dealer's offer or until he accepts my rejection, is a second source of recursivity in the development of a negotiation.

We may thus set up a multi-recursive model, which can account for the development of any possible negotiation.

I make the hypothesis, which is confirmed by all the dialogues we have analyzed, that the construction of a linguistic exchange, be it a request for information, a news interview or a medical interview, follows the same model, which I represent by the following diagram<sup>3</sup>:



<sup>3</sup> The internal + and - mark respectively the satisfaction and non satisfaction of the interactive 'complétude' constraint, which governs the closing of the move, whereas the external + and - mark respectively the satisfaction and non satisfaction of the interactional completude constraint, which governs the closing of the exchange.

I will not elaborate here on the exchange structure. We saw earlier that the immediate constituents of the exchange, the moves, are linked by initiative and reactive illocutionary functions. We see on the diagram how a negative reactive move leads to an extension of the structure of the exchange from three to five, seven or even more constituents, since it normally gives rise to a new initiative move from the first speaker.

I will rather focus briefly on the move structure. It has rarely been described in discourse or conversation studies and, in the framework of the monological discourse of one speaker, it sets back again in new terms the problem raised by Searle at the beginning of *Conversation* of the relation between successive speech acts.

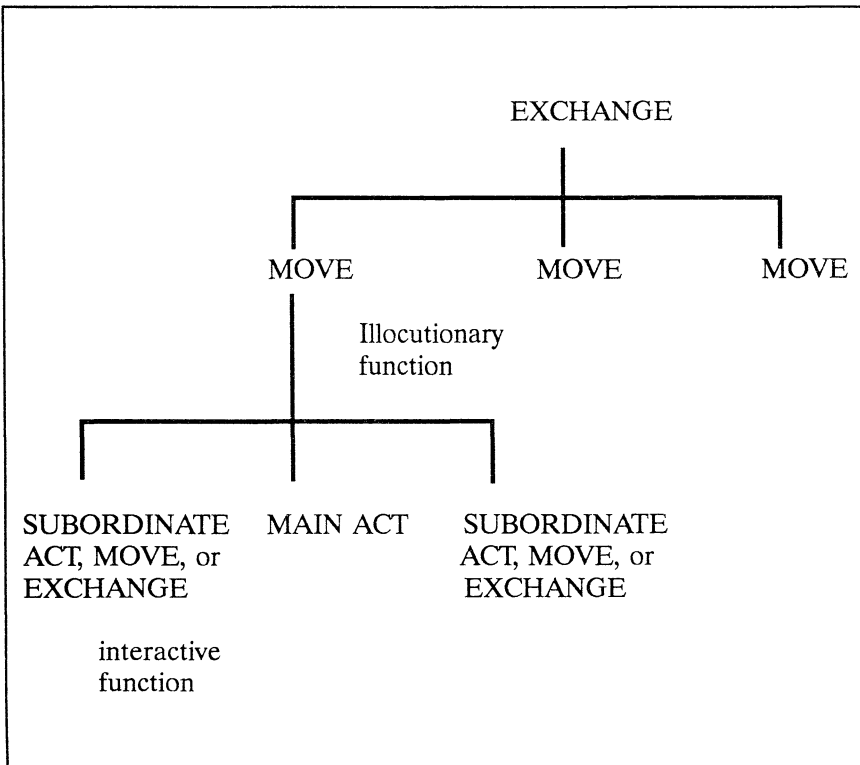
I have shown in Roulet *et al.* (1985, chap.1) and in Roulet (1986), through the analysis of different types of dialogues, how the speaker exerted himself to build an initiative move which would satisfy the interactive 'complétude' constraint by adding to the main act subordinate acts, moves or exchanges that might prepare or justify it, and how the speaker was sometimes brought to subordinate this move, which was first uttered as a complete and autonomous move, to a new main constituent that might better satisfy the interactive 'complétude' constraint. I have also shown how the hearer, if he judged that the speaker's move did not satisfy the interactive 'complétude' constraint, would open a subordinate exchange to get the missing information before reacting, positively or negatively, to the initiative move. Those recursive processes may lead to the construction of quite complex initiative moves. The same could be said concerning the second and third moves of an exchange.

Before pursuing this study of the structure of the exchange as negotiation, let us go back to the problem, raised by Searle, of the relations between speech acts in discourse. In the framework developed here, we are necessarily dealing with relations between move constituents, that is, constituents of monological discourse, since moves, and not speech acts, are the immediate constituents of the exchange, that is, constituents of dialogal discourse. If we assume, as a corollary, that the illocutionary functions described by Searle (1969, 1973) and which can be generally paraphrased by a performative verb, are features of moves - or, rather, features of the relations between moves if one speaks of initiative and reactive illocutionary functions -, and not features of speech acts, then a crucial question arises: what is the type of relation that links the main act to the subordinate acts, moves or exchanges which constitute a move?

I have pointed out above to the fact that a subordinate constituent could prepare or justify the main act of a move, and that a main move could reformulate a preceding one. Those relations of preparation, justification or reformulation are quite different from the illocutionary

functions described by Searle. On one hand, they link a constituent which is subordinate (and may thus be suppressed without destroying the structure of the move) to a main constituent, whereas the initiative and reactive illocutionary functions link constituents at the same level and are reciprocal. On the other hand, unlike illocutionary functions, the relations between move constituents can never be paraphrased by a performative verb (see the difference between *prepare, justify, reformulate*, on one side, and *affirm, answer, request* on the other). To designate this new type of relation, which links move constituents, we will use, following Aston's suggestion (Aston 1977), the term *interactive function*. We distinguish three types of interactive functions: *ritual, argumentative* and *reformulative* (for a detailed study of those functions and of their markers in the French language, see Roulet *et al.* 1985, chap.2, Roulet 1986 and 1987).

Let us now go back to the structure of conversation as negotiation. What I am suggesting as a conclusion to this paper is that the exchange has a hierarchical structure, with constituents at two levels which are linked by two different types of functions: illocutionary (initiative and reactive) for the exchange constituents, interactive for the move constituents. This hierarchical structure can be represented by the following tree:





This model of the hierarchical structure of the exchange leads to at least two remarks.

First, it is a model of the structure of the exchange, and not of the structure of conversation as a whole. Therefore, it offers only a partial solution to the problem raised by Searle; in the present state of discourse and conversation studies, one can doubt that a conversation is formed simply of one exchange or of coordinate exchanges. If it is formed by a sequence of exchanges at the same level, it is not very clear presently what the relations are between those exchanges and what kind of constituent, intermediary between conversation and exchange, they form. Nonetheless, before we get better insights in those macro aspects of conversation, such a model of exchange and move structures is a first step towards the solution of the problem of conversation structure.

Secondly, if we have to give a global account of the structure of conversation, we also have to account for the differences between varied types of dialogues like the ones mentioned by Searle in his paper. I make the hypothesis that those varied types of dialogues are specific realizations of the potentialities of the above model. I will show in Roulet (1988) that the varied types of exchanges that we observe in everyday transactions, news interviews, cross-examinations, lessons, or even drama dialogues, are specific realizations of the potentialities of the model which may be correlated with specific features of the interaction's situation.

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## SPEECH ACTS, EFFECTS AND RESPONSES

Marina Sbisà  
*University of Trieste*

In his paper "Conversation", John Searle begins by questioning the traditional limitation of speech act theory to the study of individual speech acts; but ends up by pointing out a feature of conversation (that of having a background) which is again a feature of individual speech acts. His speech act theory and its derivatives do not seem to be able (nor perhaps willing) to leave the traditional sentential perspective for a textual (here, conversational) one. I shall now try to put forward some comments on certain aspects of the theses argued by Searle, from a point of view which is internal to speech act theory (and thus different from, say, the point of view of conversational analysis), but is not committed to an "individual speech act" kind of sentential perspective. Our considerations ought to be accompanied by a careful discussion of their consequences on various methodological issues in speech act theory and pragmatics, but here there will not be sufficient space to do so.

1. J.L. Austin maintained that "an effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out" and called such an effect *uptake*, meaning by this "the understanding of the meaning and the force of the locution." (Austin 1975: 117). This notion has sometimes received exaggerated attention (as in Bach and Harnish 1979, for example, where uptake appears to be all the illocutionary act is up to), but its consequences have rarely been discussed (Gazdar 1981 is an isolated example). I would like now to draw attention to some of these consequences.

If the hearer's uptake is necessary for the carrying out of an illocutionary act, in order to know whether a certain illocutionary act has been carried out we should first know whether an uptake has been achieved. And this we can know from a consideration of the response (verbal or non-verbal) which follows the illocutionary act under examination, since each response makes manifest how the hearer has taken the speaker's illocutionary act. It seems therefore that, when we want to assign a definite illocutionary force to a certain speech act, we should take the hearer's response into account. But if this is so, we have to admit that our consideration of isolated speech acts leads only to provisional results, until

we know not only in which context a speech act has been issued, but also which response it has received. Thus the consideration of sequential phenomena seems to be relevant to the consideration of the very illocutionary force of an utterance. When asking ourselves how the study of conversation is to be related to the study of speech acts, we should not try simply to *extend* speech act theory to conversation, since the study of speech acts already *presupposes* some reference to conversational sequences.

It should be noted that if a response can confirm or disconfirm the supposed illocutionary force of the utterance to which it reacts, it is reasonable to expect that, if the utterance displays some illocutionary ambiguity, the response it is given can be used for disambiguating its force, for letting it count as a definite illocutionary act. It is less clear what we should say when a speech act, which at first sight appears to be unambiguous, receives a response which would be appropriate to a different illocutionary force: sometimes we would speak of a "misunderstanding", but in other cases the deviant response may have the effect of re-defining the situation and thus the illocutionary force of the previous speech act.

2. Let us now consider some possible objections to the perspective on speech acts that we are proposing. First of all, in claiming that the consideration of sequential phenomena is relevant to the very illocutionary force of an utterance, are we not confounding illocutionary and perlocutionary acts?

A response, or any other verbal or non-verbal act of the hearer, which is performed because of the understanding by the hearer of the meaning and/or the force of the speaker's utterance, counts as a perlocutionary effect of the speech act, and the act by the speaker of bringing it about counts as a perlocutionary act of the speaker (cf. Austin 1975: 101ff.; Davis 1981). Thus the two facts (i) that the perlocutionary act does not coincide with the illocutionary act and (ii) that the response given by the hearer, or generally the perlocutionary effect on her/him, presuppose a certain understanding of the meaning and/or the force of the speech act, both follow from the definition of perlocution and do not conflict with each other. The case of the response which confirms, defines or redefines the illocutionary force of a speech act *is* a case of perlocution: in particular, it is the case of a perlocutionary effect consisting not merely in a psychological reaction, but in an act of the hearer, when such an effect presupposes an understanding of the force of the speech act (and not, as may also happen, merely of its meaning). However, the response produces its own backward effect on the illocutionary force of the previous speech act not by virtue of its being a perlocutionary effect, but because it presupposes

and therefore indicates how the speech act has been taken. It should also be noted that such a response need not be a response of compliance with respect to the perlocutionary goals of the speaker (we can disobey a command, while our response to it shows we recognize it as a command; disbelieve - and contradict - an assertion, while recognizing it as an assertion; refuse to give the information we are asked for, while recognizing we are asked for it...).

