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# On Searle [on Austin] on language

Kanavillil Rajagopalan

*Department of Linguistics, Institute for Language Studies, State University at Campinas  
(UNICAMP), Campinas — SP, 13081-970, Brazil*

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[O]ne of the reasons why the subject of speech acts is so much fun is that you don't have to worry about what all the great figures from the past said, because most of the great philosophers had no theory of speech acts.

John R. Searle (quoted in Nerlich and Clarke, 1994, p. 440)

## 1. The problem

In a very stimulating and neatly argued paper entitled 'On Searle on language', published in *Language & Communication*, Nigel Love (1999) points out a profoundly contradictory state of affairs besetting the Theory of Speech Acts, in the form in which it has been developed and defended by John R. Searle (passim—but especially, Searle, 1969, 1979a) over the last three decades or so. The contradiction — or what may be characterised, at the very least, as a permanent tension — in Searle's version of the theory has to do with the attempt by the Berkeley philosopher to reconcile two trends which, as Love reminds us, are at bottom irreconcilable.

On the one hand, Searle has insisted right from the beginning that the fundamental concept that his theory invokes is not that of any of the familiar units of language, as identified by the grammarian. He says:

The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word, or sentence,

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*E-mail address:* rajan@panini.iel.unicamp.br (K. Rajagopalan).

but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act (Searle, 1969, p.16)

For Searle, thus, a theory of language is not a theory about the combinatorial possibilities of symbols that can be strung together so as to yield the well-formed sentences of a given language — as a Chomskyan generative grammarian claims it should be. It is about the knowledge that the native speakers of a language have of what speech acts are performed during actual communicative events as opposed to what sort of knowledge the speakers must possess in order to, say, be able to tell all and only the grammatical sentences of their language. Says he:

It might be objected to this approach that such a study deals only with the point of intersection of a theory of language and a theory of action. But my reply to that would be that if my conception of language is correct, a theory of language is part of a theory of action, simply because speaking is a rule-governed form of behavior. Now, being rule-governed, it has formal features which admit of independent study. But a study purely of those formal features, without a study of their role in speech acts, would be like a formal study of the currency and credit systems of economies without a study of the role of currency and credit in economic transactions (Searle, 1969, p. 17).

To summarise this point, then, Searle has taken pains to stress that (his own version of) the theory of speech acts is at odds with the grammarian's or, for that matter, the modern linguist's, approach to language in at least one crucial respect.

On the other hand, Searle has also been equally anxious — again right from the very beginning of his career — to impress upon the academic community that his approach to communication and that of the traditional grammarians (or, more contemporaneously, the linguists, especially, of a Chomskyan or 'generative' persuasion) "construed not as theories but as approaches to investigation, are complementary and not competing" (Searle, 1969, pp. 18–19). Or, as he puts it elsewhere,

I don't think that [the Chomskyan view of language, according to which the task of linguistics is to specify the set of rules that relate sounds and meanings] is false, so much as it is extremely misleading and misleading in ways which have had unfortunate consequences for research. A more accurate picture seems to me this. The purpose of language is communication. The unit of human communication in language is the speech act, of the type called illocutionary act. The problem (at least one important problem) of the theory of language is to describe how we get from the sounds to the illocutionary acts (Searle, 1979b, p. 178).

Nevertheless, on other occasions, Searle adopts a tactic that is sharply critical of Chomsky, especially in what he sees as the latter's obdurate refusal to see the 'perfect fit' between their respective approaches, or rather a smooth passage from the

one to the other. Thus Searle accuses Chomsky of “the failure to see the essential connection between language and communication, between meaning and speech acts” and of engaging in “a rearguard action” against the study of speech acts (Searle, 1974, p. 30).

Now, it so happens, Love reminds us, that Chomsky’s approach to language is not in the least concerned about how humans actually conduct the business of communication. Chomsky and his followers are interested in delving into the workings of human linguistic competence or, simply, grammar. They do so in the hope of ultimately being able to come to grips with the mysteries of the human mind. As Chomsky put it himself on one occasion: “[...] language is a derivative and perhaps not a very interesting concept” (Chomsky, 1980, p. 90). Or, as Neil Smith, a staunch Chomskyan by self-confession, declares; “Linguistics is not about language, or languages, at least that is not its main focus; it is about *grammars*” (Smith, 1983, p. 4, quoted in Widdowson, 1989, p. 129). More recently, Chomsky has resorted to the use of the technical term ‘I-language’ but his fundamental position with regard to the object of linguistics remains unaltered. In his recent book on Chomsky, Smith (1999, p. 138) says:

At the heart of Chomsky’s linguistics is the notion of I-language, a term which replaces one of the uses of the term ‘grammar’ in his early work. ‘Grammar’ was used ambiguously to designate both what we have in our heads, and the linguist’s theory of what we have in our ‘mind-brain’. In Chomsky’s current usage ‘grammar’ still refers to the linguist’s theory, but the object of that theory is now referred to as ‘I-language’, where ‘I’ is a mnemonic for Internal, Individual, and Intensional.

This is a study of highly abstract principles that govern the human faculty of language and, in this enterprise, those factors that have to do with communication are a nuisance rather than an aid. As a matter of fact, the Chomskyan approach requires that the researcher first filter out such factors in order that she may concentrate on what is potentially possible rather than what is effectively achieved in real situations of verbal interaction between persons. Any attempt to bring the issue of communication to centre stage in our attempt to understand language is tantamount to putting the cart before the horse. Chomsky is categorical when he says:

There is no reason to believe [...] that language ‘essentially’ serves instrumental ends, or that the ‘essential purpose’ of language is ‘communication,’ as is often said, at least if we mean by ‘communication’ something like transmitting information or inducing belief (Chomsky, 1977, p. 87).

And, answering Searle’s charges, he argues that it is not at all necessary that some communicative intention or another be present every time someone uses language.

I can be using language in the strictest sense with no intention of communicating. Though my utterances have a definite meaning, their normal meaning,

nevertheless my intentions with regard to an audience may shed no light on this meaning (Chomsky, 1975, p. 62).

So Love's critique of the Searlean enterprise has to do with what seems to him to be nothing short of a violent and precipitate welding together of two traditions that are really irreconcilable. In fact so diametrically opposed are the two traditions that Strawson (1971b) once described the relentless tug-of-war between the two as a veritable 'Homeric struggle'. In Strawson's own words,

A struggle on what seems to be such a central issue in philosophy should have something of a Homeric quality; and a Homeric struggle calls for gods and heroes. I can at least, though tentatively, name some living captains and benevolent shades: on the one side, say, Grice, Austin, and the later Wittgenstein; on the other, Chomsky, Frege, and the earlier Wittgenstein (Strawson, 1971b, p. 172).

The tension that Love detects in Searle's attempt to elaborate a theory of speech acts and portray it as "complementary rather than competing" in relation to the Chomskyan paradigm has thus its roots in a fundamental incompatibility widely perceived to exist between the two contending traditions whose advocates were referred to by Strawson as "the theorists of communication-intention" and "the theorists of formal semantics" respectively. Here is how Love spells out his thesis:

Searle's marriage of an early-Chomskyan linguistics to his own version of an Austinian philosophy of language causes problems and mystifications, of which the most fundamental is how a philosophy designed to analyse 'the performance of illocutionary acts of human communication' can be based on a linguistics whose 'goal [...] is not now and never has been to explain communication' (Borsley and Newmeyer, 1997, p. 47), whose subject-matter is not second-order cultural products called 'languages', which draws or, at the relevant time, drew an explicit distinction between linguistic 'performance' and an abstract linguistic 'competence' in order to concentrate exclusively on the latter (Love, 1999, p. 16).

The problem identified by Love is indeed a serious one and has important consequences, as the remaining part of his paper goes on to discuss.

## **2. Objectives**

In this paper, I would like to take up the discussion from where Love leaves off. The question that I want to ask and attempt an answer to is: Granted that there is indeed this contradiction identified by Love in Searle's theoretical enterprise, why is it that such a major inconsistency has by and large remained unnoticed or been passed over in silence by the academic community? Alternatively, how is it that John

Searle has succeeded in staking out a solid reputation as the sole intellectual legatee of and authorised spokesman for J.L. Austin and, at the same time, interpreting the late Oxford philosopher's thoughts in a way that they are made to look perfectly reconcilable with a tradition of thinking about language to which Austin's ideas have been claimed to be diametrically opposed?<sup>1</sup>

By way of anticipating myself, I shall contend that, in order to arrive at a satisfactory answer to the question posed above, one needs to look at the history of the Speech Act Theory, i.e. of how it evolved out of Austin's original reflections on the subject<sup>2</sup> and were subsequently taken up by Searle who went on to build up his reputation and world-wide recognition as its leading exponent. Such an investigative tack will necessarily have to consider the social and political aspects of the way knowledge is produced and disseminated in academia and will thus be part of an exercise in what is referred to as the 'sociology of knowledge' rather than the familiar philosophy of science (cf. Bloor, 1976; Latour, 1987, Woolgar, 1988). Occasionally, I shall also make some remarks on the rhetorical strategies used by Searle in order to promote his own position as Austin's intellectual successor — which will bring my work closer to so-called 'rhetoric of science' (Fuller, 1993). Incidentally, to the extent my analysis is right, it will lend some additional credibility to a fundamental tenet of integrationism, as succinctly captured by Wolf (1999, p.1) in the following words (I must hasten to add that my primary objective in writing this paper is not to vindicate the claims made by the exponents of this movement, notwithstanding the fact that I am, by and large, sympathetic to them):

[Integrationism] may be initially characterized by the view that sign-makers create signs, for the purpose of integrating various activities, in the communicational contexts in which they find themselves: as such they are 'real people doing real things in real time' . . .

Or, as Harris put it some two decades ago in a book that may be regarded as the manifesto of that movement,

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<sup>1</sup> A number of the close associates of Austin have registered that his temperament was that of a radical reformer (cf. Hampshire, 1967; Warnock, 1969, p. 21). In the words of Lakoff (1987, p. 21), "Like Wittgenstein, Austin was dedicated to showing the inadequacies of traditional philosophical views about language and mind that are still widely held".

<sup>2</sup> It has been argued by a number of scholars that Austin may not be all that original as he has been portrayed to be and that some of the basic insights of what is today known as the speech act theory may date back to as early as Socrates (Urmson, 1969, p. 23). Smith (1990) traces the origins of the speech act theory to Thomas Reid and Adolf Reinach, among others. Other candidates for the role of the precursor to Austin include David Hume (Flew, 1971, p. 482), Wittgenstein, (Silverman and Torode, 1980, p. 211), G.E. Moore (Furberg, 1963, p. 8; Hampshire, 1969, p. 33; Lacey, 1982, p. 403), Cook, Wilson and Price (Brown, 1962, p. 341), Berkeley and Peirce (Tsui, 1987, p. 95), Frege (Finlay, 1988) and even such 'illustrious unknowns' as Koschmieder (Kech and Stubbs, 1984). But in this paper, I am not interested in the precise genealogy of the theory — which, by the way, is bound to be just as fictional as every other myth of origin. What interests me is what happened to the theory in its passage from Austin to Searle.

[...] what is important from an integrational perspective is not so much the fund of past linguistic experience as the individual's adaptive use of it to meet the communicational requirement of the present. That use is — and can only be — manifest in the communication situation itself. No new technology is required to study it. The evidence is available *in praesentia*. All that is lacking is the readiness to accept it (Harris, 1981, p. 187).