3. Secondly, up to this point we have been considering uptake as being necessary to all kinds of illocutionary acts; but is this really the case? According to various authors (Searle, *Conversation*; Katz 1977; Bach and Harnish 1979) the phenomena we have been considering as general ones are in fact limited to "conditional" speech acts such as bets and offers.

Let us now see whether bets and offers are so different from the other illocutionary acts (and so similar to each other). A bet, if it is accepted, commits the speaker to doing something (specified by the utterance which counts as a bet) only if something else (also specified by the utterance) happens or turns out to be the case. An offer, if it is accepted, commits the speaker to do what s/he offered to do. But does "is accepted" mean just the same in these two cases? As for the bet, it is relevant that it is accepted *as a bet*, namely, that the addressee agrees that the speaker is betting and that her/his bet is felicitous. In this case the bet "takes effect" (I recall here the distinction drawn by Austin between three kinds of effects of the speech act: uptake, "taking effect" and the inviting of perlocutionary responses or sequels; cf. Austin 1975: 116ff.): namely, if the specified event happens or turns out to be the case, the speaker will have to perform the specified action (say, pay the hearer a certain amount of money). As for the offer, if it is to create a straightforward obligation for the speaker to do something, it has to be accepted in a stronger sense, that is, the hearer has not only to accept *that it is an offer* (that the speaker is offering and that her/his offer is felicitous), but also to accept *the offer* (by saying "Yes, please" rather than "No, thanks").

As to those speech acts, which are held not to be conditional, it is easy to see that their being accepted as illocutionary acts of certain kinds is relevant to their "taking effect" in the corresponding ways. If your interlocutor does think that, in spite of your good will, you will never be able to do what you are promising to do, s/he will not accept your promise as a promise, and you will not be bound by it. Similarly, I can reject your justifications or your excuses or your compliments, which is a much more radical kind of a rejection than maintaining that your excuse or compliments were insincere or even finding out you gave a false justification. And if an assertion is not accepted as an assertion, the speaker will not count

as being committed to the truth of the proposition expressed: the problem of the truth or falsity of what s/he said will never seriously arise; the hearer will not ask the speaker for evidence, reasons, and the like, nor perhaps expect her/him to avoid self-contradiction. Think of what happened to moral judgements when philosophers decided they were not real assertions.

Should we therefore conclude that all speech acts are "conditional", in the sense that they all "take effect" only if they are accepted as performances of some illocutionary act? This is, in other words, what we have already claimed by arguing that the hearer's uptake, together with the response which makes it manifest, plays a central role in the assignment of an illocutionary force to an utterance. What is then the difference between so called "conditional" speech acts and other speech acts? Bets seem to "take effect" only when they are accepted as bets: they are like "non-conditional" speech acts, but for the fact that the obligation produced by their "taking effect" is itself conditional (an obligation to do something if certain circumstances are the case). Offers, on the contrary, have been described above as "conditional" in a stronger sense, since they produce an obligation only if the addressee "accepts" them not only by taking them to be (felicitous) offers, but also by manifesting a positive attitude of her/his will toward the offered action. But is it really the case that a bet "takes effect" if it is simply accepted as a bet, by producing an obligation which is itself conditional, while an offer needs to be accepted in a stronger sense, in order for it to "take effect" by producing an obligation which is not itself conditional? If we re-describe offers as producing conditional obligations, that is obligations to do something if something else is the case (in particular, if the hearer wants the speaker to do so), offers appear to be similar to bets and thus to "non-conditional" speech acts: in order for them to "take effect" by producing a conditional obligation, it is enough that they are accepted by the hearer as offers. Thus, it would be convenient to consider offers as producing conditional obligations, and as taking effect if they are simply accepted as offers, independently of the positive or negative orientation of the speaker towards the offered action, which is expressed by the response they (as offers) receive. Under this new description, offers appear to have all the three kinds of effects distinguished by Austin: they need the hearer's uptake (in order to be offers), they "take effect" (by producing a conditional obligation), they produce further consequences (acceptation - in the stronger sense - or refusal; beyond these and possibly according to these, the performance or non-performance by the speaker of the offered action; and so on). The existence of a "conditional obligation" may seem strange, but is no stranger than the existence of a conditional illocutionary act. From a logical point of view, this is simply a matter of the scope we want to assign to the

deontic operator. Moreover, it is already a consequence of our distinction between illocution and perlocution that a speaker may be assigned a certain obligation, without this obligation giving rise to an actual course of action.

Our conclusion is, then, that all illocutionary acts (bets and offers included) may be held to be "conditional" in the sense that they have to be accepted as illocutionary acts of certain kinds, if they are to "take effect" in the corresponding ways, while only some illocutionary acts (among which bets and offers, but not promises or commands) produce conditional obligations.

4. We can now come back to the suggested interference between the conversational sequence and the illocutionary force of speech acts. According to Searle, the illocutionary point of an assertion is achieved whether it receives an appropriate response or an inappropriate one, while the illocutionary point of a bet is achieved only if it receives an appropriate answer. I would like to argue that such a distinction makes reference to different kinds of "appropriateness".

If we react to a would-be bet as if it were not a bet, we are giving an inappropriate response in an illocutionary sense (our response is inappropriate to the supposed illocutionary force of the utterance). On the contrary, if we react to an utterance such as Searle's example:

"I think the Republicans will win the next election"

by saying

"I think the Brazilian government has devaluated the Cruzeiro again"

we are giving a response whose inappropriateness is due to locutionary (or propositional) features both of the response and of the previous speech act: it is the (asserted) content of our response which is not appropriate (relevant, etc.) to the (asserted) content of the previous utterance. Apart from this, to issue an assertion as a response to an assertion, that is, to add a piece of information to a piece of information (either in a cooperative or in a competitive way, which may involve change of topic) is a way of responding which is wholly compatible with the implicit uptake of the former speech act as an assertion. However, it is not the case that every response to an assertion takes it as an assertion. Imagine responses to

"I think the Republicans will win the next election"



in a more or less Alice-in-Wonderland style, such as:

"You should not think"

or

• "But do you *hope* they will?"

These are responses that do not take the assertion as an assertion and thus are inappropriate in the illocutionary sense. When the response to a would-be assertion in a certain speech situation approximates itself to these examples, it would be uncorrect to claim that the assertion has been successfully performed: the utterance does not "take effect" as an assertion, namely, it does not commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition, so that the speaker is not obliged to give evidence or reasons for it, and the hearer her/himself is not made competent to issue further assertions on the same topic (that is, s/he would not tell someone else that the Republicans will win) on the sole ground of her/his having listened to that utterance.

5. If a would-be assertion does not "take effect" as an assertion, however, what does it "do" (in the illocutionary sense)? Does it have any illocutionary effect - and which one? While in formal situations infelicitous speech acts do not seem to get any other illocutionary force apart from the infelicitous (and thus ineffective) one, so that infelicitous bets remain mere attempts at betting, infelicitous baptisms remain mere attempts at baptizing, and so on, in informal talk an utterance which could have a certain illocutionary force but does not get a response appropriate to it, may "take effect" in a different way, according to the uptake which is made manifest by the actual response. Thus, in a dialogue such as:

"I think the Republicans will win the next election"

"Why do you think so?"

the speaker is asked for reasons for her/his assertion, and this makes it apparent that, according to the hearer, the speech act is an assertion and "takes effect" in the way assertions do. On the contrary, in a dialogue such as:

"I think the Republicans will win the next election"

"But do you *hope* they will?"

what is at issue is not a judgement to the effect that the Republicans will (probably) win, but the expression of subjective attitudes (opinion, hope...) with respect to the same possible fact; this makes the utterance count as an expressive speech act rather than as an assertion.

It should be noted that assertions introduced by prefixes such as "I think" are *hedged* judgements, and thus have a tendency to oscillate between the force of real assertions and that of expressives. Thus, it is perhaps true that for such utterances every response may count as an appropriate response. Nevertheless, some responses are more appropriate with respect to an assertive illocutionary force, while others emphasize the expressive features of the speech act. Moreover, the phenomenon described here is not confined to such hedged speech acts. Consider:

"It is raining"

together with each of the following responses:

- (1) "Is it windy too?"
- (2) "Don't go out"
- (3) "Alright, I'll take my umbrella"

Response (1), asking the speaker for further information, takes it for granted that the preceding speech act has given the hearer a piece of information (namely, that it was an assertion). Response (2), advising the speaker not to go out, indicates that the preceding comment about the weather has been taken by the hearer as a reaction to the situation and in particular as an expression of perplexity about what to do in that situation (thus, "It is raining" is viewed as belonging to a kind of speech act roughly corresponding to the Austinian class of behabitives, and related to that of expressives). Response (3) shows that the hearer aligns her/himself with what here counts as a warning (an exercitive illocutionary act in Austin's terminology and perhaps a directive as well, since it tries to and succeeds in getting the hearer to modify her/his course of action).

6. In this perspective it is not relevant to discuss whether, in order to identify in actual conversation such "adjacency pairs" as question-answer, greeting-greeting, and proposal-acceptation or refusal, we need an independent definition of the speech acts which constitute their first pair-parts, namely question, greeting, and proposal. We have a question or a proposal, and the like, when a speech act is issued and accepted, by speaker and hearer respectively, as being a question or a proposal; but we can understand whether the hearer accepts it as such only if we take into

account her/his response. Conversely, if we understand that a certain utterance counts as a (preferred or dispreferred) second pair-part of an adjacency pair of a certain kind, we have also to understand that it has a connection with the corresponding first pair-part and what this connection is. That is, we have to understand which is the effect, produced by the first pair-part, that affects the situation in which the second pair-part is uttered and which this second pair-part reacts to. Thus, in a sense, it is correct to say that each speech act creates a space of possibilities of appropriate response speech acts: but this should be taken to mean that each speech act, by achieving an uptake, produces a corresponding effect which counts as the point of departure, or the initial situation, of the response act, while the response act makes manifest how the speech act has been taken and thus in which way the speech act "takes effect". Only response acts that count as appropriate responses (in the illocutionary sense) to a certain illocutionary act can make it the case that the preceding speech act counts as an illocutionary act of just that kind. It should be noted that these "appropriate" responses may be preferred or dispreferred ones (in terms proper to the speech act theory, they may satisfy or not satisfy the perlocutionary goals of the speaker); what is relevant is that they presuppose (or at least are compatible with) some illocutionary effect, and thus validate its achievement.