Drawing on this precious insight, I shall conclude my paper by suggesting that the theory of speech acts is itself an elaborate speech act — or, for that matter, a sign — and therefore subject to not only all the conditions of felicity that attend on these linguistic acts, but also, insofar as it is a sign, something that carries the indelible imprint of the sign-maker(s) who created it in the first place. The communication situation I shall look at is the historical context in which Searle developed Austin's insights into a full-blown theory.

### 3. Some preliminary considerations

Before we proceed any further, it is important to draw the readers' attention to a key phrase in the passage cited above from Love's paper. Love makes a point of saying that what he is looking at is Searle's "own version of an Austinian philosophy of language". This is not the only place in the paper where Love invokes the name of Austin while referring to Searle's views. Thus he says elsewhere: "In Searle's view, as in Austin's, the core of any speech act is the illocutionary act". (Love, 1999, p. 12). On yet another page, we come across the following remark: "Searle confines his examples to the rules of games [...] most strikingly, ceremonies of the kind whose verbal aspects provided some of Austin's original examples of 'performatives' [...]" (Love, 1999, p. 18). Nor is Love alone in so constantly remembering Austin's name in connection with that of Searle. In his editorial introduction to the same issue of *Language & Communication* in which Love's paper appears, Wolf observes that "Nigel Love examines a weakness in the Austinian tradition (as represented by Searle)" (Wolf, 1999, p. 2) and goes on to remark a little later that "[the pervasiveness and centrality of the theme of language] lives in Austin's and Searle's attempts to demarcate the domain of the speech act" (Wolf, 1999, p. 4).

An important question that we must ask at this stage is: just what is the nature of the link between the mentor and the disciple? What makes it so strikingly different from other famous cases of master–disciple relationship of which Western philosophy has many well-known examples? Thus, although we know that Plato's work, at least in its initial stages, was heavily influenced by Socrates, we do talk about Plato's philosophy without mentioning in the same breath the name of his teacher. Likewise, we do not go about recalling Plato's name every time we refer to the work of his equally illustrious disciple, Aristotle. What is it, then, that binds together the names of Austin and Searle as if they were a pair of philosophical Siamese twins?

Now, there is indeed a broad consensus amongst scholars that Austin was Searle's primary source of inspiration — Caton (1971, p. 4, fn. d) refers to Austin as the

‘prime-mover’ — and that Austin’s early thoughts on the subject constitute the life-blood of what was later developed by Searle as a full-fledged theory of speech acts. It is as if Searle took to fruition what Austin was unfortunately prevented from doing because of his sudden and untimely death. But surely Searle’s reputation is also more than that of a disciple who tidied up his teacher’s haphazard and unfinished work. Most scholars also believe that Searle did develop Austin’s thoughts in ways his mentor would most probably not have even imagined. In other words, there can be no doubt that Searle’s contribution to the theory he inherited is very remarkable and original. What is seldom noticed by scholars who in varying degrees subscribe to both these views is that the two views are at loggerheads with each other. That is to say, only one of them can be entirely correct. Since so much of our appreciation of Searle’s role in the development of the speech act theory hinges on this crucial point, I shall below distinguish between the two views, spelling them out as Thesis 1 and Thesis 2, respectively.

#### **4. The two theses**

Thesis 1 states simply that Searle found all the ingredients of the theory which was to win him world-wide acclaim in the work of his teacher Austin who, as we know, published very little in his life time, and who elaborated most of his ideas through lectures and seminars at Oxford, mainly in the 1940s and the early 1950s and, between 1955 and 1958, exposed them to a wider public in the United States. This view is frequently expressed by the authors of introductory text-books as they present the theory of speech acts and the circumstances of its early development. Thus witness what Lyons has to say:

Austin’s theory of speech-acts was developed over a number of years; and in its final version (in so far as Austin himself succeeded in producing a final, or definitive, version before his death) it is deliberately modified and extended in the course of its presentation (Austin, 1962). The term ‘speech-act’ is rarely used by Austin; and, when he does use it, it is not entirely clear how much of what is done, or performed, in the production of the utterance he intends it to cover. [...] Since the term ‘speech act’ is now widely employed in work which derives from Austin, and notably in the title of an influential book by Searle (1969), we will use it in the present discussion (Lyons, 1977, pp. 725–726).

In other words, Austin came nowhere near to presenting a fully worked out version of a theory of speech acts; instead what we find in his writings is at best a theory, as it were, ‘in the offing’. Meggle (1985, p. 209) contrasts Austin’s “limited approach” with Searle’s which he describes as “more promising” but is otherwise happy to treat the two as representing a single, unbroken tradition. The sub-text that emerges is that what Austin left for posterity was a philosophical torso; the task of ‘completing’ the work and giving it the finishing touches fell into the hands of his

chosen disciple (whether a torso is necessarily incomplete and in need of completion at the hands of another sculptor is a moot point).

Other writers have followed suit, opting to present Searle's work as basically Austin's, only more streamlined, more methodical. Thus Levinson (1982, pp. 237–238) refers to “the very influential systematisation of Austin's work by Searle, through whose writings speech act theory has perhaps had most of its impact on linguistics” Fraser (1974, p. 433) hails Searle's *Speech Acts* as “the only serious theoretical work in the area” and declares that Searle “follow[s] Austin in spirit though not always in detail” (p. 434). Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, p. 19) reinforce the thesis of a smooth transition from the English philosopher to his North-American exegete and speak of the “standard version” of the speech act theory “whose foundations Austin laid and which was elaborated further by Searle on the basis of his own intuitions” (the qualifier ‘on the basis of his own intuitions’ does attribute some originality to Searle's extension of the theory). A more recent introductory textbook has the following to say apropos of the speech act theory: “Its main developers were the British philosopher John L. Austin (whose posthumous *How to do Things with Words* [...] ) had an enormous impact on linguistic philosophy, and thereby on linguistics, especially in its pragmatic variant), and the American John R. Searle, who had studied under Austin at Oxford in the fifties, and who became the main proponent and defender of the former's ideas in the United States, and subsequently world-wide” (Mey, 1993, pp. 109–110). Burkhardt (1990, p. 1) presents the theory of speech acts as “founded by Austin and continued by his disciple Searle and others” and Thomas (1995), after referring to Austin as “the father of pragmatics” (1995, p. 44), goes on to register that “Grice put forward a series of maxims (informal generalizations) to explain how a speech act ‘works’, Searle tried to establish a set of rules” (Thomas, 1995, p. 94). Blackburn (1994, p. 30) affirms that Austin's thoughts “pioneered the theory of speech acts, as well as introducing many of the terms such as locutionary act and illocutionary act”. In a recent encyclopaedia entry called ‘Speech act theory — an overview,’ we come across the following remark: “Austin cleared the ground and laid the foundations for speech act theory, and to him goes the credit for distinguishing locution, illocution, and perlocution. But it was Searle [...] who first established criteria for the definitions of illocutions, using promising as an example [...]” (Allan, 1998, p. 931). Luján Martínez (1997, p. 192) refers to “a philosophical tradition in which we find names such as Austin or [sic] Searle’, giving the reader the impression that the difference between the two is negligible. Finally, Searle has himself underscored the influence of Austin's ideas on his philosophical thought, referring to the Oxford philosopher as the ‘founder’ of the speech act theory (Searle, 1991, p. 81) . Elsewhere, reminiscing about his own philosophical youth, Searle has written as follows: “My earliest work was in the philosophy of language, and a good deal of it was an attempt to develop a general theory of speech acts. I made extensive use of insights already developed by other Oxford philosophers, especially Austin” (Searle, 1997, p. 512).

Thesis 2 claims that Searle is an original philosopher who not only forged a theory out of the scattered and half-baked thoughts he found in his Oxford teachers but

contributed to it significantly, extending it in ways (for all we know) not imagined by them. Thus Alston (1991, p. 57) refers to John Searle as “foremost among those who have taken the torch from J.L. Austin and developed a theory of illocutionary acts that occupies a prominent position in the philosophy of language”. Witness also the following observation by Lamarque (1998, p. 1051): “Unfortunately, Austin left his theory largely unrefined, due to his early death, though he did attempt a rudimentary taxonomy for illocutionary acts. J. R. Searle, who had studied under Austin, developed the theory in his influential *Speech Acts* (1969), though he was critical of several aspects of Austin’s pioneering work [...]”. Van Rees (1992, p. 33) speaks of “Searle’s adaptation of Austin’s ideas”.

Thesis 2 is typically presented in the form of a claim to the effect that Austin by no means came anywhere near proposing a fully worked-out theory or was, for that matter, not even interested in proposing one, or that, given his scepticism, he could possibly never have developed a theory all by himself, or, what comes to the same thing, his philosophical thoughts had a fundamentally negative thrust that could not have led to the development of a positive theory. Here is how one (otherwise admiring) commentator evaluates Austin’s contribution: “It is impossible to give a systematic account of Austin’s philosophy, for he had none” (Urmson, 1969, p. 26). Others have stressed what they interpret as a complete lack of interest on the part of the Oxford philosopher when it comes to proposing a *positive* theory. Thus Warnock (1988, p. 11) refers to the “almost throughout undeviatingly negative [and] critical, even polemically critical” tone of Austin’s lesser known work *Sense and Sensibilia* (Austin, 1962b) — whose very last phrase “dismantling the whole doctrine before it gets off the ground” would alone seem to suffice to justify Warnock’s remark. In Warnock’s view, then, Austin “in fact held no [...] general theory of philosophy at all — unless a certain purely negative view could be accounted a theory” (Warnock, 1988, p. 8).

Now, Thesis 2 has also been defended occasionally (though very rarely indeed) by claiming that the affinity between Austin and Searle is more apparent than real. A case in point is Cavell (1995, p. 44) who guardedly describes Searle as “*a philosopher trained at Oxford while Austin was still alive* and whose book on the theory of speech acts has been and continues to be far more influential — in both literary studies and in philosophy — than Austin’s original work that invented the subject” (emphasis added). Thus, in one swift stroke, Cavell dismisses the received opinion concerning the smooth continuity between the teacher and the disciple and also hints at how the latter’s enormous prestige was primarily responsible for eclipsing the former’s.

## 5. The importance of keeping the two theses distinct

As already pointed out in Section 3, the two theses are clearly distinct and must be distinguished from each other. According to Thesis 1, all that Searle did in order to achieve his niche in the history of speech act theory was to play second fiddle to his illustrious mentor and undertake some tidying up operation over the work the latter left unfinished at his death. Or, if you like, he just happened to be at the right place

at the right time. An appropriate name for Thesis 1 may thus be ‘The mantle of Elijah’.

By contrast, Thesis 2 projects an image of Searle as an innovator, an original philosopher, comparable to the figure of Plato in relation to that of Socrates. After an initial phase which the historians of philosophy refer to as the ‘early Socratic period’, Plato did emerge as a philosopher in his own right. Thus, those who advocate Thesis 2 will pay more attention to those aspects of Searle’s philosophy where he clearly departs from Austin’s views in directions his mentor might, in all likelihood, not have approved of. In other words, the Searle that emerges from Thesis 2 is a philosopher who, as he resolved to venture out on his own, found it expedient to, as it were, free himself from the shadow of his mentor by asserting his intellectual independence. A somewhat more picturesque name for Thesis 2 would therefore be ‘Usurpation of the Throne’ — or, to stick to the Biblical idiom, ‘The harp of David’.

It so happens, however, that in actual practice, historians as well as ordinary researchers working in such areas as the philosophy of language, linguistic pragmatics etc. where the speech act theory is extensively discussed and used as a basic framework for other investigations, do not always find it easy to distinguish between the two theses, and instead often conflate them. Thus one frequently comes across graduate students (as well as authors of introductory text books and research papers in respected journals, though less frequently) who invoke the authority of Austin, not realising that they are in fact citing the views of Searle — invoking an Austin, that is, *recreated* by Searle. Alternatively, there are those who simply do not bother about reading Austin and finding out what the Oxford don had to say, because they think that Austin’s original ideas about such matters are at best of historical interest, prompting some more discerning scholars such as Marina Sbisa (1984, p. 93) to lament that “direct reference to John L. Austin has become rather unusual in speech act theory”. Those who systematically bypass Austin thus are most probably reasoning along the following lines. If it is indeed the case that what Austin did was prepare the way for his illustrious disciple, why bother about what the Oxford philosopher might have had to say about the topic of speech acts and related matters, since one is certain to come across the same issues discussed in a far more lucid and systematic way in the writings of his Berkeley follower? Why bother, in other words, if the mantle was received as a gift or legacy or wrenched from its rightful owner? Richards (1971, p. 519) expresses this idea in the following words: “Since Searle basically attempts to extend and weld Austin’s views into some kind of a general theory, we shall [...] confine our discussion to the details of the thesis that Searle himself puts forward.”

Perhaps nowhere else is this practice of rolling Austin and Searle into one — of freely and indiscriminately mixing ideas that were developed by the one but not the other — more evident than in a recent introductory text book on pragmatics. In a chapter devoted to the speech acts, the author, Yule (1996), moves from a discussion of Austin’s tri-partite distinction of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts [explicitly rejected by Searle (1973)], to a discussion of the so-called IFIDs [or ‘Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices’, introduced by Searle (1969) but nowhere to be come across in Austin’s writings], felicity conditions, Ross’s (1970) performative

hypothesis (cf. Section 8 and 9), and finally to a discussion of Austin's original and highly tentative five-way speech act classification [dismissed by Searle, who in fact offers an alternative taxonomy (Searle, 1979b)]. Although the author of an introductory course-book ought not to be taken to task for not going into all the details, the fact remains that the underlying premise seems to be that it hardly matters who contributed what to the overall theory or that there is a smooth continuity from Austin to Searle.

## 6. Three strategies of containment

In this section of the paper and the next, I want to look into some of the specific aspects of the intellectual climate that favoured Searle's appropriation of Austin's ideas. It is my contention that Austin's original thoughts on the topic of speech acts and related issues were somewhat 'unwieldy' from the point of view of the Philosophical Establishment of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Searle's attempt to 'streamline' those thoughts and put them back on to the beaten track of analytic philosophy was more than welcome, it was a heavensent intervention that saved the philosophical community from having to put up with an illustrious member who was threatening to become something of an embarrassment. Clearly, this is a bold claim and must be buttressed by convincing supporting arguments. This is what I shall attempt to do in the next few pages.

But first it is important to look into the ways and means by which the philosophical community has confronted potential threats to its integrity coming from its own ranks. Among recent cases that immediately spring to mind is that of Nietzsche. With his resoundingly devastating critique of Socratic rationalism and hence the very basis upon which he believed the edifice of Western Philosophy had been erected, Nietzsche was soon rightly perceived to be an iconoclast and a looming threat to the integrity of the discipline.<sup>3</sup> The reaction from a number of his

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<sup>3</sup> There are some affinities between Austin and Nietzsche that are striking. Towards the end of his *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962a, p. 151) remarks with a certain impish satisfaction so typical of Nietzsche that he had all along been primarily interested in 'playing Old Harry with' two 'fetishes' that are nothing but two of the most important dichotomous distinctions on which the entire superstructure of Western philosophy is erected: 'fact vs. value' and 'truth vs. falsehood'. About the latter opposition, Derrida (1982, p. 322) remarks: 'Austin had to free the analysis of the performative from the authority of the *value of truth*, from the opposition true/false, at least in its classical form, occasionally substituting it for the value of force, of difference of force (*illocutionary or perlocutionary force*). It is this, in a thought which is nothing less than Nietzschean, which seems to me to beckon toward Nietzsche; who often recognized in himself a certain affinity with a vein of English thought'. Felman (1980) is another writer who recognises a certain Nietzschean strain in Austin's philosophy. Austin's fierce opposition to such immaterial entities as concepts, propositions and universals is also reminiscent of Nietzsche who was described by Arthur Danto (1965, p. 12) as 'a critic of concept and a word tormenting anarchist'. As a matter of fact, Danto has also pointed to Nietzsche's proximity to analytic philosophy: 'Nietzsche's affinities to analytical philosophy [...] are nowhere more evident than in his preoccupations with language. Common sense is after all expressed in ordinary language; in speaking the language we have learnt from infancy, we are prescribing how the world is believed and comprehended' (Danto, 1965, p. 83).

contemporaries was to dismiss him as an ‘outsider’ to philosophy. This was often done by paying him a left-handed compliment: praising his flair for writing and his literary talents (which, given the notorious stand-off between philosophy and literature, meant nothing short of a summary condemnation of Nietzsche as a *philosopher*: the left-handed compliment is meant to be a sore reminder that he pandered to base passions, desires, emotions, sentiments and what have you — all in the true tradition of poets and others literarily inclined). Nietzsche, in other words, was demonised. (One can always give a dog a bad name and hang it!)

If Nietzsche was demonised, the tactic used against Wittgenstein, as he too was perceived in his later years as a maverick of sorts and became a source of embarrassment to the philosophical establishment, was to insist that there are really two Wittgensteins — the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* and the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Though scholars do remain divided about just how the two are or are not related to each other, the underlying assumption that a line can somehow be drawn so as to distinguish an earlier from a later phase has survived all critical scrutiny. Thus, Bertrand Russell, under whose supervision and blessing Wittgenstein had completed his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, 1961), could admit to being at a loss in coming to terms with the sort of reflection his once-favourite pupil was to undertake in his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 1968). The same Lord Russell, who had enthusiastically welcomed the publication of the *Tractatus*, describing it as a book “which no serious philosopher can afford to neglect” (Russell, 1961, p. xxii) was to write the following in his enthusiastic foreword to a somewhat scurrilous condemnation of the whole enterprise of linguistic philosophy by Gellner (1959):

When I was a boy, I had a clock with a pendulum which could be lifted off. I found that the clock went very much faster without the pendulum. If the main purpose of a clock is to go, the clock was the better for losing its pendulum. True, it could no longer tell the time, but that did not matter if one could teach oneself to be indifferent to time. The linguistic philosophy, which cares only about language, and not about the world, is like the boy who preferred the clock without the pendulum because, although it no longer told the time, it went more easily than before and at a more exhilarating pace (Russell, 1959, p. xv).

Nietzsche was unceremoniously ostracised. In Wittgenstein’s case, the philosophical community found an ingenious alternative. They invented not one, but two Wittgensteins. Once this was done, anyone who wished to do so could still swear by Wittgenstein 1 and, without entering into a contradiction or feeling any sort of embarrassment, reject Wittgenstein 2 as a once-serious philosopher, now gone eccentric.

With Austin, the tactic that was used was altogether different. They (i.e. the powers that be) re-interpreted the Oxford philosopher so that he could be welcomed back to the fold which he was threatening, if not to quit, at the very least to ruffle up. The extraordinary success of this strategy may in part explain the following rather curious fact noticed by Taylor (1981, p. 263) against the backdrop of his general puzzlement as to why there has so far been very little impact of Wittgenstein’s

later philosophy on linguistics: “Indeed, even J. L. Austin — often grouped with Wittgenstein as a founder of the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy — has acquired a steadily increasing presence in linguistics”.<sup>4</sup> It is as part of the careful execution of this strategy that, as I shall argue below, Searle’s critical intervention turned out to be providential. Not only was the time ripe for such an intervention, Searle himself realised the opportunity that lay ahead and was quick to cash in on it.

## 7. The king is dead; long live the king

At the time of Austin’s untimely death in 1960, the Oxford philosopher was one of the most-talked-about figures in Austro-Anglo-American philosophy. His William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955 had already made him a celebrity in the USA. Shortly before his death in 1960, rumour had it that he had accepted to take on a teaching position at the University of California. Although the veracity of this rumour has been questioned, few Austin biographers have denied that expectations were running high of his continued presence in the US or at least more frequent trips to and fro. In a biographical sketch written shortly after Austin’s death, Warnock reminisces as follows:

Austin visited Harvard as William James Lecturer in the spring term of 1955, and the University of California in the autumn of 1958. In both cases, he made a powerful impact on those who heard him; and in Berkeley, even before the semester he spent there, he was strongly solicited to take a permanent appointment. By this invitation he was greatly tempted (though it is not true, as has been stated, that he had finally resolved to accept it). He was fascinated, I believe, by the whole phenomenon of America — by its size, by its populousness and resources, by the sense there of endless possibilities and a wide-open future (Warnock, 1969, p. 21).

Looking at the development of the speech act theory from a historical perspective, what interests us is that Austin’s untimely death must have come as a sudden blow

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<sup>4</sup> But, apart from this, Taylor is absolutely right in regard to the underlying premise that Austin and Wittgenstein have a lot more in common than many scholars are willing to concede — important exceptions being Lakoff (1987) (see ft. 1 above). It is important to point out here that, despite all the significant points of similarity between Wittgenstein and Austin, Searle has been keen on driving a wedge between the two. Even as he is anxious to claim a direct line of intellectual descent from Austin, Searle has made a point of distancing himself from Wittgensteinian ideas of family resemblance and language games, especially as these appear to threaten his own project of positing ideal speech acts and their universally valid types. Thus in *Speech Acts*, he speaks of “institutional theories of communication, like Austin’s, mine, and I think Wittgenstein’s’ as opposed to ‘naturalistic theories of meaning’ ” (Searle, 1969, p. 71). But elsewhere he writes: “There are not, as Wittgenstein (on one possible interpretation) and many others have claimed, an infinite number of language games or uses of language. Rather, the illusion of limitless uses of language is engendered by an enormous unclarity about what constitutes the criteria for delimiting one language or use of language from another” (1979b, p. 29).

to the philosophical establishment in the US which was forced to undertake urgent steps to fill in the enormous vacuum the episode had left behind.

### 7.1. *The election of Searle as the heir apparent*

Searle's appointment to the post originally meant for the English philosopher was no doubt what the university could have best done under the circumstances. Searle had already built up a considerable reputation as an up-and-coming philosopher and had the additional merit of having pursued his studies at Oxford which in a sense entitled him to take on the (at that time) none-too-comfortable role as Austin's intellectual successor and legatee.

But there was a major hurdle to be overcome. Austin's reputation was that of a contentious figure, a philosophical fly in the ointment. Most of those who knew him at Oxford have registered the fact Austin was a thoroughly unconventional philosopher. As was pointed out in Section 2, many of those who knew him personally even doubted if Austin ever came anywhere near propounding a unified theory or for that matter was even interested in doing it. According to Furberg (1963, p. viii), "Austin's intellect was mainly critical and negative" and "His positive suggestions are mostly concerned with moral philosophy". Berlin (1973, p. 13) writes:

Austin looked at whatever was placed before him, and was ready to follow the argument wherever it led. It was later maintained by some of his critics (at least in conversation) that this philosophical spontaneity and apparent freedom from preconceived doctrine were not altogether genuine: that in fact they were elaborate Socratic devices which concealed a fully worked-out positive doctrine which he was not yet ready to reveal. I believe this to be false.