7. What should then be the relationship between speech act theory and the study of conversation? It seems that the two have to be interrelated, though, of course, Searle is right in pointing out that some methods proper to speech act theory do not fit the study of conversation. For example, a speech act theorist should resist the temptation to extend her/his own idea of the "felicity conditions" for illocutionary acts to aspects of language different from illocution. And conversation is obviously not itself a kind of illocution. If this is what is meant by saying that we cannot get a theory of conversation that matches our theory of speech acts, this conclusion has to be accepted as obvious. However, a theory of conversation could "match" a theory of speech acts in more than one sense. We might agree, for example, that conversation is made up of speech acts producing, among other things, illocutionary effects, and we might investigate, whether different genres of discourse are characterized by different kinds of illocutionary effect (in such an investigation the distinctions drawn by Austin, who devotes more attention than Searle to the deontic features of illocutionary effects, are of easier application: cf. Austin 1975: 151ff.; Sbisà 1984a, 1984b, 1987). This work is very different from the work of conversational analysts, but is not incompatible with it. Moreover, conversational analysts have often been concerned with the deontic aspects

of conversational activity, namely, with the rights and the obligations of the participants towards each other, with respect to conversational turn-taking, keeping the floor, interrupting and overlapping of turns, and the like. Maybe these deontic aspects could be compared with the deontic aspects of the illocutionary effects of speech acts: such a comparison might help us to understand the so-called "expositive" illocutionary acts, which seem to be similar to other illocutionary acts but also different from them all (cf. Austin 1975: 152; Searle 1979: 6), and conversation could turn out to be a kind of speech activity which is characterized by the bringing about of certain illocutionary effects of the expositive kind. The analogy to be exploited is not between turn-taking rules (or other conversational rules) and the constitutive rules of speech acts, but between the obligations and the rights assigned to the participants by the fact that one of them is speaking (or is arriving at a "transition point", or is ceasing to speak altogether...) and the obligations and rights assigned to speaker and hearer by the intersubjectively validated performance of illocutionary acts. This analogy is still to be explored.

It could be added that, though constitutive rules are an important tool for theoretical work in the field of language use, they are not the only tool to use for every kind of investigation. Thus, we should not feel obliged to either adopt constitutive rules as our unique tool, or reject them altogether. Moreover, constitutive rules are not self-explanatory. If we want to build up a dynamic image of how verbal interaction works, we shall have to investigate how it is that rules (both constitutive and regulative, or belonging to other possible kinds) can be accepted, shared, recognized, violated without rejection, or rejected, and here such assumptions as cooperativity and relevance come into play. We shall not tackle the methodological problem of the way in which these assumptions should be used in theory and analysis, but perhaps it is relevant to the aims of this paper to suggest that notions such as cooperativity and relevance should also allow for degrees of intensity and for intersubjective negotiation. It is not the case that such assumptions are always made by the participants in actual interaction. Nevertheless, the fact that they are made (or possibly that some conflicting assumptions, also related to the attitudes of the participants towards each other, are made instead) plays a role in the construction of the intersubjective relationship, and perhaps in the processes leading to the identification and the acceptance of shared rules or even to the identification of each other's background. The description of this role is another task at which the theory of conversation and the theory of speech acts could usefully cooperate; the emphasis posed by Searle on the background (which affects both the understanding of individual speech acts and of conversational sequences) may be taken as

a suggestion in this direction, though one would hope that his analysis of the connections of the background with the purposes of the participants and with conversational relevance, which leads to denying the possibility of intercultural communication, would not be considered as final.

However, apart from these hints at the possible ways in which speech act theory could contribute to or cooperate with the study of conversation, my main suggestion remains that the right direction to take in order to bring together the study of speech acts and the study of conversation is to go from conversation to individual speech acts, and not the other way round: it is the investigation of conversational sequences that could throw some light on the investigation of individual speech acts, and in particular of the various kinds of effects they bring about.

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## TO SEARLE ON CONVERSATION: A NOTE IN RETURN

Emanuel A. Schegloff  
*University of California at Los Angeles*

Dear John,

I rather wish I had had a chance to see your recently published "Notes on Conversation"<sup>1</sup> before they were given broad circulation. I was puzzled by some of the things you say about the work on turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) from the literature on what is called "conversation analysis" (perhaps even more puzzled than you claim to have been about that work itself), and some of the puzzles (yours or mine) might have been cleared up in advance. But I was heartened to see that you were, as you say, "prepared to be corrected." Unless, of course, that declaration is to be taken with the same irony which you confer on your characterization of this brand of "sociolinguistics" by the use of quotation marks and attributive phrases, for example in "as they would say, 'empirically'" or "they think that they have a set of rules, indeed, 'recursive rules.'" But I will (henceforth) presume that you were serious and not ironic, and try to "correct" where relevant, but mostly try to help you (and others) understand what the work on turn-taking was saying. I trust that once that is understood, whatever correction is in point you can undertake yourself, in keeping with other conversation-analytic work (cf. Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks 1977 on "The preference for self-correction..."). And here (with an occasional lapse) the ironic part of this note ends.

As I understand it, your discussion of turn-taking (and that is the only part of your "Notes..." that I take up here, although the rest merits discussion as well) goes as follows. First, you reproduce part of our

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<sup>1</sup> I first encountered the paper to which I here address myself when it appeared in *Contemporary Issues in Language and Discourse Processes* (edited by Donald G. Ellis and William A. Donohue, and published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986, pp. 7-19) under the title "Introductory essay: Notes on conversation." Nothing appears to have materially changed with the paper's name change to "Conversation," and I have accordingly left the remarks which I drafted in 1987 in response to that version materially unchanged, including the epistolary format. I am grateful to Herbert Clark whose comments on an earlier draft were very helpful.



discussion of turn-taking, but unfortunately not all of the central parts. You include the "rule-set," which, you recall, goes like this:

The following seems to be a basic set of rules governing turn construction, providing for the allocation of a next turn to one party, and coordinating transfer so as to minimize gap and overlap.

(1) For any turn, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructural unit:

(a) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, then the party so selected has the right and is obliged to take next turn to speak; no others have such rights or obligations, and transfer occurs at that place.

(b) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, then self-selection for next speakership may, but need not, be instituted; first starter acquires rights to a turn, and transfer occurs at that place.

(c) If the turn-so-far is so constructed as not to involve the use of a "current speaker selects next" technique, then current speaker may, but need not continue, unless another self-selects.

(2) If, at the initial transition-relevance place of an initial turn-constructural unit, neither 1a nor 1b has operated, and, following the provision of 1c, current speaker has continued, then the rule set a-c reapplies at the next transition-relevance place, and recursively at each next transition-relevance place, until transfer is effected.

But you do not include the explication of the resources which the rule-set deploys -- such as "turn-constructural unit," "transition-relevance place," "current speaker selects next technique," and the like, without which it is difficult to grasp exactly what this statement of the rule set is proposing. I will supply the missing explication a bit later on.

After having reproduced this part of our paper on turn-taking, you offer (p.16) a translation of what you had quoted into "plain English:"

It seems to me they are saying the following: In a conversation a speaker can select who is going to be the next speaker, for example, by asking him or her a question. Or the speaker can just shut up and let somebody else talk. Or he or she can keep on talking. Furthermore, if the speaker decides to keep on talking, then next time there is a pause in the conversation (that's called a "transition place"), the same three options apply. And that makes

the rule recursive, because once you have the possibility of continuing to talk, that means the rule can apply over and over.

But something gets lost in the translation, most importantly what a "transition place" is, in part because the quotation from our paper omitted that part of the "apparatus." We will come back to this point.

This transformation of our position is then subjected to a number of critiques:

First, you claim that "the rule could hardly fail to describe what goes on;" that is, that it is tautological, although you almost immediately retract that as an objection.

Second, you reject it *as a rule*, that is, you appear to object to calling it "a rule" because of a notion you have about the proper use of that term. In your view the term should be used for behavior "[made to] conform to the content of a rule *because it is a rule*" (emphasis supplied). This could have been just a matter of varying usages of the term "rule," but you go on to say that our account "couldn't be a rule because no one actually follows that rule" (17). Earlier (15), you put it even more strongly: "...that [the account] couldn't possibly be a rule for conversational turn-taking simply because nobody does *or could* follow it" (emphasis supplied).

You undertake to show this point about whether it is a rule or not by "go[ing] through the cases" (17), that is, the various modes of speaker transition which you attribute to us. In the course of this, it appears that a) there *are* rules that bear on who talks next (and presumably they are followed, and necessarily therefore *can* be followed), but that b) these are not rules of the sort we propose -- "rules of asking questions or making offers." As you put it, "The explanation is in terms of the rules for performing the speech acts in question, the internally related speech act pairs." In our terms, you absorb the organization of turn-taking into the organization of sequences such as "adjacency pairs," a term which you find "misleading" (8), but which has seemed to us useful (Schegloff and Sacks 1973).

This stance, that there *are* rules but that they are speech act rules and not turn-taking rules, comes up in the discussion of one of the three modes of speaker transition which you ascribe to us: the other two you say (18) "[don't] even have the appearance of being a rule because [they do not] specify the relevant sort of intentional content that plays a causal role in the production of behavior." This appears to invoke again the particulars of your usage of the term.

Perhaps the best way to begin clearing up your puzzlement is by considering a key component of the organization of turn-taking as we understand it, referred to in the rules but evidently misunderstood in your

rendering of them. We referred to this as "the turn-constructional component," and we introduced it with the following account (Sacks *et al.*, op.cit., 702-703):

There are various unit-types with which a speaker may set out to construct a turn. Unit-types for English include sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions... Instances of the unit-types so usable allow a projection of the unit-type under way, and what, roughly, it will take for an instance of that unit-type to be completed. Unit-types lacking the feature of projectability may not be usable in the same way.

As for the unit-types which a speaker employs in starting the construction of a turn's talk, the speaker is initially entitled, in having a turn, to one such unit. The first possible completion of a first such unit constitutes an initial transition-relevance place. Transfer of speakership is coordinated by reference to such transition-relevance places, which any unit-type instance will reach.

A detailed elaboration of all the relevant points is not possible here. One upshot is that there are discrete places in the developing course of a speaker's talk in a turn at which ending the turn or continuing it, transfer of the turn or its retention become relevant. These are not relevant options at any moment in the course of the talk's production, but become relevant at what we have called (unsurprisingly) "transition-relevance places."<sup>2</sup>

Where are these places to be found? We have proposed that talk in a turn is produced out of building blocks which we call (again, unsurprisingly) "turn-constructional units." The ones we mention are characterized roughly by grammatical terms (words, phrases, clauses, sentences), but surely prosody and various aspects of the talk and other conduct enter into the matter. We do not mean any word, any phrase, etc. We mean to note that there are constructions whose possible completion (a term to which I will return) the co-participants can treat as possibly the end of the turn. Not, then, *any* single word, but (to offer a sampling) "yes," "no," "hello," "who?" etc. And this specification of particular words which have this feature can be augmented by more general classes: for example, any word (or phrase or clause) can be a "one word (or phrase, or clause) turn-constructional unit" if it occurred in the immediately preceding turn. The point is: this is not a tautological claim. Not any spate of talk, on any

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<sup>2</sup> Gene Lerner (1987) argues that there are other places as well, not incompatible with the overall position taken in Sacks *et al.*, 1974.

occasion, at any arbitrarily selected stopping point, will have constituted a turn-constructional unit, and make for transition-relevance.

Further, it is not the *actual* completion of some spate of talk which is crucial, but its *possible* completion. A turn at talk is finally complete when some other begins, for a speaker can add increments to it, either as grammatically independent additions or as increments within a continuing grammatical structure. The empirical materials with which we work indicate that co-participants do not ordinarily wait to hear if a current speaker means to add to the talk already produced,<sup>3</sup> if it has come to a possible completion. If they behaved in that manner, we would generally expect to find gaps of silence between the end of prior turns and the starts of next turns -- the silences which gave evidence of the prior speaker's "actual completion." But we do *not* find that. We find instead closely coordinated articulation between the possible completion of one speaker's talk and the start of a next's. And we find incipient next speakers starting to talk at possible completions of a current speaker's talk, even when, as it happens, the current speaker continues talking.

That, in part, is what we mean by saying "transfer of speakership is coordinated by reference to such transition-relevance places." Note, then, that "transition-relevance place" does *not* translate into plain English as "pause." (By the way, this is not only because most transition-relevance places do not have silences, let alone being recognized by them. It is also because there *are* silences in the talk during which others specifically *withhold* intervention, and these are when the silences occur at other than possible completions of the turn-constructional units, that is, when they are *not* at transition-relevance places.) And decisions to shut up or keep talking have a very different character (and very different likelihood of occurrence) at different points in the talk. Once launched into a turn-constructional unit a speaker is under some onus to talk to possible completion; once arrived at such a point, the speaker encounters a structurally provided occasion for other participants' opportunities to take over.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, starting up by an interlocutor is of differing import and differing frequency (and potentially differing manner, cf. French and Local 1983) depending on the point a current speaker's turn has reached. Talk

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<sup>3</sup> There are describable classes of exceptions here; cf. for one example, Schegloff *et al.*, 1977: 374 and footnote 20.

<sup>4</sup> Many of the preceding and ensuing points, and many additional observations about the consequences of the turn-taking organization, were first formulated and developed by my late colleague Harvey Sacks in lectures between 1965 and 1972 (cf., Sacks, in preparation).

which overlaps a current speaker's talk may be recognized as "interruptive" if initiated nowhere near a possible completion, and as enthusiastic if overlapping what has already been recognized as its incipient possible completion (on the opening of the transition space, cf. Schegloff 1987: 106-107). As well, the absence of talk by another while a current speaker is mid-turn-constructional-unit is not recognized as absence, whereas a failure to start up at a transition-relevance place *may* be so recognized (depending on the character of the preceding talk).

Note in all of the above that it is the *possible* completion of turn-constructional units which organizes the occurrence and import of further talk by current speaker or its cessation, transfer of turn to another or its retention, and that possible completion is something projected continuously (and potentially shiftingly) by the developing course and structure of the talk. That is to say, speakers can build their talk and format it with an orientation to the possible completion which it will project; they can assume that their interlocutors will be oriented to that projected possible completion as providing the occasion for taking, or relevantly passing, the opportunity for a turn, sometimes having been put under a compelling onus of taking a next turn, and doing so at that point of possible completion. This means, correlatively, that among the ways hearers hear talk is a parsing for points of possible completion, and specifically with respect to whether or not they have been chosen to talk next there or whether some particular other has been chosen. This is so whether or not they end up actually talking there. And speakers build their talk in ways addressed to this sort of attention which it will be accorded. This is to claim that indeed the rules we have proposed (or some such rules) are followable, and are followed. Or, if the language of "practices" is preferred to the language of "rules," that these practices *can be*, and *are*, employed, although not necessarily with the same articulatable self-consciousness as characterizes some rules or practices, such as the side of the road on which one should drive.

In the paper on turn-taking, and in a number of other works (e.g., Sacks, 1965-1972, *passim*; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Jefferson 1973; Goodwin 1981; Schegloff 1980, 1982, 1987), we have offered various sort of evidence that parties to talk-in-interaction are oriented to organizing their talk in these ways. I have mentioned or alluded to some of these sorts of evidence: for example, that next speakers routinely start up directly after possible completion of turn-constructional units, either with no gaps of silence to indicate their completion or in the fact of actual continuations by prior speakers, shows an orientation on their part to the *possible* completion of turn-constructional units as a place at which starts of next

turns by new speakers is relevant. Perhaps an example taken from an ordinary conversation will be useful to illustrate the point.

Consider the following instance, taken from the paper on turn-taking (p.721):

Tourist:	Has the park cha:nged much,		
Parky:	Oh:: ye:s,		
	(1.0)		
Old man:	Th' <i>Fun</i> fair changed it'n	[ahful lot	[didn'tit.
Parky:		[Th-	[That-
Parky:	<i>That</i> changed it,		

Note (as we did in the original paper) that Parky starts an incipient next turn at the first possible completion point in Old man's turn. He withdraws as soon as he hears that Old man's turn is not actually complete, and then starts up again, not any place, but at the next possible completion of Old man's turn. Again, he starts not by virtue of any silence, but by virtue of the projected possible completion of the turn-constructural unit. Again, as it happens, Old man is not finished and Parky yields. He tries again at the next possible completion, which is finally a place for a next turn by another speaker. As we remarked at the time (ibid.):

The empirical materials of conversation, then, lead to the observation about the use of such components, and to their inclusion in the model of turn-taking as the elements out of which turns are built.

Another practice which gives evidence of an orientation to this organization of turn-taking, and to other participants' orientation to it, is that by which a speaker who is approaching a projectable possible completion speeds up the talk and talks "through" the possible completion, through the "transition place," without pause or breath into a next turn-constructural unit, in order to inderdict, or circumlocute, the prospect of another speaker starting up (Schegloff 1982). It is the effort to ground our claims in such details of repeatably inspectable occurrences in this domain of natural events that we refer to in speaking of our work as "empirical."

Now all of this may well be conceded to be relevant evidence for something but not for a *rule* such as the one we have proposed, for, in your view, something is only to be counted a rule when persons make their behavior conform to it "because it is a rule," because it plays "a causal role in the production of...behavior" (16). I envy you the certitude of your grasp of the causal well-springs of human behavior. It is apparently quite clear to you that you drive on the left in England *because* there is a rule which

tells you to (16); you apparently have been able to reject quite firmly some not unrelated possibilities, such as that you are oriented to the possibility that other drivers will be oriented to the rule (i.e., to just this orientation on your part), and that if they (and you) do otherwise you are likely to collide head on, it being the avoidance of this prospect which motivates your compliance, rather than "because it is a rule." Although you have apparently ruled this out (if I may put it that way), it is nonetheless strongly suggested as a possibility by your own discussion when you write (16-17), "If another driver is coming directly toward me the other way, I swerve to the left, i.e., I make my behavior conform to the content of the rule." But that suggests that you do so only when there is the prospect of a collision; there would be no need for swerving if you (and the other drivers) conformed your behavior to the rule *because it was a rule*.

Now I am not proposing that your swerving to the left is caused by the prospect of the collision; I am somewhat more cautious about the adequacy of such causal theories. But if all this makes the use of the term "rule" somewhat delicate, then I am willing to adopt for now an alternate term, such as "practice" or "usage." There is still an interrelated set of these, whatever we call them; they are still followable, followed, practiced, employed -- oriented to by the participants, and not merely, as you suggest, "extensionally equivalent descriptions of behavior."

It occurs to me that you may be bothered by the fact that the "rule set" we propose provides a) alternatives and b) options, as compared to "Drive on the left," which appears simple, direct, unequivocal, etc. (I say "appears," because we both know that there is as much contingency and equivocality and optionality here, but it is just remanded to the unarticulated practice of the rule-follower, which is, I suppose, how you come to find the need for swerving). But I don't see why the fact that there are alternative ways to achieve some outcome, ways that provide for initiatives by any of the participants, ways that provide differing degrees of constraint including pure options, should disqualify such organized practices from the status of "rule." (When you go shopping, once you enter a store you may or may not buy something (it could be otherwise; it could have been that once you enter, you must buy something); if you do, you can pay by cash, check or credit card; if cash, value must be transferred when the goods are; if check or credit card, the value will be transferred later, but you must give the commitment now, and in writing; or you can take a loan...etc., but if you choose to buy and have not done one of these options and leave with the goods, you have broken a rule and can be arrested for shoplifting.) But I am not a philosopher, and must surely be missing some critical conceptual point here. As I say, for now we can make do with "practices" instead of "rule."

To cases, as you say. Two of the "rules" we propose you say are not rules at all. In one of these, "next speaker self-selects." You explicate that as follows (18):

That means that there is a pause and somebody else starts talking. That rule says that when there is a break in the conversation anybody can start talking, and whoever starts talking gets to keep on talking. This doesn't even have the appearance of being a rule because it doesn't specify the relevant sort of intentional content that plays a causal role in the production of the behavior.

By now we are in a position to see what is wrong here.

First, it does *not* mean that there is a pause and somebody else starts talking. It means that when current speaker has come to a *possible* completion, and has not selected some particular other (in a multi-party conversation) to talk next, then anyone can start talking. Nothing about "breaks" is at all relevant; not only are "pauses" not required, but because the first to start gets the turn (in the absence of some superceding basis for another to get the turn), there can be a premium on earliest possible start, minimizing "breaks" in that sense (Sacks *et al.*, 106-7, 719), and what motivates someone to take next turn at the earliest possible opportunity may be the relevance of responding to what current speaker is saying, minimizing "breaks" in that sense.

Further, it is not the case that "whoever starts talking gets to keep on talking." That person's talk will also be composed of a turn-constructive unit which will itself fairly rapidly come to a possible completion, which will be transition-relevant, affording another participant the opportunity for turn-transfer. While the one who starts to talk may thus *end up* keeping talking, they do not "*get* to keep on talking;" they get one turn constructive unit; if they keep on talking, that is something they achieve (Schegloff 1982, 1987), not something they "get."

Note several points about this "option rule." First, it is contingent on the non-applicability of the preceding one (by which current speaker can select next speaker). Second, it offers current non-speaker(s) an option, which lends both their talking and their non-talking a different import than informs talk after a prior speaker has selected someone to talk next. Third, when read together with the global conditions of application which inform each of the "rules," it specifies particular points/moments in the flow of conduct at which these options apply; that is, it sequentially organizes the relevance of determinate action options. Whether or not this qualifies it as a rule, it certainly is relevant to the contingent shaping of the trajectory of conduct in interaction.



The same considerations apply to the third of our options: current speaker continues. You write, "It just says that when you are talking, you can keep on talking." Actually, of course, it says more than that, and less.