"Indeed," Berlin goes on to observe, "I cannot recall anything I ever heard, or read, of Austin's that contained a straightforward, old-fashioned philosophical *argument*" (his italics) (Berlin, 1973, p. 20). In the words of Passmore (1957, p. 450): "Even amongst his closest associates [...] there is more than a little controversy about what Austin was trying to do and his relevance to the traditional pursuits of philosophy". Katz refers to the whole orientation of ordinary language philosophy as "anti-theoretical" (Katz, 1966, p. 88) and says the theory of speech acts is "no theory at all, but merely a loose assortment of observations about various aspects of language" (Katz, 1977, 1980, p. 230). Katz is in fact so impressed by what he diagnoses as a certain self-destructive instinct in Austin that an entire chapter of his 1977 book is devoted to the theme of 'How to save Austin from Austin'. Incidentally, Katz's charges are levelled at not only Austin, but at Searle as well.

Warnock has the following to say with respect to the thoroughly informal nature of the famous Saturday morning sessions at Oxford where Austin discussed his favourite themes with a handful of fellow philosophers:

It was not that the proceedings were formally disciplined; on the contrary, they were exceptionally fluid and free; with no formal order at all. Nor were they

solemn; on the contrary, they were continuously enjoyable and amusing — *funny*, in fact (Warnock, 1973, p. 32).

Moravcsik (1967) draws our attention to Austin's persistently nonchalant approach to philosophy and his refusal to theorise precipitately. In his own words,

The Socratic kind of self-questioning whether practiced by Socrates or — in our own times — by Austin, has no theoretic aim and leads to a badly needed sharpening of our linguistic intuitions (Moravcsik, 1967, p. 233).

In much the same vein, Urmson recalls Austin's constant plea against hasty theorising on the grounds that “premature theorizers bend their idiom to suit the theory” (Urmson, 1967, p. 234) and Hampshire (1967, p. 243) assures us that Austin was highly critical of “premature system-building” on the part of professional philosophers. Forrester (1990) argues that Austin's work is before anything else a thorough criticism of the tendency to reify so typical of theories of language informed by logical positivism and the earlier Wittgenstein. Silverman and Torode (1980, p. 207) have noted that “Austin may be treated as engaging in a thoroughly worthwhile critique of system-building”, and further that, “[i]n its place, he offers a confrontation with the concrete world, expressed in a wonder at the subtleties of ordinary usage and its relation to the ‘practical matters’ that have arisen in the lifetimes of many generations”. Writing specifically about the form of reasoning developed by Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*, Max Black notes that the impression one is left with at the end of the book is that of a long and tiresome hunting expedition with precious little to celebrate in the end and, what is worse, the nagging suspicion that that was exactly how it was all planned to be. In his own words,

The late John Austin's William James Lectures might well have borne the subtitle ‘In Pursuit of a Vanishing Distinction’. Although the chase is remorseless, glimpses of the quarry become increasingly equivocal and the hunter is left empty-handed at last. It is hard to know what has gone awry. Has the wrong game been pursued-and in the wrong direction? (Black, 1969, p. 401).

Forguson comes very near to portraying Austin as some sort of a latter-day philosophical Sisyphus when he writes:

It sometimes happens that a philosopher will develop a view on some topic and then come to reject it. J.L. Austin was perhaps unique in that he not only rejected a philosophical view of which he was the author, he patiently developed the view and then showed it to be ultimately unsatisfactory within the compass of the same work. And he did this not once but three times, in material intended for publication (Forguson, 1969b, p. 412).

In other words, Austin had no doubt established a reputation for himself that was solid and unquestionable; but he was also widely perceived to be an inveterate

debunker of received wisdom who revelled in philosophical debauchery to the detriment of system-building. To quote Shaw (1990, p. 76), “There has been much loose talk of Austin’s continually contradicting himself as he goes along, taking up and then discarding positions with Dionysian abandon”.

However, what the Philosophical Establishment in the US needed was a system-builder — indeed, one might begin to wonder, what else is mainstream philosophy anywhere in the world all about if not system-building!! — who could inaugurate a new paradigm. And Searle offered himself as the man cut out for the job. The novelty that he introduced into the Austinian framework was the promise of organising the random thoughts of his teacher into a coherent and well-articulated theory. In Shaw’s words, “For Searle, Austin’s own work, pioneering in more ways than one, can also be codified, and it ought to be” (Shaw, 1990, p. 91). Searle’s appearance on the scene was not just opportune, it was almost providential. With his freshly submitted D.Phil thesis on sense and reference [finished in 1959 and subsequently developed into his *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Searle, 1969)], Searle had just returned from Oxford and was the right candidate to fill in the vacuum left behind by Austin’s untimely death.

But the very sub-title of Searle’s book also announced in unequivocal terms a major difference between the Oxford don and his North American legatee. Searle made it very clear right from the very beginning that he had little sympathy for the so-called ‘linguistic philosophy’ and insisted that his own work be seen as part of the more august tradition of ‘philosophy of language’. In fact, it is precisely this tradition that Searle invokes in an early paper entitled ‘Austin on locutionary and illocutionary acts’ (Searle, 1973) in which he argues that Austin’s notion of ‘locutionary act’ should be replaced by his own ‘propositional act’. After speculating that “Austin may have had in mind the distinction between the content or, as some philosophers call it, the proposition, in an illocutionary act and the force or illocutionary type of the act” (Searle, 1973, p. 155),<sup>5</sup> he goes on state:

This distinction, in various forms, is by now common in philosophy and can be found in philosophers as diverse as Frege, Hare, Lewis, and Meinong (Searle, 1973, p. 155).

In other words, Searle made it clear right from the very beginning of his spectacular career and rise to academic stardom that his mission was to put the philosophical insights into the phenomenon of speech acts that he had picked up at Oxford back on the tracks. If Austin had caused some alarm by appearing to want to

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<sup>5</sup> In a calculated rhetorical ploy, Searle invokes at this point the authority he has conferred upon himself as someone who *personally* knew Austin. Thus he says in a footnote: “Austin once told me he thought a distinction could be made along these lines — but it is not clear that he intended the locutionary-illocutionary distinction to capture it”. Despite the rhetorical merits of this tactic, I believe that Searle is completely mistaken about his implicit claim that Austin himself would have come to a similar conclusion. The strongest evidence against Searle’s claim here is Austin’s clear dismissal of concepts, propositions, and universals (cf. Section 10).

straggle away from the herd, Searle was determined to stay within the fold and remain faithful to its traditions. It hardly mattered to him that this involved sacrificing what was most characteristic of Austin's philosophical technique — sticking to the ordinary use of words in their ordinary contexts. As Harris (1996, p. 49) has remarked, the introduction of the metalinguistic unit called 'proposition' in Western philosophy helped "bypass the problems encountered if the actual words uttered are treated as the basis of logic".

### 7.2. *The coronation and consolidation of power*

By 1979, Searle could proudly announce that he had been successfully facing "the challenge of trying to provide an adequate formalization of the theory [of speech acts] using the resources of modern logic, particularly set theory" (Searle, 1979 a, p. xii), adding that the first concrete result of that line of inquiry was already under way in the form of a book in collaboration with Vanderveken (cf. Searle and Vanderveken, 1985). Since then Searle himself seems to have had second thoughts on the viability of such a programme (i.e. to judge by his reticence and apparent lack of interest in continuing the line of enquiry), but his erstwhile collaborator Vanderveken has been persistent in his attempt at "a partial unification of speech act theory and of classical truth conditional formal semantics" (cf. Vanderveken, 1990, p. 2). Interestingly, in more recent work, Vanderveken (1994) — presumably acting on his own — has evinced the hope of arriving at a "complete formalisation" of the theory. Among others who have entertained similar ambitions is Kuroda (1986).

Price (1994) has argued that there is yet another important sense in which Searle's intervention into the Austinian tradition may be seen as a throw-back. Price identifies in what he refers to as the claim of 'non-factualism' the 'crucial insight' of the linguistic movement in philosophy of which Austin was a key figure. Non-factualism is the denial of the putative primacy of the fact-stating role of language. According to Price, non-factualism was widely accepted in the philosophical community in 1950s, as evidenced by the prestigious philosophical journals of the period. But then, with Searle, there was a complete reversal of the trend. To cite Price,

At the time [i.e. in 1950s], many of the non-factualist endeavours drew on the new terminology of speech act theory, taking their lead at least in part from J.L. Austin. It is therefore somewhat ironic that when non-factualism came to be seen as discredited, one of the works responsible was Searle's *Speech Acts*. Non-factualism was thus disowned by the movement from which, at least in part, it drew its inspiration (Price, 1994, p. 132).

But then Searle had, by now, also made it amply clear that he intended to be Austin's sole legatee and authorised spokesman. And, furthermore, there can be little doubt that, as the years since then have amply proved, Searle's interpretation of Austin's thoughts has generally been recognised as the only authorised version (indeed, as we have already seen, to the point of letting many scholars think they are working on Austin's original insights even as they are unwittingly looking at them in

the form in which they were filtered through Searle's 'exegesis'). In the words of Leonardi and Sbisà (1984, p. 1), "the fundamental assumptions of *received* speech act theory [are] mainly due to John Searle" (*italics added*). Or, as Du Bois (1993, p. 49) puts it, many of the early adherents

either left the [...] standard Searlean speech-act theory implicit in their application of it, or perfunctorily repeated those elements which they saw no reason not to endorse (quoted in Duranti, 1997, p. 227).

Now, how could Searle claim to be extending Austin's original line of thinking on the one hand and, at the same time, effectively undertake an about-turn on the other, forcing the line of thinking back to the beaten track of mainstream analytic philosophy? The answer is that he did so by persuasively claiming that, except for some differences of emphasis here and there, what he was doing was essentially interpreting the thoughts of his mentor. In this project, he was aided and abetted by the wide-spread perception that Austin had left behind him an unfinished philosophical project — a theory, if you will, in the making. We have already seen how some close associates of Austin such as Urmson and Warnock were also convinced that Austin had no interest in — or at the very least, was in no hurry to undertake — system-building.<sup>6</sup> In its most critical form, this meant that Austin changed his views so frequently that there was no prospect for the emergence of a solid, fully articulated and coherent philosophical project. Warnock recalls that "Austin himself said that the views expounded in the [William James] lectures 'were formed in 1939'" and goes on to qualify the statement with the following observation: "He must have meant, of course, 'began to be formed', since it would obviously be wrong to suppose that his thinking about these topics was completely static or unchanging over the following twenty years" (Warnock, 1988, p. 105). Searle himself has spoken of "the misleading appearance of unity of Austin's views", adding that "in fact they developed and changed a good deal over the years" (Searle, 1966, p. 389).

The whole issue is at the very heart of the famous dispute between Derrida (1977a,b) and Searle (1977) over the role of parasitism in Austin. Derrida (1977 a) argues that Austin's secret desire to capture the 'essence' of speech acts flounders concomitantly with the rather painful realisation on his part that so-called 'parasitic' discourse (literature, for instance) is just what makes serious discourse possible to begin with. Derrida's point is that Austin's true greatness lies not so much in what he eventually comes up with but in the struggle that he goes through in trying to stake out a theory and in his untiring persistence, reminiscent of, say, the Greek tragic hero. In his response to Derrida, Searle dismisses the whole idea with the complacent remark:

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<sup>6</sup> At the end of his paper 'Pretending' (Austin, 1961c, p. 271, fn.) Austin comes up with the following remark that eloquently sums up his philosophical approach: "I dreamt a line that would make a motto for a sober philosophy: *Neither a be-all nor an end-all be*".

Derrida seems to think that Austin's exclusion [of parasitic forms] is a matter of great moment, a source of deep metaphysical difficulties, and that the analysis of parasitic discourse might create some insuperable difficulties for the theory of speech acts. But the history of the subject has proved otherwise. Once one has a general theory of speech acts — a theory Austin did not live long enough to develop himself — it is one of the relatively simpler problems to analyse the status of parasitic discourse, that is, to meet the challenge contained in Derrida's question: "What is the status of this parasitism?" (Searle, 1977, p. 205).

This passage is interesting because it presents a number of the key features that have marked Searle's self-image vis-à-vis his mentor. Whereas, on the **one** hand, he takes full credit for developing the theory of speech acts, Searle is also, on the other hand, equally eager to claim a smooth continuity between Austin and himself, despite all the differences.

So the stage was set for the disciple to 'continue' the work left unfinished by the master and at the same time, armed with the authority now conferred upon him, endeavour to 'streamline' it so as to bring it in line with the great tradition, unmindful of whether or not the changes introduced would make the master squirm in his grave. It is arguably the case that what Searle effectively did was to put Austin on the Procrustean bed of conventional philosophy, reclaiming him back to the fold and at the same time ensuring his own status as the only authorised spokesman for Austin.

## 8. Bowdlerisation of Austin at Searle's hands and its timeliness

Under the pretext of 'tying up the loose ends' in Austin's theorising, Searle effectively tidied it up so as to make it more 'palatable' to the Philosophical Establishment-and, as we shall see below, more amenable to instant application, notably by linguists working in the then fashionable Transformational-Generative paradigm.<sup>7</sup> The essentially negative thrust of Austin's philosophical musings — which, as we have already seen, did not go unnoticed by many of Austin's early commentators — was conveniently pushed underneath the carpet, conferring upon what little remained the trimmings of a well-articulated and coherent theory. Austin was, in short, bowdlerised. As Falkenberg (1990, p. 130) remarks:

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<sup>7</sup> The real significance of this move can only be appreciated against the backdrop of a controversy that raged in the US between 1949 and 1967 (cf. Lyas, 1971), involving, on the one hand, those who pleaded for the empirical concerns of linguistic science [Fodor and Katz, 1971; Mates, 1971; New, 1971; Vendler, (1971)] on the other, sympathisers of linguistic philosophy who saw little hope in linguistics for philosophy (Austin, 1971; Cavell, 1971; Hare, 1971; Hensen, 1971; Ryle 1971). What the debate underscored was a stand-off between the linguists and philosophers, apparently heading for a stalemate. Searle must indeed be given the credit for defusing that state of affairs and preparing the grounds for an *entente cordiale* which did materialise in the ensuing years, thanks to his dotting overtures to the Generative Semanticists (at what price is an issue we still need to look into).

[...] Searle's book of 1969 — despite its sub-title — has to be considered a major success: it was ground-breaking for linguistics and helped to establish a new discipline: *linguistic pragmatics*. This is all the more ironic as Searle took great pains over demarcating his own concerns from those of linguistics and emphatically identified himself as a philosophical semanticist (1969, ch. 1.1.). But he soon caught the signs of the time and began taking sides in linguistics [...]

As noted by a number of commentators, one of the first casualties that the theory of speech acts suffered at the hands of Searle was the action character of speech acts. Rolf (1990, p. 147) suspects that Searle reduced speech acts to ordinary sentences and asks, "Is the term *speech act* just another word for *sentence*, or is it intended to denote a specific kind of actions, i.e., linguistic actions?" Similar objections have also been raised more recently by Bertolet (1994) and Holdcroft (1994). Following Searle's lead, however, it soon became common practice among linguists to speak of the illocutionary force of sentences (cf. Fraser, 1971). It is interesting to mention here in passing that in Alston (1971), the author takes credit for being one of the earliest interpreters of Austin to think of sentences as being invested with "illocutionary act potential" (Alston, 1964), but makes a point of adding parenthetically: "This is *not* Austin's concept of an illocutionary act, whatever that is, though I did filch the term from him" (emphasis in the original) (Alston, 1971, p. 35). In Alston (1994), the author reiterates the point in the following words:

This view was, as far as I know, first unveiled in public by myself in Alston (1963) and (1964b). But it received little development in print since that period. It was embraced by John Searle (1969), but he has done little to spell out a theory of linguistic meaning in these terms (Alston, 1994, p. 30).

As is well-known, Searle prepares his grounds for a theory of speech acts by first setting up a number of binary oppositions — to wit, "regulative vs. constitutive rules" and "brute vs. institutional facts", etc. These dichotomous oppositions have been the mainstay of Searle's ambitious programme, as is evidenced by the importance given to them in his recent *The Construction of Social Reality* (Searle, 1995). [The contrast with Austin's philosophical style becomes clear as one recalls the latter's famous exhortation "to abandon old habits of *Gleichschaltung*, the deeply ingrained worship of tidy-looking dichotomies" (Austin, 1962b, p.3)]. What is important to stress here is that the two dichotomous distinctions that Searle invokes as the central pillars of his theoretical edifice derive their strength from orthodox philosophical realism.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Searle has been a die-hard advocate of orthodox realism and invoked adherence to it as a criterion for defining the very notion of rationality. To quote him, "Metaphysical realism is [...] not a thesis or a theory; it is rather the condition of having theses or theories or even denying theses or theories" (Searle, 1990, p. 40). Or again, "Realism does not function as a thesis, hypothesis, or supposition. It is, rather, the condition of the possibility of a certain set of practices, particularly linguistic practices. The challenge, thus, to those who would like to reject realism is to try to explain the intelligibility of our practices in light of that rejection" (Searle, 1993, p. 81).

Searle's adherence to orthodox realism is in sharp contrast with Austin's own discussion of the familiar problems of metaphysics. As Stoutland (1989, p. 96) remarks, realism is predicated, *inter alia*, on the assumption that truth is non-epistemic. Stoutland goes on to point out that the world of philosophy is not simply divided between realists and non-realists because, were it so, a non-realist would *ipso facto* be an anti-realist and a candidate for the charges of relativism. In *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin comes up with an argument which clearly identifies him as a 'non-realist' in Stoutland's sense. Arguing against Ayer's famous claim that judgements about material objects are doomed to be irremediably inconclusive, Austin extends a line of reasoning he had initiated earlier in his broadside against the so-called 'argument from illusion'. Austin takes up the following familiar riddle: When a church is camouflaged as a barn or a straight stick is placed in a tumbler full of water, what exactly is one *in fact* looking at as one contemplates these objects? Contrary to the received wisdom, Austin insists that the correct answers in these cases should be "a church camouflaged so as to look like a barn" and "a straight stick made to appear bent" (Austin, 1962b, pp. 44–55). Arguably then, what Austin is insisting on is that the epistemic state of the observer, i.e. the knowledge that she happens to have about the deliberate attempt (on someone else's part) to deceive her senses, is part and parcel of the objectual reality (or, of the truth conditions attending on a statement made about that reality) or, simply put, truth is epistemically affected.<sup>9</sup>

Once the important step of replacing Austin's 'locutionary acts' with the run-of-the-mill 'propositions' (for long, common currency amongst analytic philosophers) had been taken, it was relatively easy for Searle to embark on his mission of system-building. Where Austin showed reluctance when it came to summarising his rather sketchy findings in the form of a full-fledged theory on the grounds that a lot more of careful spade-work needed to be done, Searle was all too happy proposing the fundamental structure of a theory, even if it meant making significant departures from Austin's thoughts on the subject. In the words of Koller (1970, p. 219):

Searle is not obliged, of course, to spell out the theory Austin might have been pursuing; nor does he. But, neither, surprisingly does he make any use of the methods of analysis which led Austin to his notion of illocutionary acts. Although he uses some of Austin's terms and insights, his purpose differs: he wishes to set forth the necessary and sufficient conditions by which a stretch of speaking is to be classed as an illocutionary act.

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<sup>9</sup> David Pears (1969, pp. 54–55) makes the following remarks that have a bearing on the present discussion: "In all his work, critical and constructive, *his paramount purpose was to keep philosophy in close contact with human experience*. [...] It is as if the way to represent the third dimension on a plane surface had just been discovered – or, rather, rediscovered, because Austin's realism was not entirely new, and so too were the meticulousness and devotion with which he practised it" (*italics added*). Apropos of the main thrust of Austin's arguments against sense-data, Ferguson (1969b, p. 311) argues that "throughout the book Austin argues that the empirical facts to which the sense-datum theorist appeals in order to raise the problems of perception do not actually conflict with our every-day beliefs, if we take the trouble to describe these facts carefully, and fully, and in detail".

But then, so great was Searle's impact on linguistics in the 1970s that many scholars were increasingly getting interested in the "problem of relating illocutionary force to grammar" (Mittwoch, 1976, p 41) — an issue they felt they could no longer postpone. By 1980, it was common to come across such carefully worded remarks where the metamorphosis of Austin into Searle was simply taken for granted and the price tag that went with it ingeniously downplayed (Obs.: Recall that the term 'propositional act' is due to Searle, not Austin):

The notion of a speech act is fairly well understood. [...] Such types of acts as those exemplified above are called, following Austin, *illocutionary acts*, and they are standardly contrasted in the literature with certain other types of acts such as perlocutionary acts and propositional acts (Searle, et al., 1980b, p. vii).

Another important step in the direction of creating a theory out of Austin's original insights and making it attractive to linguists had been announced by Searle as early as 1969 when he formulated what he referred to as "the principle of expressibility". Simply put, the principle of expressibility states that "whatever can be meant can be said" (Searle, 1969, p. 17). There can be little doubt that Searle formulated this principle under the direct influence of his Oxford teacher, P.F. Strawson. The following excerpt from a 1964 essay by Strawson contains the all the essentials of the principle of expressibility:

Whatever doubts may be entertained about Austin's notions of meaning and of locutionary act, it is enough for present purposes to be able to say, as I think we clearly can, the following about their relation to the notion of illocutionary force. The meaning of a (serious) utterance, as conceived by Austin, always embodies some limitation on its possible force, and sometimes — as, for example, in some cases where an explicit performative formula, like 'I apologize', is used — the meaning of an utterance may exhaust its force; that is there may be no more to the force than there is to the meaning; but very often the meaning, though it limits, does not exhaust, the force (Strawson, 1971 pp. 149–150).