On the one hand, it says that where you have otherwise come to a possible completion, and sometimes should *not* continue talking (if, following our option 1a, you have selected someone to talk next), under other conditions you *can* continue (for example, when with respect to option 1b others have not self-selected). (There is a lot more to be said about this, but not here, not now). You write, "But you don't need a rule to do that," i.e., keep on talking. But you do, if sometimes you are not to keep on talking.

On the other hand, if you are still within the boundaries of a turn-constructional unit, you *should* keep talking, and people do, even when it is clear that their interlocutors have already grasped what they are in the process of saying. In these circumstances, speakers rarely just stop before possible completion.

But there is one circumstance about which you apparently agree that there are rules, and that is the option we call "current speaker selects next speaker." But that is not something you think is much done in conversation. As you say, "speakers hardly ever *directly* select a subsequent speaker" (emphasis supplied). You furnish an example from a formal occasion with a master of ceremonies, but characterise as "very unusual" cases in which "the speaker *literally* selects somebody" (emphasis supplied). Now these terms "directly" and "literally" refer us back to a larger position which you have developed about direct and indirect speech acts, and their relationship to so-called literal meaning. I do not want to take all that up here, but at least one aspect of it merits some attention for the present exchange.

You write as if the basic way, the default position, for selecting someone to talk next is to say, "I select you to talk next." Anything other than a variant of this is not doing (directly at least) "selecting someone to talk next." You write (18),

What normally happens, rather, is that the speaker asks somebody a question, or makes him an offer. The rules that determine that the second person is to speak aren't rules of "speaker selects next technique," but they are rules of asking questions or making offers.

One *or* the other. Why not both? A speaker can, after all, ask a question without "asking *somebody* a question;" for example, "Any a'you guys read that story about Walter Mitty?" (cf. Sacks *et al.*, p.703). A speaker can, after all, make an offer, without making *somebody* an offer: "More dessert

anyone?" (as others have noted as well, although from somewhat different points of view, e.g., Clark and Carlson 1982). Here actions are done which do not select anyone as next speaker, but provide for self-selection by intending next-speakers. When a speaker asks, "John, have you read *Walter Mitty*?" or offers "Bill, you want some?" (Sacks *et al.*, *ibid.*), the speaker has done more than a question or an offer. By addressing a turn of this type to a particular recipient, they have selected someone as next speaker. And it is not that they have done this "indirectly;" this is one, perhaps *the*, basic way of selecting someone as next speaker.<sup>5</sup> And it need not be done with the address term; it can be done, for example, by gaze direction. This basic device for next speaker selection we formulate as "addressing a first pair part" to them. Such an addressee is expected to analyze from the speaker's turn not only that a question, or offer, or request has been done, but that it has been done to *them*; and, further, that by virtue of its having been done to them, some response is due from them (something which is not the case by virtue of just any utterance being addressed). They can fail on either count.

And there is the class of instances in which more than one interlocutor is selected to speak next. For example:

Mark:	Hi Sherry. Hi Ruthie,
Ruth:	Hi Ma:rk.
Sherry:	Hi Ma:rk.=
Mark:	=How're you guys. (0.4)
Ruth:	Jis' fi:ne. (0.4)
Sherry:	Uh:: tired.

Whatever the rules for whatever speech act one takes "How're you guys" to be doing, it is unclear how they contribute to ordering the talk offered in response. That talk is certainly orderly, and it can be shown that the order of the answers is closely related to their character (or "content"). An explication of that relationship is not appropriate here, but it turns on several of the turn-taking "rules" (including the self-selection option) as well as other types of organization. It does not appear to be part of

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<sup>5</sup> This is but one of the points at which a conversation-analytic tack diverges from a speech-act theoretic one, and specifically with respect to "indirect speech acts." See, for example, Levinson's comparative treatment of "pre-sequences" and "indirect speech acts" (1983: 356-364, and the general review of speech act theory in Ch.5) and a similar juxtaposition in Schegloff 1988b and 1989.

constitutive rules for requests for information, or well-being inquiries, or greetings, etc.

So there are various reasons for not treating next speaker selection as an aspect of speech act rules. First, the same speech acts (such as "request for information," "request for service," "offer," "complaint," and many others) can be done while selecting someone as next speaker, while not selecting someone as next speaker, or selecting several someones without ordering their responses. Second, selecting someone as next speaker is a formal job that is invariant to a whole set of types of speech act (however we understand the notion "speech act"), and very simple notions of parsimony suggest that we not duplicate next-speaker selection operations separately for each speech act, but formulate them to operate across the members of a class of action types, types which we have called "first pair parts" of adjacency pairs. Third, some speaker selections are not done by addressing particular act types to particular addressees, but by invoking social identities of the parties (Sacks *et al.*, 718) or differentially distributed information (cf. Goodwin 1981, chapter 5), or by "recipient designed" choice of diction (for example, by use of "recognitional" references to persons; cf. Sacks and Schegloff 1979), or by implicit reference to recent events in the interaction in particular ways (asking "Y'want some nuts, babe?" selecting the daughter who has not had any yet to be next speaker, rather than the husband who has, for whom the utterance would have been "Y'want some more nuts, babe?"). These devices operate even if the speech act in which the reference occurs would not ordinarily select anyone to speak next.

Although not exhaustive, these grounds are "sufficive." Although it is true that the organization of turn-taking and the organization of sequences (or speech acts) are not independent (after all, addressing a first pair part to another is the primary mode of selecting them as next speaker), and both are always operating on any talk, they are largely distinct and only partially intersecting (I discuss one intersection in Schegloff 1987: 107). So if you agree that there *are* rules operating here (*at least* here), then I think you should conclude that there are *turn-taking* rules. I don't know whether or not this is a problem for you -- whether it violates some aesthetic of theoretical parsimony, for example. I don't see why it should be. For the conversation-analytic enterprise, such a tack seems warranted in order to account for readily observable empirical features of conversation -- both features observable in single episodes of talk and features observable over aggregates of episodes of talk. This is one of the points which the 1974 paper on turn-taking was designed to show.

Your 'Notes...' began with a search for "constitutive rules for conversations in a way that we have constitutive rules for speech acts." I don't know about that last constraint, but I think that empirically if we are to have conversation as we know it we will have to have some turn-taking organization -- whether rules or practices. The task of ordering contributions to talk-in-interaction is a generic organizational problem. It is not (or not only) an issue of politeness or civility. Single violations of turn-taking practices may be treated by their sufferers as rude or uncivil. But absent a turn-taking organization as an institutionalized practice of organizing talk-in-interaction, what would be lost would be the very possibility of concerted action, of *responsive* action, in interaction. This is as close to a constitutive set of rules as we are likely to get *sociologically*, if not conceptually (Schegloff 1988a).

The shift to the empirical and the sociological from the conceptual and philosophical underlies much in our exchange. For when we examine the details of the actual talk of actual people in interaction, we encounter the omnipresent relevance of context, in various of the senses of that term, for sentient actors. In certain respects, of course, you have sought to provide for the relevance of certain senses of context in your work, although not always positioned where I believe it should be in accounts of action (Schegloff 1989). There is, to my mind, no escaping the observation that context, which is most proximately and consequentially *temporal* and *sequential*, is not like some penthouse to be added after the structure of action has been built out of constitutive intentional, logical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic/speech-act-theoretic bricks. The temporal/sequential context rather supplies the ground on which the whole edifice of action is built (by the participants) in the first instance, and to which it is adapted "from the ground up," so to speak (Schegloff 1988b). How sequential context and organization are shaped and operate, how they are embodied and displayed, and how they are oriented to by participants in real time, turn out to be empirical, not philosophical, questions. They appear in the world as detailed practices and features of the conduct of talk -- hesitations, anticipations, apparent disfluencies, apparently inconsequential choices and replacements of words, and the like. Often unnoticed or underappreciated in casual observation or even effortful recollection of how talk goes, these facets of talk are strikingly accessible to empirical inquiry, and once registered in inquiry, are increasingly inescapable as observations for which disciplined inquiry must account, because they are relevant and consequential for the conduct of the talk by its participants.

There is the prospect then that we are going through another of those phases in which a part of what has been philosophy's turf is claimed by empirical inquiry; what its dimensions and boundaries are remains to be

determined.<sup>6</sup> As I noted, some of what turns out most to need accounting for is not even noticed by casual observation or introspection. The questions and the answers resonate to a different wavelength, and are disciplined by different responsibilities. Wittgenstein spoke of the ways in which we use language as "forms of life." Disciplined inquiry into "forms of life" is the calling of anthropology and sociology. Another domain of inquiry is passing from philosophy to an empirical discipline.

With unconditional felicitations and sincerity,  
Manny

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the final paragraph of John Heritage's (1984: 337) detailed exploration of the uses of the particle "oh." After a fine-grained explication of various contexts of use and various sequential imports and consequences of empirically encountered and examined occurrences of "oh" in conversation, Heritage cites a passage from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Grammar* (1974: 67), in which he remarks of objects like "oh" that there is in them "nothing comparable" to "...the calculus, to the complicated game which we play with other words[.]" In the juxtaposition of these two treatments of "oh" lies embodied one exhibit of the transition to which I refer.

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## THE DISPREFERRED OTHER

Jürgen Streeck

*University of Texas at Austin*

et dedisti ea homini ex aliis de se conicere  
Augustinus

"Shared intentionality" plays a key role in how Searle converts the speech act scenario into a scenario for conversation. The concept makes no provision for "other" and "self". A certain ambivalence can be felt in his paper, between individualism and a collective will.

I compare Searle's "scenarios" with G.H. Mead's "conversation of gestures", a scenario in which the "other" constitutes the "self". I also compare it with a bit of "real life" conversation, to show that conversational *structure* favours the "other" over the "self".

### 1. The Speech Act Scenario and the Scenario for Conversation

This is how Searle initially sketches the "speech act scenario".

S goes up to H and cuts loose with an acoustic blast; if all goes well, if all the appropriate conditions are satisfied, if S's noise is fused with intentionality, and if all kinds of rules come into play, then the speech act is successful and nondefective. The speech act is concluded and S and H go their separate ways (p.7).

In this scenario, only the self (the speaker) has a body (and a mind); H is just H. They thus stand in no relation to one another. There is an act, there are rules, but there is no uptake. But Searle says that in "real life",

speech characteristically consists of longer sequences of speech acts, either on the part of one speaker in a continuous discourse; or it consists, more interestingly, of sequences of exchange speech acts in conversation, where alternately S becomes H; and H, S. (7)



Here, we see an "other" beside the "self". They take turn at being speakers, but do not act toward nor with one another. Then, however, they get connected, become a collective, by "sharing intentionality".

A recognition of shared intentionality and its implications is one of the basic concepts we need in order to understand how conversations work. (22)

Searle does not define what exactly is meant by the term, but he gives an illustration: A and B push a car. The important feature of this scenario - and of the one for conversation- is that A and B intend their acts to be contributions to *joint pushing*. In this sense, intentionality is shared. "Shared intentionality [...] underlies much of social behavior" (22)

Incidentally, A and B not only share in a joint venture; their contributions are also entirely alike. (They do the same thing at the same time. While there may be differences in style or in the amount of energy spent -depending perhaps on whose car is being pushed- A's and B's actions still are versions of one another.) Previously there was no "other". He has now appeared and looks conspicuously like the self.