Strawson's claim, later on worked by Searle into an article of faith, is that, in certain cases, as when an explicit performative verb is used, one does not need to look for anything beyond the very linguistic meaning of that sentence to work out the illocutionary potential of that sentence. In other words, the sentence containing the explicit performative verb must be the canonical form of the sentence — or, in terms of the model of grammar that was in vogue when Searle enunciated the principle — must represent the underlying structure of all sentences, *tout court*. That Austin himself would most probably have refrained from making such a sweeping statement is evident from such remarks as: "The explicit performative rules out equivocation and keeps the performance fixed, *relatively*" (emphasis added) (Austin, 1962, p. 76) and "There seem to be clear cases where the same formula seems sometimes to be an explicit performative and sometimes to be descriptive, and may even trade on this ambivalence" (Austin, 1962, p. 78). Ducrot and Todorov (1982,

pp. 402–403) claim that Searle and many other later theorists of speech acts made an important departure from Austin when they sought to pin down speech acts by dint of pre-established and purely conventional rules — “The effects of an illocutionary act cannot be contained, in terms of interpretation, by means of rules” (my translation). Anyhow, given Strawson’s exegesis of Austin and, added to that, Searle’s axiomatic principle, it is but a small step to arrive at what is referred to in the literature as the ‘performative hypothesis’ (see Section 9 below for further discussion).

Leech has argued that the idea “that a performative, an utterance containing an explicit performative verb, is the canonical form of utterance, the yardstick in terms of which the forces of other utterances are to be explicated” is muddle-headed and called it the ‘performative fallacy’ (Leech, 1983, p. 175). Leech is of the opinion that Austin too “flirted with the fallacy” (p. 175). But it is certainly true that Austin came nowhere near developing the fleeting idea into a full-blown doctrine such as Searle’s principle of expressibility.

Where Austin had characteristically rejoiced in leaving his audiences perplexed by his systematic refusal to theorise, here was his disciple who was at last showing some signs of hope that, with some conceptual streamlining, it was possible to accommodate his mentor’s random and haphazard insights into the framework of a workable theory.

## 9. Speech act theory and generative linguistics

The qualifier ‘workable’ merits special attention. Because what guaranteed the instant success of the speech act theory and, with it, the world-wide acclamation of Searle as Austin incarnate was the possibility of the theory’s immediate application, especially in the neighbouring discipline of linguistics. Thus Pak, while sharply critical of several aspects of Searle’s theorisation of speech acts—which in his view revealed “insuperable difficulties on closer inspection” (Pak, 1974, p. 145), readily conceded that it had become “popular among linguists” (p. 145). “I regard the notion of ‘speech act’,’ declared Wunderlich (1980, p. 291), “as one of the most fruitful notions of contemporary linguistic theorizing.” Also pertinent to the present discussion is the following remark by Koller (1970, pp. 217–218):

It was to be expected that a certain kind of philosopher would be tempted to develop a general theory of speech acts after encountering the half-theories, hints, and indirections thereto in the work of J.L. Austin. John Searle is that philosopher. The difference between Searle’s work and Austin’s, however, is that the theory of what Austin was doing was indifferent to him, whereas Searle’s book asks to be measured solely in terms of the adequacy of the theory it presents.

And the adequacy of the theory, as I shall argue below, had to do with the promise it held of immediate applicability [although Koller himself had gone on to describe Searle’s *Speech Acts* “a maddening book to read”, adding that “the

linguists should find it even more exasperating” (p. 219)]. In retrospect, it seems clear that Searle’s decisive reinterpretation of Austin’s original insights was just the sort of added impetus that a group of Young Turks within the ranks of the Chomskyan paradigm in linguistics in the late 1960s and early 1970s was waiting for. Under the leadership of Ross (1970), McCawley (1971), Fillmore (1972), Lakoff (1972), and Sadock (1974), a schism had developed within the ranks of the mighty Generative Paradigm. The advocates of this rebel movement, known as Generative Semantics, challenged a fundamental postulate of the mainstream trend led by Chomsky himself (referred to as Interpretative Semantics). The bone of contention was the precise status of semantics in grammar. While Chomsky and his followers held firmly to the classic position that semantics could at best have a peripheral, interpretative role to play, the young challengers were eager to prove that, quite on the contrary, semantic considerations were right at the very epicentre of grammar. In fact, many of the Young Turks were beginning to argue that the deep structure might, when all is said and done, prove to be nothing but the very logical form of the sentence — an idea that sat well with Searle’s proposal to separate the performative clause from the clause corresponding to the propositional content (the one where ordinary, truth-conditional semantics could be claimed to operate). “It is natural,” wrote Lyons (1977, p. 228), “to consider the possibility of deriving all sentences from underlying structures with an optionally deletable main clause containing a first person subject, a performative verb of saying, and optionally an indirect-object expression referring to the addressee.” What Lyons failed to mention — or probably thought not that important to do so — was that the ‘naturalness’ of the move was due to Searle’s replacement of Austin’s locutionary acts by propositional acts (which correspond to what the traditional grammarians called ‘noun clauses’ — clauses that served as objects of certain verbs of saying).

Viewing these developments in retrospect, Vendler (1967) was delighted to point out that they had all been ‘prophetically’ foreseen by Austin himself. To quote him: “[...] one of the most fascinating aspects of Austin’s work in these twin books is his uncanny anticipation of later developments in linguistics” (Vendler, 1967, p. 304). In particular, Vendler went so far as to remark, Austin “anticipated” certain results of generative grammar (p. 308). What is most remarkable about such anachronistic claims of inspirational parenthood is that the Austin that was being claimed to have ‘out-Chomskied’ Chomsky by a few years was already an Austin that had been passed through the Searlean interpretative sieve.<sup>10</sup> To put it more bluntly, it was

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<sup>10</sup> To be fair to Vendler, it must be noted that he did draw attention to the fact that Austin was somewhat unconventional as a philosopher. Thus he refers to Austin’s “peculiar sort of linguistics” and says: “To put it bluntly, while other linguistic philosophers have had a thesis or at least a problem which prompted them to gather some facts of language to support their position or ‘dissolve’ their puzzles, with Austin, at least at a later stage of his development, the thesis or the problem becomes secondary, and theory often serves as occasion to explore some fascinating aspect of language for its own sake” (Vendler, 1967, p. 304). Now, such a characterisation of Austin’s personality is clearly at odds with Vendler’s own suggestion that he anticipated the work of generative linguists. The only plausible explanation I can think of for this apparent anomaly is my claim that the Austin Vendler claims foresaw developments in generative linguistics is an Austin seen through Searle’s interpretative lens.

Searle's re-interpretation of Austin's thoughts that was, from now on, being routinely and anachronistically attributed to Austin himself.

A more revealing case in point is Sadock's treatment of Austin and Searle in his book *Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts* (Sadock, 1974). In a section in the introductory chapter of the book devoted to the basic notions relating to the theory of speech acts, the author gives full credit to Austin and spells out the tripartite distinction among the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary acts. In the following section, entitled, 'Formal linguistics and illocutionary acts', Sadock goes on to trace the developments in grammatical research culminating in the incorporation of illocutionary force into the underlying structure of a given sentence. Sadock points out that the first important step in the tradition set off by *Syntactic Structures* (Chomsky, 1957) was the work by Katz and Postal (1964) who persuasively argued for the elimination of all meaning-changing transformations and thus the need for rethinking such familiar rules of transformation as those that yielded interrogative and imperative sentences from an underlying sentence in the declarative mood. Instead of effecting a change of mood through syntactic transformation, it was suggested that the mood be treated as specifically marked in the deep structure of the sentence, so that, in the passage to the surface structure, no meaning change would take place. "In several respects," writes Sadock (1974, p. 14), "Katz and Postal's scheme is an improvement over Chomsky's." With the publication of Ross's seminal paper 'On declarative sentences' (Ross, 1970), the so-called 'abstract performative hypothesis' had attained its most mature form and even the declarative sentences that had until then been unproblematically treated as the basic, default cases began to be seen as structurally more complex and having in their deep structures a highest clause corresponding to the performative formula 'I affirm that etc.' (which was potentially subject to deletion, depending on whether or not the sentence was ultimately going to be realised as an explicit performative). Ross's paper was enthusiastically hailed by, among others, Davis (1976) who described it as "one way in which part of Austin's work might be integrated with linguistic theory" (Davis, 1976, pp. 86–87).

What Sadock does not acknowledge or does not consider worth acknowledging is the fact that the illocutionary act that he is invoking is not Austin's but Searle's — for it is Searle who first introduced into the theory of speech acts the idea that the illocutionary force of a sentence may be considered in isolation from its propositional content. And it was Searle who introduced for the first time the notation F (p) — where the 'F' stood for an Illocutionary Force Indicating Device and the 'p' for its propositional content. Of course, Sadock's claim went one step farther than Searle's in that he was claiming (and indeed did so verbatim at the end of the book) that "[t]he illocutionary force of an uttered sentence is not distinct from propositional acts, to use Searle's [...] term, nor from one sort of locutionary act, to use Austin's term" (Sadock, 1974, p. 147). (It is arguably the case that Sadock uses Searle as a springboard but ends up espousing a thesis that, in the final analysis, goes against one of Searle's principal tenets — a thesis argued for before him by Cohen, 1969, p. 420 who found the concept of illocutionary force to be 'empty').

Sadock's failure to mention Searle while giving full credit to an Austin that was entirely Searle's recreation is by no means an isolated case in the vast literature on the topic of speech acts in linguistics. Ross himself had signalled what was to become the standard practice from then on—of attributing to the Oxford philosopher views that can easily be shown to have resulted from Searle's influential interpretation/appropriation of his thoughts. It is significant that there is not a single mention of Searle's name in Ross's (1970) 50-page-long paper. Instead, all the credit for the insights relative to meaning and illocutionary force is given to Austin. As we have already seen (cf. Section 7), however, the performative hypothesis derives its strength from the twin principles of (a) the principle of expressibility and (b) the possibility of sharply isolating the propositional act from the illocutionary act — which are clearly Searle's and not Austin's.

If Sadock has full recourse to Searle's recreation of Austin while paying lip service to the English philosopher, Gazdar, writing a handful of years later, does just the opposite. Gazdar enthusiastically endorses Sadock's leading insights. Curiously though, against five explicit references to Searle, Austin gets only two passing mentions — once, in a footnote (p. 15) and again in a quick reference, in the body of the text, to 'Austin's terminology'. By the end of the 1970s, one might argue, generative linguistics had all but swallowed up the theory of speech acts. This is most evident in such confident remarks as the following by Lakoff (1972, p. 655): "What we have done is to largely, if not entirely, eliminate pragmatics, reducing it to garden variety semantics."

## 10. Searle's short-lived romance with linguistics

There is every reason to believe that, in the early 1970s at least, Searle was quite happy with the reception his theory had in linguistics — the one discipline that was at the pinnacle of glory in the hierarchy of disciplines in American universities (measured both in terms of student enrolment and in terms of generous funding from governmental and non-governmental agencies). "The language connection is not just a point of contact but a shared vested interest," as Harris (1996, p. xiv) pithily put it in a different context—an observation which is nevertheless relevant to the present discussion. In Searle's own enthusiastic words,

Indeed, in the way in which philosophical results tend to be assimilated to the special sciences, the study of speech acts, one might say, is rapidly becoming a branch of linguistics. The coalescence of these two trends is most visible in the work of the generative semanticists, who reject Chomsky's separation of syntax and semantics and attempt to do the study of syntax, using the theory of speech acts as one of the bases (Searle, 1975a, p. 90).