## 2. Parallelism or a Conversation of Gestures?

G.H. Mead (1934) approached the "self" from the point of view of the "other". (This is what I mean by "de-centering".) He describes a scenario called "conversation of gestures". In it, self, language and mind emerge from communication and "social adjustment".

The reference model Mead chose as a basis for de-centering, was the individualistic language psychology of Wilhelm Wundt (1911). In Wundt's scenario symbolic communication (by gesture or language) comes from purely physical affect behavior. Human organisms house *affects* (and - later on in evolution- construct mental representations of affective objects and occasions). Affects are externalized by expressive motions ("acoustic blasts", facial movements, gestures). These movements as such do not communicate, they have no meaning. They are but physical traces: "each affect, [...] is accompanied by movements matching its character, [...] because of the natural unity of the psychophysics organization" (Wundt 1911: 65).

But while Wundt kept body and mind, meaning and symbol, "sensory process and psychic content" (Mead, 50) dually apart, he went on to claim that they are *parallel*. Parallelism later explains the possibility of communication.

In Wundt's doctrine, the parallelism between the gesture and the emotion or the intellectual attitude of the individual makes it possible to set up a like parallelism in the other individual (Mead 1934: 48).

In this scenario A and B will likely understand each other, given that they are naturally so much alike. But so far, they feel no need to communicate. To get started, they also need a "communication drive" and a "drive to imitate". Communication occurs when B imitates A's expression and creates in himself the affect that it conveys. This is possible because of the "natural unity" of the psychophysics organization. Later, language gives stability to the emotions and images that are exchanged; it enables B to not only imitate, but make "answer movements" in response to a given image. First, "individual affect becomes [...] shared affect", then, "jointly experienced [...] affect becomes jointly [...] operating thought" (Wundt 1911: 255).

"Parallelism" operates on a category-mistake: it invokes the duality - while claiming the natural unity- of body and mind. Mindless bodies never procreate meanings and therefore never communicate (Ryle 1949). The inhabitant of the Wundt-scenario therefore shares the fate of the loners in the other Cartesian scenarios: held captive in a body, his mind seeks to reach out. All it finds are similar bodies; other minds are non-transparent. Everything else is analogy, projection. Even the loner himself is present only by stipulation.

Wundt presupposes selves as antecedent to the social process of communication in order to explain communication within that process. [...] But he cannot explain that which is taken logically prior at all, cannot explain the existence of minds and selves (Mead: 44, 222).

Searle and Wundt, elaborating their original scenarios to accommodate communication, make stipulations at similar points. They need a bridge to connect the actors. "Imitation" and "shared intentionality" are the bridges. But the concepts presuppose that some understanding has already been achieved at a prior level. And in both scenarios, communication is depicted as a symmetrical relationship between other and self.

In Mead's scenario, communication does not begin with the self; rather, the self appears in and reflects communication. Communication does not require a mind, but mind presupposes communication. It is an internalization of the social act. It first appears when an organism "calls out in himself the response that (his gesture) [...] calls out in another" (66).

A "gesture" is an "early stage of an act"; it "serves as a stimulus to others" (42). It allows others to respond to the act that it indicates -before the fact. If the indicated act is unfavourable, the other may try to pre-empt it (e.g., by responding to a threat by a flight display). Gestures, thus, have meaning. Meaning is not "a physical addition to (an) [...] act and [...] not an 'idea'" (76), but the relation between the gesture and subsequent behavior [...] as indicated to another human organism by that gesture. [...] (It is) a relation between certain phases of the social act" (loc.cit.). A gesture is meaningful, in other words, because it makes an action-projection. And it becomes a "significant symbol"

when it has the same effect on the individual making it that it has on the individual to whom it is addressed or who explicitly responds to it (46).

Gestures enable the self to control his actions in light of the other's 'early' response. This is the moment when the mind arrives, through a process of social adjustment. The adjustment takes place through communication, "by gestures on the lower planes of evolution, and by significant symbols [...] on the higher planes" (75). In the "conversation of gestures", no thought nor affect nor intentionality is shared from the beginning. Conversation is a process of sharing. Self and other make their actions transparent and mutually adjust them and thereby acquire a mind.

### 3. The Cigarette Scene

Mead's "conversation of gestures" is an idealized scenario of human evolution, not an observation-based model of conversation. But it accomodates some of conversation's "empirical" features. Conversational *structure* is 'skewed', de-centered. It displaces actions unfavourable to the "other".

The following is a 'generic' analysis of the *Cigarette Scene* (Birdwhistell 1970), from *The Natural History of an Interview*, an early microstudy of human interaction (McQuown 1956). By 'generic' I mean: analysis of the types of resources that are brought to bear upon the single case by the particular parties, but are available to anyone (Schegloff 1987). In the scene is Gregory Bateson, interviewing Doris, a patient. At this moment he lights her cigarette. With them in the room is her kid.

Doris: I spose a:ll mothers think their kids are smart but  
(1.6)  
I ha:ve no: worries about that child's (0.5)

Gregory: intellectual [(0.3) ability.  
 |No that's a very smart one.

This is an assessment sequence, an assessment by self plus a return assessment by other. As such, the sequence is *unmarked*: assessments commonly solicit second assessments. Because this is how they occur in ordinary conversations, they can be used "to secure recipient co-participation" (Goodwin & Goodwin 1988: 11). Doris' utterance, then, is an *invitation for assessment*.

Gregory not only makes a return-assessment, but he *agrees*. Again, this is the common case. A "preference for agreement" operates in conversation; agreements are unmarked, disagreements are marked. Doris can thus expect that Gregory will agree and say something nice about the child.

Gregory not only agrees, but "intensifies" the positive assessment. While Doris "has no worries", he thinks the kid "is very smart". This is how agreements with assessments are commonly done. If the agreement were done without "up-grade", it would sound "weak"; "weak agreements" foreshadow disagreements. Also, Gregory's strong agreement begins early, in overlap with the "completor", the possibly and actually final component of Doris' turn.

Doris: I ha:ve no: worries about that child's (0.5)  
 intellectual [(0.3) ability.  
 Gregory: |No that's a very smart one.

Early starts are common among strong agreements. "When agreements are invited, strong or upgraded agreements are performed with a minimization of gap (in fact frequently in slight overlap)" (Pomerantz 1984: 69). Bateson's response begins at a "recognition point" (Jefferson 1984), when her utterance is nearly complete and it can be recognized that all it needs for completion is some version of "ability". "Pre-possible completion" is routinely taken as an "opportunity space" for early turn-beginning (Lerner 1987).

However, Gregory's response is not only 'early', but also 'delayed'. Although he takes the opportunity for an early agreement, he only takes the third of its kind. There have been two prior spaces where Bateson had an opportunity -and could feel invited- to respond. *That child's intellectual projects ability*, but so does *that child's*.

but (1.6) I ha:ve no: worries about that child's (0.5) intellectual  
 (0.3) ability.

*Intellectual*, then, is inserted into the turn when one opportunity to respond early is not taken. It delays the turn's completion and provides another opportunity for 'pre-terminal' response.

The first opportunity for 'assessment collaboration', however, is after the preface.

Doris: I spose a:ll mothers think their kids are smart but  
(1.6)

In the preface, Doris shows "what she is up to". It is a "disclaimer". And it makes her action transparent.

Not all assessment-turns begin with a preface. [preface + action] is a *marked* construction type, used to format "dispreferred" actions, actions unfavourable to others. Prefaces mark disagreements (but not agreements), or declinations rather than acceptances of offers, invitations, or requests. Prefaces are similar to gestures: it is an "early stage" and projects a subsequent act, making it transparent to the other before the fact. It provides an opportunity for pre-emption. (Someone who receives an offer and produces a 'pre-declination' invites a modification which he then can possibly accept.)

The preference-system evoked by the preface of Doris' turn is *self-praise avoidance* (Pomerantz 1984). It is 'enforceable by self and/or other, in that order" (Pomerantz 1978: 88). Self-praise may be unfavourable to the other; it is therefore displaced. Self (current speaker) can invoke the system by "incorporating a disclaimer within self-praising talk" (89). Other, upon recognizing the projected, unfavourable action, can move to pre-empt it, by 'giving praise' (the action thus shifting from 'self'- to 'other-praise', a solidary, affiliative action). This is what Bateson does; but one can see that he does it 'reluctantly'.

We have thus examined the *Cigarette Scene* as an instantiation of structures, as a local deployment of 'generic' resources that are available to anyone. These resources not only include speech act types but also their forms of production. These forms are de-centered, structurally designed to favour solidary action: involvement of other, responsiveness, praise.

Birdwhistell's account of the scene, based not on an examination of generic resources but the single case, is consistent with our description, although different in kind. He says that Doris' non-lexical behavior (getting Gregory to light her cigarette) is

a demand upon Gregory for a relationship more interpersonally involved than he has seemed to engage in before (1970: 233).

#### 4. Conclusion

This, then, is a bit of structure of "real-life" conversation. In this scenario the speaker's actions invite the recipient's co-participation, partly by displacing possibilities that would be unfavourable to him.

An assessment by self solicits an assessment by other. An assessment, in other words, not only shows an opinion but makes room for the other to show that "the minds are together" (Goodwin & Goodwin 1988). If this opportunity is not taken, it is declined. Using a "participants' syntax-for-conversation" (Lerner 1987), Doris creates, as her utterance unfolds, "opportunities for collaboration". The utterance unfolds in response to whether or not they are taken.

Doris invites Bateson to become more involved by invoking "self-praise avoidance", a preference-system designed to favour "others". Preference organizations generally de-center the structure of conversational actions: actions favourable to others are unmarked and simple, unfavourable actions are marked. "Dispreferred turn-shapes" not only displace and minimize the occurrence of unfavourable actions, at the same time they create second opportunities for favourable ones. "Prae-ferre" is how this is done: a "preferred action *token*" is moved to the turn-beginning and completed before the unfavourable act is done. An action-preface is like a gesture. Like a gesture, it is the initial part of an act; like a gesture, it 'anticipates' or 'projects' the act; and like a gesture it makes social action transparent and enables others to adjust and respond to the act before the fact. These design-features of conversation are "entrenched", "collectivized [...] as a feature of social structure" (Heritage 1984: 276).

In the interaction scenario, "sharing" is not taken as a "given". But it is quite easily achieved.

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## CONVERSATION RECONSIDERED

John Searle

*University of California, Berkeley*

The odd history of the target article will perhaps explain some features of the present discussion. I originally presented this material, in much like its present form, as an off-the-cuff after dinner speech introducing a conference. It never occurred to me as I was giving this talk that it would ever be published, much less that it would become the subject of a volume. So the remarks were not intended in any sense as a *prise de position*, but rather as a matter of *poser des questions*.

The puzzle that informs the article can be stated quite simply. Why don't we have an account of conversations that parallels our account of other linguistic phenomena, such as the grammatical structure of sentences or the intentional structure of speech acts? Why are we still lacking a *theory* of conversation in a way that we have more theories of speech acts or of sentences than we really know what to do with? Now, a typical way that we have formed theories in the study of language has been to get necessary and sufficient conditions for the phenomenon in question. Characteristically these necessary and sufficient conditions can be stated in the form of constitutive rules, e.g. for the performance of speech acts, or for the formation of grammatical sentences. This procedure has proved so fruitful that it seems reasonable to ask: Would it work for conversations, and if not, why not? So the original puzzle can be put in the form of a challenge: Give me a theory of conversations that is as good as, and has the form of, current theories of speech acts or current theories of sentences. And if we cannot get that kind of a theory, what kind can we get? And if we cannot get any theoretical account, why not? I put this challenge in the hope that I might learn something. I might either be informed of some existing theories that I knew nothing about, or somebody might suggest the tools with which a theory could be constructed. The best way for me to pose this challenge was to present objections to some existing approaches and to express skepticism about the possibility of success in meeting the challenge. The best way to answer my skepticism would be to present a theory of conversation whose very existence would refute it.



I presented the original paper in the hope of learning something and it is fair to say that my hopes have been satisfied. I will begin by stating some of what I have learned from this whole exercise.

Let us start with my notion of collective intentionality. I claim that all conversations are forms of collective intentionality. Several authors complain that I do not explain this very much, and that is a justified complaint. I have written an article about this which was supposed to have been published several years ago. I am still waiting for its publication which I hope will occur soon.<sup>1</sup>

For this discussion it is important to see that collective intentionality is a primitive concept which does not reduce to individual intentionality plus mutual knowledge. And furthermore, it is important to see that the higher level collective intentionality - "we are doing such and such" - allows within it for individual intentionality of the form "I am doing so and so as part of our doing such and such". Thus, the individual intentionality is part of the collective intentionality, even though the individual agents can be doing something different from what the other agents are doing (this point is misunderstood by Streeck who thinks all collective intentionality consists simply in everybody doing the same thing). Let us allow then that conversations are forms of collective intentionality and that the "we-intention" of "we are having a conversation" allows for differing "I-intentions", e.g. for my "I-intention": "I am explaining such and such to you" and for your "I-intention": "I am disagreeing with what you say", etc. What more can we say? Here are some principles that emerge from the discussion in this volume.

1. The units of a conversation, namely the subsidiary speech acts, are organized on principles other than those of the whole conversation. This is consistent with the fact that any given speech act may be identified by its position within the conversation.

The conversational intentionality cannot be reduced to the intentionality of the individual speech acts. I will return to this point at the end.

2. Following Jucker, we can say that characteristically in a conversation the content of the collective "we-intention" is determined by the process of the conversation and is not given by an antecedently intended structure. In this

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<sup>1</sup> Searle, John R. "Collective Intentions and Actions". Forthcoming in P. Cohen, J. Morgan, & M.E. Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication*. Bradford Books, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.

respect the collective intention in a conversation differs markedly from the intention to perform a certain speech act. The individual speech act is, so to speak, determined by the intention, but in the case of conversations, the conversation structures the developing collective intention. The emphasis, to repeat, is on structure resulting from process, rather than the process simply being a function of an antecedently intended structure.

3. Following Dascal, we can say that a constraint on the structure is that, in general, subsidiary speech acts within the structure both answer a previous "conversational demand" and express a new conversational demand, which the interlocutor then in turn answers. I prefer Dascal's formulation to the one I originally gave where I said that each speech act creates a possibility of a range of appropriate response speech acts, because my original formulation is oriented too much from a third person point of view. It seems to me Dascal is right in that we ought to think of conversation as, in large part, a series of mutually iterated and potentially satisfied demands made by each speaker as he becomes now speaker then hearer.

4. Following Roulet, it seems to me that we can begin to identify, and possibly even make a typology of, different hierarchical structures within the structure of the collective intentionality of the speech act. He gives the example of what he calls "a linguistic exchange". The exchange is characteristically smaller than the entire conversation, but his hypothesis is that conversations are made up of linguistic exchanges. I do not fully understand his model, in particular his notion of "an interactive completeness constraint". Perhaps this just means that you have to complete an exchange before you go on to the next exchange. But he is surely right in thinking that within exchanges you can get subsidiary exchanges. For example, in a conversation to determine whether or not I am going to buy an oriental rug from a dealer, I might first have to make a subsidiary determination of what exactly the asking price is.

I am not sure if Roulet thinks that all conversations consist in linguistic exchanges. That seems to me probably too strong a hypothesis. But a weaker and more plausible hypothesis might be that there are organized hierarchical structures and that his linguistic exchange model is a typical sort of structure.

5. A distinction that cuts across the distinctions made so far is this: Often big speech acts are made up of little speech acts. So, for example, if I am explaining to you the operation of an internal combustion engine, or justifying my behavior at last night's party, I will characteristically make a

series of subsidiary speech acts all of which add up to the big speech act of *explaining* or *justifying*. Roulet calls these larger speech acts "moves", as opposed to subsidiary speech acts, but it seems to me that a "move" is characteristically also a speech act. It is generally the case that an illocutionary act can itself be made up of subsidiary illocutionary acts.<sup>2</sup> With these five principles in mind, let us now turn to some of the specific issues raised by the commentators.

### **Illocutionary uptake and speech act identity**

Several authors, especially Sbisà and Holdcroft, think that I am denying that illocutionary uptake is part of the speech act. But that is not my position at all. Indeed in *Speech Acts* I explicitly identified what I called the illocutionary effect (to distinguish it from the perlocutionary effect) as an essential part of the successful and nondefective performance of the speech act. Illocutionary effect is a matter of understanding the utterance, and is roughly equivalent to Austin's "illocutionary uptake". However, once this misunderstanding is corrected, there is still a deep disagreement between my view and those of Sbisà and Holdcroft. They hold, in slightly different forms, that the very existence of the speech act requires that it have an appropriate position in the conversation. Holdcroft maintains that if I make a totally irrelevant remark, e.g. "Les Misérables is a great success" in response to a remark about the Brazilian economy, then I have not even made a statement (p.63). Sbisà thinks that unless my promises and statements are accepted then they have not even been made and that in a sense this renders all speech acts "conditional", they are conditional on acceptance by the hearer (p.105ff). This is part of her general thesis that we should not think of conversations as made up of speech acts, but rather the other way round: the identity of the speech act is determined in large part by a kind of feedback mechanism depending on how it is taken in the conversation.

I think there is something right about these claims but also something wrong. What is right is this: Often one's remarks are only intelligible given their specific location in a conversation. To take an obvious example, if in a conversation I say "yes", both propositional content and illocutionary force are a function of what preceded. If "yes" is the answer to "Do you promise to marry me?" then my speech act is quite different from "yes" said as the answer to "Do you have any bananas?" And "yes" said out of the clear blue sky is not a successful speech act at all. I hope everyone would agree on these points. But Sbisà and Holdcroft go

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<sup>2</sup> Fotion, N. "Master Speech Acts". PhQ. 21:84. pp.232-43.

far beyond the truth of these insights when they claim that even in cases where illocutionary force and propositional content are fully explicit and understood I still have not performed a speech act. Sbisà says, (p.103-104) "if an assertion is not accepted as an assertion, the speaker will not count as being committed to the truth of the proposition." But if you consider actual cases, that seems mistaken. I can make a statement I know will be rejected and thus will not "take effect" but all the same I did make a statement and I am committed. To take a famous example, when Galileo said "Eppure si muove" his utterance was clearly "not accepted", but all the same he did make a statement. Similarly for Holdcroft's bore who is anxious to get in his irrelevant claim about *Les Misérables*. Even though we may be puzzled as to why he is telling us this, it is all the same clear both what he is telling us and that he has told it to us. Now what is the difference between the "yes" case, where conversational context is crucial to both identity and existence of the speech acts, and the other cases where it is not? The key to understanding illocutionary acts is to see that (assuming the other necessary conditions are satisfied) the act is achieved if the speaker communicates his illocutionary intentions to the hearer. In the "yes" case it is impossible to do that in the absence of the appropriate context. But in the other cases, communication has succeeded even though the conversational situation may be a mess in other respects. I believe that Sbisà is right in thinking that illocutionary acts "take effect", but wrong in thinking that no act has even been performed until it takes effect. Indeed, the only way an illocutionary act can take effect is if it has already been performed.

In her general discussion of the conditionality of speech acts she claims that bets and offers create conditional obligations even after they have been accepted. I believe that is true for bets but not for offers. It seems to me the situation is this: Suppose I say "I offer to buy your car for one thousand dollars". That utterance commits me conditionally; that is to say, I have made an offer which will obligate me, conditional on your acceptance. But once you have accepted, then my obligation is no longer conditional, it is unconditional and categorical. If you accept the offer, then I have promised to pay you one thousand dollars for your car, no conditions about it. On the other hand, bets are, so to speak, doubly conditional. If I say, "I bet you one hundred dollars that the San Francisco Giants will win the next World Series", then my making the bet is conditional on your acceptance, but once you have accepted, then I still have a conditional obligation to pay you one hundred dollars if the Giants do not win, and you also have a conditional obligation to pay me one hundred dollars if they do win.

About expositives, Holdcroft and I have a small misunderstanding and a large disagreement. The small misunderstanding is that he thinks that I hold all of Austin's "expositive" illocutionary forces to be assertives; but that is not my position. Rather, I think that there are *no such things as* expositive illocutionary forces, because the verbs in question do not name a type of illocutionary force at all but another feature of a speech act, namely how it relates to the rest of the conversation. I do think that most of the actual acts of which the expositive verbs are true will turn out to have an assertive force, but this does not have the consequence that expositives are a type of force in addition to assertives. The large disagreement, then, is whether there really is such a thing as an expositive illocutionary force. Consider his example of the expositive verb "add". Just to say that something was "added" does not tell me what sort of a speech act was performed at all. It just tells me that the speech act, whatever it was, stands in a certain relation to the rest of the conversation; and thus it gives at most one component of an illocutionary force, i.e. discourse relations. He concedes that all such cases must be "doubly classifiable". A speech act could not be just a case of adding but must be some other type of speech act, as well. I believe he should find this result more worrying than he does in fact. It is not at all like my cases of an utterance having more than one illocutionary point, where illocutionary point forms the basis of the taxonomy. It is rather as if someone had said that smelly animals are a kind of animal, but that smelly animals must be "doubly classifiable". It is indeed true that many speech acts are cases of adding, just as many animals are smelly (or furry or belong to the Bronx zoo). But not everything which is a feature common to lots of animals or speech acts can form a basis for a rational classification. As usual, Austin (and the rest of us) was misled by the existence of separate verbs to think there must be a separate class of acts or forces.