The botanical metaphor of 'branch' is explored further—alongside Love's (1999, p. 16) metaphor of 'marriage', i.e. a bond never to be torn asunder except by the Almighty — in Searle (1974, p. 30), where it is claimed there is an urgent need to *graft*

the theory of speech acts onto the body of theory already developed by the linguists. In point of fact, Searle reverses the order of priorities, because he says it is the study of language as carried out by the linguists that needed to be grafted onto the study of speech acts — a sea-change indeed from the earlier characterisation of the speech act theory as “a branch of linguistics”. In an influential paper first published in the same year (but originally presented 4 years earlier), entitled ‘A taxonomy of illocutionary acts’ Searle (1979b) is perfectly at ease with the idea that the speech act potential should be latent in the syntactic component of grammar. Thus, after spelling out his basic purpose, viz. to propose a taxonomy of speech acts different from Austin’s, Searle goes on to state:

Furthermore, since basic semantic differences are likely to have syntactical consequences, a third purpose of this paper is to show how these different basic illocutionary types are realized in the syntax of a natural language such as English (Searle, 1979b, p. 1).

Indeed, so great was Searle’s enthusiasm for the idea of incorporating the fundamental insights of the speech act theory (as *he* had formulated it) into the then fashionable model of syntax, that, towards the end of the paper, we find him waxing eloquent (and sounding indistinguishable from a professional linguist from Dwinelle Hall, right across the Berkeley campus):

Since all of the sentences we will be considering will contain a performative verb in the main clause, and a subordinate clause, I will abbreviate the usual tree structures in the following fashion: The sentence, e.g., “I predict John will hit Bill”, has the deep structure shown in Fig. 1. I will simply abbreviate this as; I predict + John will hit Bill (Searle, 1979b, p. 20).

But it did not take Searle very long to come to the realisation that things were slowly getting out of hand. Lakoff (1972)’s call for a ‘garden variety semantics’ must have rung the first alarm bells, for what the generative semanticists were asking for was a complete absorption of speech acts into a semantically informed syntax. As Sadock was to point out in 1977, “from the generative semantic point of view, illocutionary force is an aspect of sentence meaning” (Sadock, 1977, p. 67; cited in Gazdar, 1979, p. 15). The reduction of speech acts to sentence-level semantics was soon being hotly pursued by, among others, Hausser (1980), Lieb (1980) and Auwera (1980). Many scholars such as Fodor (1977) and Auwera (1980) went so far as to claim that the most basic speech acts are the ones that correspond to the four basic syntactic moods, viz. the assertive, the interrogative, the imperative and the optative. There were others like Wierzbicka (1980, 1985a, 1986), who were content to approach illocutionary forces as complex semantic structures, which would have, in some cases, simple syntactic structures corresponding to them, while in other cases, the illocutionary force would lend itself to being decomposed into a number of components (cf. Wierzbicka, 1980, p. 295).

In a scathing review of Sadock's 1974 book, Searle showed clear signs of having taken an about-turn<sup>11</sup> and lashed out at the attempts to incorporate speech acts into the then available model of syntax. He wrote:

The contemporary inclination to pack all sorts of things into phrase-structure trees even when they don't belong there does not arise simply from a fascination with a new analytical tool, rather the formulation itself makes it necessary to put this information in the trees because the notation provides no other way to represent it (Searle, 1976, p. 967).

In his paper 'Speech Acts and recent linguistics', Searle chose as prime targets of his lambasting criticism Ross's paper 'On declarative sentences' (Ross, 1970) and Gordon and Lakoff's 'Conversational postulates' (Gordon and Lakoff, 1971). In a passage marked by an unmistakable tinge of jealousy and fear that his brain-child — the theory of speech acts — may no longer be in his own custody, Searle says:

Both of these theories seem to me to be mistaken explanations of the data concerning speech acts, and both — though in their quite different ways — make the same mistake of postulating a much too powerful explanation to account for certain facts, *when there already exists an independently motivated theory of speech acts that will account for these facts* (Searle, 1979b, p. 163, the italics are mine).

And he goes on to conclude the paper saying:

The theory of speech acts is not an adjunct to our theory of language, something to be consigned to the realm of "pragmatics", or performance; rather, the theory of speech acts will include all of what used to be called semantics as well as pragmatics (Searle, 1979b, p. 178).

## 11. Disenchantment with the Searlean version of the speech act theory

Writes Duranti:

Austin's popularity is due to the work of the American philosopher John Searle, who through his speech act theory made Austin's ideas accessible to a wider audience including literary critics and psychologists [...] however, it is

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<sup>11</sup> This is not the only occasion when Searle has opted to beat a tactical retreat. The question as to whether or not performatives are declarative sentences that are, *in addition*, used to perform speech acts other than assertions is one to which Searle has provided different answers at different times (cf. Searle, 1989; also, Bach and Harnish, 1992). Searle has also appeared to vacillate between semantics (Searle, 1969) and pragmatics (Searle, 1986) in characterising his own theory of speech acts.

precisely Searle's accentuation of certain features of Austin's theory, such as sincerity and intentionality, that have prompted the sharpest criticism of speech act theory by linguistic anthropologists (Duranti, 1997, p. 218).

Incidentally, this passage bears yet another testimony to the vacillation typically evinced by scholars as they try to assess the respective contributions of Austin and Searle to what is vaguely referred to as the theory of speech acts. The first part of the passage leaves one with the impression that the speech act theory, properly speaking, began with Searle (Austin's, by contrast, was at best a cluster of ideas, mostly inaccessible). But then this impression is quickly laid to rest by the second part of the passage, where not only is Austin credited with a theory of his own, but Searle's contribution to it is characterised as that of highlighting certain of the features already present in Austin's 'proto-theory'. But, apart from this indecision, Duranti rightly mentions the crucial fact that Searle's contribution is a critical intervention into Austin's ideas and that not all criticisms directed at Searle automatically carry over to Austin. This in itself, I believe, is a refreshingly novel perception, because, as I have been at pains to stress all along, the commoner practice among text-book writers is to treat the two as constituting a neat continuum or, to change the metaphor, as having done a relay race of theory-making. Particularly interesting is Duranti's implied suggestion that not all changes introduced by Searle would have met with Austin's approval had he had the chance to review them. Recalling Urmson's (1967, p. 234) observation, one might hazard the guess that Austin would have thought of some of Searle's bold innovations as at best attempts at "premature theorising".

Perhaps nowhere else is the difference between Austin and Searle more evident than in the way they went about making generalisations. Against Austin's characteristic habit of interrogating each case over and over again, of trying to tease out different shades and nuances of meaning of single lexical items, of going back again and again to what the man in the street would ordinarily say, Searle's approach consisted in theorising from top down. In contrast to Austin who was an Aristotelian in spirit and method (Brown, 1962; Urmson, 1967; Rorty, 1967b; Cerf, 1969), Searle reveals himself to be an unrepentant Platonist to the hilt (cf. Baker and Hacker, 1984, p. 65).

In Searle and Vanderveken (1985), we find the idea of an illocutionary logic presented as the culmination of the project initiated in Searle (1969). The following passage attests to the typical Platonic move from actuality to potentiality and exclusive interest in the latter:

Illocutionary forces are realized in the syntax of actual natural languages in a variety of ways, e.g., mood, punctuation, word-order, intonation contour, and stress, among others; and it is a task for empirical linguistics to study such devices as they function in actual linguistics. The task of illocutionary logic, on the other hand, is to study the entire range of possible illocutionary forces however these may be realized in particular natural languages. In principle it studies all possible illocutionary forces of utterances in any possible language,

and not merely the actual realization of these possibilities in actual speech acts in actual languages (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985, pp. 1–20).

Nowhere else does Searle's Platonism make itself more self-evident than in the eagerness with which he looks around for universals in speech act theory. Thus, against Austin's rough-and-ready classification of the illocutionary acts into five somewhat fuzzy and overlapping categories,<sup>12</sup> Searle (1975) offers a taxonomy that yields 12 exhaustive types, arguing that "[u]ltimately, I believe, essential conditions form the best basis for a taxonomy" (Searle, 1979b, p. 2). And he goes on to take Austin to task for not having looked for such basic principles:

The most important weakness of [Austin's] taxonomy is this. There is no clear or consistent principle or set of principles on the basis of which the taxonomy is constructed (Searle, 1979b, p. 10).

Interestingly, Searle (1979c, p. 50) does recognise that there are important differences from one language to another (when it comes to, say the conditions under which certain linguistic forms can be used to perform indirect speech acts), but is quite happy to brush them aside as having to do with constraints of idiomaticity and hence — by implication — factors that are merely accidental.

As a matter of fact, this unmistakably Platonic gesture of setting aside 'marginal' cases so as to concentrate on the more 'central' ones (or, more appropriately, setting aside as marginal all those cases that seem to threaten the general rule being proposed) is evident from some of Searle's earliest writings on the topic of speech acts. Thus, discussing the necessary and sufficient conditions for the making of a promise, he says:

There are all sorts of odd, deviant, and borderline promises; and counter-examples, more or less bizarre, can be produced against my analysis. I am inclined to think we shall not be able to get a set of knock-down necessary and sufficient conditions that will exactly mirror the ordinary use of the word 'promise'. I am

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<sup>12</sup> Despite Searle's remark that "Austin advances his categories very tentatively, more as a basis for discussion than as a set of established results" (Searle, 1979b, p. 9), and despite Austin's own comment that "I am not putting any of this forward as in the very least definitive" (Austin, 1962, p. 151) which Searle cites as evidence for his conclusion (Searle, 1979b), a case can be made that Austin was unsure of ever coming up with neat and discrete categories. After observing that the notion of the purity of performatives has to be definitively abandoned, Austin goes on to affirm: "[...] this was essentially based upon a belief in the dichotomy of performatives and constatives, which we see has to be abandoned in favour of more general *families* of related and overlapping speech acts, which are just what we have now to attempt to classify" (Austin, 1962, p. 150). The emphasis on the word *families* is Austin's. The question that arises then is: couldn't Austin have been using the word in the sense in which Wittgenstein had popularised it? Although there is very little reason to believe that Wittgenstein could have influenced Austin in any decisive way, Pitcher (1973, p. 24) recalls Austin's frequent reference to the *Philosophical Investigations* and his favourite remark "Let's see what Wittgenstein has to say about that". Against Searle's attempt at identifying the essential conditions on the basis of which to classify speech acts, Reiss (1985) has pleaded for a looser, heuristic approach. Searle's claim that his taxonomy is more economical than Austin's has been called into question by, among others, Flowerdew (1990).

confining my discussion, therefore, to the centre of the concept of promising and ignoring the fringe, borderline, and partially defective cases (Searle, 1971, p. 47).

In other words, whenever there is a mismatch between what theory predicts and what practice delivers, to hell with what the people actually do with words. The issue is taken up again in Searle (1969), where one reads:

In short, I am going to deal only with a simple and idealized case. This method, one of constructing idealized models, is analogous to the sort of theory construction that goes on in most sciences, e.g., the construction of economic models, or accounts of the solar system which treat planets as points. Without abstraction and idealization there is no systematization (Searle, 1969, p. 56).

The contrast here with Austin is clearly brought to the fore by Finlay (1988) in her remark:

[...] Austin does differ from the logical atomists, the Port-Royalists, or for that matter the Chomskyites, all of whom would rather state that there is a skeletal ‘ideal’ language underlying everyday language (Finlay, 1988, p. 13).