### **Pragmatics and indirect speech acts**

Dascal thinks the crucial difference between conversations and speech acts is that speech act theory is semantic, in the sense that it "does not yield speaker's meanings" (p.42) whereas the theory of conversation is pragmatic, in that "the level of organization is essentially that of speaker's meanings." (p.44) In this connection he also thinks that in an indirect speech act, contrary to my view, the speaker performs only one speech act and not two.

I find these claims very puzzling. If I am right about the principle of expressibility, then any speaker meaning can be given exact expression in an actual or possible sentence meaning. Since any pragmatic speaker

meaning can in principle be given an exact expression in a semantic sentence meaning, the *theory* of speech acts is both semantic and pragmatic at once on his definition of the distinction. Now certain elements of the theory, such as the theory of indirect speech acts, are pragmatic in the explicit sense that they are concerned with the mechanisms by which a speaker communicates a speaker meaning which is not identical with the meaning of the sentence uttered. But it seems quite obvious to me that, as he has defined these notions, the theory is both a semantic and a pragmatic theory. When it comes to conversation, it seems equally obvious that the theory is *neither* semantic nor pragmatic on his understanding of these notions, since what makes a sequence of utterances into a conversation goes beyond the specific speaker meanings and sentence meanings of the component utterances. To put it bluntly: the semantic-pragmatic distinction, as he uses it, is defined over meaning, and "conversation" does not name a unit of meaning.

My puzzlement is increased when I consider what he says about indirect speech acts. I think that in an indirect speech act a speaker characteristically performs two acts, one explicit one implicit. In his example, if I say to a woman who is standing on my foot in a crowded bus, "Madam you are standing on my foot" I perform (at least) two speech acts: I make the literal assertion, "You are standing on my foot" and the nonliteral request, "Get off my foot". He thinks this is "a strange doctrine", for "why should one say that an assertion was actually made if it does not correspond to the speaker's actual point in uttering his utterance?" (p.43) But it seems to me his subsequent discussion provides the answer. The simplest proof that an assertion was actually made is that responses which would be appropriate to an assertion but not to a request are appropriate here. Thus the woman might say, "That's false! I am not." This is appropriate as a response to the assertion but not to the request. And the point is generalizable: In any indirect speech act the literal secondary act is always performed because responses which are appropriate to it but not to the primary nonliteral act are appropriate. A similar point cannot be made about, for example, metaphorical utterances.

He supports his argument by citing Davidson's claim to the effect that meaning depends on belief and belief on meaning: I can only figure out what you mean if I know what you believe and conversely. But Davidson is mistaken. He is confusing the epistemic with the ontological. In somebody else's case I am only able to *figure out* what he means/believes if I have some idea about the other term. But that is an epistemic point. You can see this by considering your own case:

In my own case, what I believe is one thing, how I express that belief, or whether I express it at all, is something else.

Jucker says that in indirect speech acts the actual form of the utterance is irrelevant. But every investigation of indirect speech acts that I have seen, including my own, shows that, in fact, they are quite systematic. There are a large number of ways that you can ask someone to pass the salt without actually issuing an imperative sentence: e.g. "Can you pass the salt?", "Would you pass the salt?", etc. But you cannot just say anything. Indeed, you cannot even say anything about salt, e.g. "The price of salt has gone up", "Salt is mined in the Tatra mountains", etc. and expect to succeed in performing an indirect speech act. One feature of the investigation of indirect speech acts is that the phenomena seem to be quite systematic and rational, and more to the point, they fit in with the general theory of speech acts.<sup>3</sup>

### **Relevance and the background**

Several authors, notably Dascal and Holdcroft, were puzzled that I cited the background as an especially rich field for investigation in the case of conversation when I also think that it is essential in the comprehension of individual speech acts, and Holdcroft even interprets me as citing the background as an obstacle or an objection to the possibility of a systematic theory of conversation. The answer to these points is this: the existence of the background is not an objection to the theory of conversation; and my citing the background is not intended to show that a theory of conversation is impossible, rather the background is part of the subject matter of such a theory. And though the network and the background both play a crucial role in the understanding of even such apparently trivial examples as the utterance "Sally cut the cake", the role they play is much greater in the understanding of whole conversations, such as the example I gave of the interview on British TV. Why? What is the difference?

In the case of single utterances, the background (including the network) is essential to fix the conditions of satisfaction of the utterance. But in the case of whole conversations much more is involved than just truth conditions and other sorts of conditions of satisfaction. Since the intentions of the conversation by definition go beyond the intentions of the individual speech acts (that by the way is what makes it a conversation, the intentionality is more than that of a series of individual speech acts) the understanding of the conversation requires a much richer component of the background than simply that which is essential to the determination of the conditions of satisfaction of the utterances. My example from British

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<sup>3</sup> Searle, John R. "Indirect Speech Acts". In: *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge University Press, 1979.

TV was supposed to illustrate this by getting us to see that we had no idea what was even relevant except in terms of a whole lot of information and capacities which were not present and could not have been made fully explicit, because any attempt to make them fully explicit in turn would require more background for its comprehension. I will not repeat the general point I tried to make about relevance because it requires a somewhat complex exposition and I believe it should be clear from the target article. But I do want to say this: it is not an objection to the point that the idea of conversation *as such* gives us no criteria of relevance, to say that *individual* conversations have their own criteria of relevance. To say that is already to concede the main point.

Jucker thinks that the background, in my sense, consists of a lot of trivial beliefs. But on the account that I am proposing, they are not trivial and they are not beliefs. They are sets of preintentional capacities that enable all meaning and understanding to take place.

### **Ethnomethodology**

In spite of the length of his reply I do not believe that Schegloff has addressed the point that was worrying me in my discussion of the turn taking rule. So let me state it in a different way: It is clear that turn taking in conversation is not random and that it is even (fairly) systematic. To the degree that it is systematic it will exhibit *patterns*. Now, in the study of language and discourse we are seeking *explanations*. Characteristically in the sciences we seek causal explanations and in the social sciences we seek explanations in terms of intentional causation, such as rule following. That is why speech act theory and pragmatics have had the successes they have had. They offer *causal* explanations in the form of speech act rules, maxims of conversation, etc. Of course, nobody performs a speech act just for the purpose of following speech act rules, any more than he drives in Britain just for the purpose of following the left hand rule of the road. Actual behavior typically has complex intentional causes, but the discovery of rules, principles, maxims, etc. is explanatory when it cites forms of causation which are systematic and pervasive. That is why the rule of the road and the rules of speech acts do more than identify patterns, they are actually explanatory. Now here in a nutshell is the difficulty: the identification of a pattern of turn taking does not so far explain anything. I gave the example of a bunch of patterns in a football game to show that they were in part the result of rules, but the identification of the patterns by itself explains nothing. In order to be explanatory the form of the pattern must exemplify a rule or some other form of intentional causation. In the case of the putative turn taking rule there is definitely a pattern - indeed, I



argue there could hardly fail to be one - but where is the evidence that this is actually a rule that people follow? It is no help to be told that maybe it is not a rule but only a "practice", because that only forces the question back a step. We are still looking for the explanatory force in the description of the pattern. And it is even less help to be told that this is "anthropology and sociology" and thus subject to "different responsibilities" than philosophy. I think we should leave these boundary disputes to university deans (try deciding about the issues discussed in this book which are "empirical" which "philosophical" which part of "linguistics" which part of "anthropology", etc.) It is quite possible that the identification of patterns in turn taking may eventually be shown to have identified a causal explanation, but I have not yet seen any evidence presented for this.

Since the point is important, not only for this discussion but for explanation in linguistics and the social science generally, it is perhaps worth repeating it one last time. Schegloff and I agree that units of speech in conversation come in chunks. I think these chunks have to be defined intentionalistically, but the boundaries of the chunks are not necessarily the boundaries of single speech acts. As near as I can tell, these chunks are what he is calling, "turn construction units", and the boundaries of the chunks, he calls "transition relevant places". I call them breaks. (And by the way, by "break" or "pause" I did not mean a simple temporal gap, but rather the boundaries of an intentionally defined chunk.) Schegloff describes patterns in the way that turn-taking relates to the breaks. Fine. But what we now need to know is what is the explanatory status of the description of the patterns? If the description of a pattern specifies the intentional content of a rule that the agent is following then the description has some explanatory force. But if the description just identifies some regularity in behavior then so far no explanation has been given. So far, the situation is like the following: An anthropologist from Mars observing my behavior will note that when I drive in the United States, I drive on the same side of the road where my birth mark is. When I drive in Britain, I drive on the side of the road opposite my birth mark. This is a very definite pattern in my behavior. But the identification of this pattern has no explanatory power at all. Rather the pattern itself is what needs explanation. And of course, the explanation has to be intentionalistic in terms of more fundamental rules that I am actually following. As a plain matter of fact these rules make no reference to birth marks. Now so far, no evidence whatever has been presented to show that the turn-taking pattern is any different from the birth mark pattern of my driving behavior.

## Conclusion

I am very grateful for all of the effort that has gone into these papers and for the constructive and intelligent level at which the discussion has been carried on. I am sorry that I have not been able to respond to every point made by every author. I have little to add to Julian Boyd's very interesting discussion of the relationship between modal auxiliary verbs and illocutionary forces, but I am certainly grateful to see it in print. I wish I had more time to discuss Streeck's account of the dispute between Wundt and Mead, but it is not really central to the main issues in the discussion.

Perhaps the most useful way for me to conclude is by way of posing a further question. One thing that emerges from this discussion is that the form of intentionality that is characteristic of the individual illocutionary act is quite different in structure from the form that is characteristic of the collective intentionality of entire conversations, or even portions of conversations. It is characteristic of the individual intentionality of the illocutionary act level that it can commonly be expressed by performative verbs: "I state that ...", "I ask whether ...", etc. Now, why couldn't there be larger performative verbs for conversations or sections of conversations? Well, to some extent, of course, there are: "I argue that...", "I disagree for the following seven reasons...", "I will explain, justify", etc. To put the question in another way: Why wouldn't the principle of expressibility apply to the collective intentionality of entire conversations or sections of conversations? The collective forms might take the form "We are discussing for whom to vote in the next election and in that discussion I am arguing for the Democratic candidate" and "I am arguing for the Republican candidate". Part of the answer to this question, I believe, is that the intentionality of the individual speech act, whether performed individually or collectively, is in general representational, as is shown by the fact that speech acts characteristically have a propositional intentional content. The characteristic form of the speech act is  $F(p)$ , where the  $p$  marks the propositional content and the  $F$  marks the illocutionary type or mode with which the propositional content is presented. The whole package is a representation of a state of affairs in a certain illocutionary mode. But the conversation as a whole is characteristically not representational, it does not represent an additional state of affairs. So there need be no additional representational propositional content in the entire conversation beyond that of the individual speech acts of which it is composed. There is no *additional* level of meaning that goes with the conversation as opposed to the meaning of the individual speech acts.



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