To go back to Searle’s quarrel with Austin over the latter’s somewhat half-baked attempt at classifying speech acts, among Searle’s principal criticisms of Austin’s five-way classification is the charge that Austin was systematically making a confusion between illocutionary acts and illocutionary verbs. In what amounts to a complete break with Austin and his insistence on a painstaking examination of the ordinary, everyday words of the English language, Searle is saying here that it is not the word that one must concentrate on, it is the abstract concept, the one that will lend itself to wider, cross-linguistic, universal generalisations. Ironically enough, though, the very same criticism was levelled against Searle’s own attempt by subsequent writers (Holdcroft, 1978; Ballmer and Brennenstuhl, 1981; Edmondson, 1981; Leech, 1983; Tsui, 1987).

Notwithstanding such critiques, Searle’s universalist approach was by now already part of the received version of the speech act theory (which, in the form in which it was available to the reading public was, as we have seen, largely the result of Searle’s decisive intervention) so that Clark and Schunk (1980, p. 111) could confidently proclaim that the tendency to use indirect means to make requests (such as the use of an interrogative sentence for this purpose in English e.g. ‘Can you please pass the salt?’) was in fact a universal trait that cut across language boundaries and Fraser et al. (1980, p. 79) could equally confidently assert that, when all is said and done, the speakers of different languages do have at their disposal the same set of speech act strategies to choose from.

But such overly complacent and sweeping claims, with hardly any empirical, cross-linguistic data to prop them up, only helped reinforce the suspicion among scholars, many of whom had an ethnomethodological orientation, that the speech act theory in its Searlean guise had unwittingly fallen prey to the peril of “premature theorising” and, worse still, had allowed the theory to be overrun by an ethnocentric

view of language (Silverstein, 1977). As Wierzbicka (1985b, p. 145) observes: “From the outset, studies in speech acts have suffered from an astonishing ethnocentrism and, to a considerable degree, they continue to do so”. Cicourel (1987, p. 660) notes that Searle’s abstract examples are at best a guide to “the formal aspects of Anglo-American culture” and decrees with a tinge of irony: “The philosopher of mind and language, in Searle’s work, becomes something of a formal anthropologist.”

The overriding ambition of Searle and his followers to universalise the theory of speech acts and the underlying ethnocentric agenda were specifically targeted by Rosaldo (1982). In the words of Duranti

For Searle and other speech act theorists, the goal is to produce a method for arriving at the necessary and sufficient conditions of human communication. [...] For Rosaldo and other linguistic anthropologists, the goal is to understand how particular uses of language might sustain, reproduce, or challenge particular versions of the social order and the notion of person (or self) that is part of the order (Duranti, 1997, p. 228).

Rosaldo, Duranti and a number of other scholars who approached language from an anthropological perspective were ultimately led to disillusionment with Searle’s rigid formalisation of the speech act theory and his single-minded quest for universals. Duranti sums up the growing disenchantment with Searle’s theory in the following words:

In particular, cultural anthropologists did not immediately realize that whereas most of the examples discussed by Austin have to do with highly ritualistic and institutionally defined speech acts such as naming a ship or marrying people, Searle’s extension of Austin’s theory to a much wider range of acts constituted a more general theory of human communication and human psychology [...]. As pointed out by a number of linguistic and cultural anthropologists, such a theory seems at odds with an anthropological understanding of human action and its interpretation in context (Duranti, 1997, pp. 227–228).

Schegloff (1992) spells out the difference between Searle’s philosophical approach and his own sociological orientation by emphasising the role of context in the latter. In his own words,

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 the actual people in interaction, we encounter the omnipresent relevance of context, in various of the senses of that term, for sentient actors (Schegloff, 1992, p. 125).

Schegloff admits that Searle is clearly aware of the importance of context but thinks that in Searle’s approach the whole idea of context emerges at best as an afterthought. Says he,

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 (Schegloff, 1992, p. 125).

It is indeed ironic that Searle's 'extension' of Austin's 'theory' should have been set aside by anthropologically inclined linguists precisely on the grounds that it overlooked cultural diversity in the name of wider, philosophically interesting generalisations. The following words by Austin himself from an early 1939 paper testify to the enormous distance travelled by his disciple and self-styled exegete:

Neither Mr. Mackinnon nor Mr. Maclagan would claim, I think, to have told us what they are talking about when they talk about 'concepts'. Both seem, however, to imply that the word 'concept' could not be explained without using the word 'universal': and this seems also the common view, though how the two are related is no doubt obscure and controversial. I propose, therefore, to make some remarks about 'universals': because I do not understand what they are, so that it is most unlikely I shall understand what concepts are (Austin, 1961, p. 32).

And, as Furberg (1963, p. 28) argues, "It is clear that the faults Austin finds with concepts also affect propositions."

## 12. Speech act theory and the search for origins

Cavell (1995, p. 44) remarks that Searle's *Speech Acts* "has been and continues to be far more influential — in both literary studies and in philosophy — than Austin's original work that invented the subject". As I have been at pains to argue in this paper, Cavell's observation is perhaps most appropriate to the reception of the speech act theory in theoretical linguistics, where it is customary to come across scholars who refer to Austin, often unmindful of the fact that the Austin they refer to is actually Searle's extremely successful recreation of the late Oxford philosopher.

To judge by what may safely be regarded as a burgeoning trend, Cavell's remark seems to be no longer true of philosophy itself. Three recently published dictionaries of philosophy, viz. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Blackburn, 1994), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Audi, 1995), and *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (Mautner, 1996) all carry separate entries on speech acts but none of them even mentions the name of John Searle among those who have had a significant role in the development of the theory (although many of the authors do make a point of mentioning Hobbes, Brentano, Husserl, Anton Marty, Adolf Reinach and others as possible precursors of Austin). The same is true of Flew's *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (Flew, 1979). Lacey's *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (Lacey, 1976) does mention Searle's *Speech Acts* in the bibliography at the end of the entry

on speech acts, but the text of the entry itself shows no influence of Searle's contributions to the topic. [A brief comment in the Preface says: "No single principle underlies the bibliographies. An item may be the original source of a notion, or a good, elementary, or accessible discussion, or a recent discussion from which previous ones can be traced, or a bibliographical source" (p. vi).]

Cavell's remark is fully appropriate to the way the speech act theory has been incorporated into contemporary linguistics. As we have already seen, in linguistics it is Searle's reinterpretation of Austin that has held sway — notwithstanding, as we have also seen, the recent disenchantment with the theory amongst those that follow an ethnomethodological orientation. As for literary studies, Cavell's remark calls for some qualification. It is probably true to say that literary theorists first took notice of Austin's thoughts thanks to Searle's popularisation of it. It is also true that some of the early attempts such as the one by Pratt (1977) reveal strong influence of Searle's interventions into the speech act theory. By contrast, Petrey (1990) proposes a speech act model for literary study based on Austin and "like other scholars working in the field of pragmatic stylistics, considers Searle's idealisation of Austin's ideas a retrograde step" (Simpson, 1992, p. 370). [Although this is in sharp contrast with Petrey's own remark, in a book published two years earlier, that Searle extended Austin's thoughts "without violence" (Petrey, 1988, p. 13).]

Limitations on space will not allow us to undertake a detailed survey of the reception of Austin's ideas in literary studies. But, in general, these scholars have tended towards a more textual approach to Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (cf. Rajagopalan, 1998, in preparation). Derrida's (1977a,b) deconstructive reading of Austin has had an enormous impact on many of them. For Derrida, Austin's book is best seen as a work which is "patient, open, aporetical, in constant transformation, often more faithful in the acknowledgement of its impasses than in its positions" (Derrida, 1977a, p. 187). Worthy of special mention in this context is Felman's interesting discussion of the Austinian text (Felman, 1980) where she casts Austin in the role of Don Juan, constantly seducing his readers and promising a theoretical rounding up of his reflections, but only to leave things more muddled up than before. Culler (1983, p. 118 fn) argues, however, that Felman is engaged in a "sustained attempt to attribute to Austin everything she has learned from Derrida, in order then to accuse Derrida of misreading Austin". Other scholars have been quick to point out that Derrida has a lot more in common with Austin than he is willing to recognise. Fish argues: "One might say, with proper qualifications, that [Derrida] is a philosopher of ordinary language. In so saying, I am suggesting that Derrida and Austin may not be so far apart as some have thought" (Fish, 1982, p. 708). On the other hand, Stanley Cavell is of the opinion that Austin has been largely misinterpreted by both Searle and Derrida:

My own feeling is that while Derrida found Austin philosophically interesting, even congenial, and Searle had found Austin useful and worth defending against *this* treatment, neither really felt that Austin's is a philosophical voice whose signature is *difficult* to assess and important to hear out in its difference (Cavell, 1995, p. 45).

### 13. Concluding remarks

The question of signature that Cavell addresses in the passage quoted above makes a direct reference to Derrida's problematisation of the very idea of signature, of what a signature is supposed to signify and to what extent it succeeds in guaranteeing its own success. In particular, Derrida calls attention to the ultimate irreconcilability of the two requirements that (a) "For the attachment to the source to occur, the absolute singularity of an event of the signature and of a form of the signature must be retained" and (b) "In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production" (Derrida, 1977, pp. 196–197). The idea of signature and the problematics of iterability it unsuccessfully seeks to circumvent is a recurring theme in Derrida. It figures conspicuously in his trenchant rejoinder to Searle over Austin and also in Derrida (1985) where one reads: "It is rather paradoxical to think of an autobiography whose signature is entrusted to the other, one who comes along so late and is so unknown" and further "Every text answers to this structure. It is the structure of textuality in general. A text is signed only much later by the other" (p. 51).

It is not difficult to see that this paper is, in the final analysis, about texts and signatures — the texts and signatures of Austin and Searle and indeed of the hundreds of others who have been trying to assess exactly what it was that Austin was trying to do with his words (and also what Searle has been, all these years, trying to do with Austin). It also has to do with who has the right to speak on behalf of who and under what circumstances. At a critical juncture in his reply to Derrida, Searle remarks as follows:

Before beginning a discussion of Derrida's charge I should point out that I hold no brief for the details of Austin's theory of speech acts. I have criticized it elsewhere and will not repeat those criticisms here. *The problem is rather that Derrida's Austin is unrecognizable; he bears no relation to the original* (Searle, 1977, p. 204, italics mine).

Searle is invoking his own hard-earned status as Austin's intellectual heir. As Smith puts it,

Searle appears also, with an exaggerated jealousy, to want to eliminate *Derrida* from coming anywhere near him or his work, and particularly anywhere near the work of J. L. Austin whose legacy Searle believes himself to be the privileged executor of [...] (Smith, 1995, p. 31).

Although Searle declares in as many words that he holds no brief for Austin, he is adamant in claiming exclusive rights when it comes to interpreting what the Oxford philosopher would have said had he not met with his untimely death in 1960. Thus, referring to Derrida's observations on parasitism and Austin's difficulties in addressing the issue, Searle says,

Derrida seems to think that Austin's exclusion [of parasitic forms] is a matter of great moment, a source of deep metaphysical difficulties, and that the analysis of parasitic discourse might create some insuperable difficulties for the theory of speech acts. But the history of the subject has proved otherwise. *Once one has a general theory of speech acts — a theory which Austin did not live long enough to develop himself — it is one of the relatively simpler problems to analyze the status of parasitic discourse, that is to meet the challenge contained in Derrida's question: 'What is the status of this parasitism?'. Writings subsequent to Austin's have answered this question* (Searle, 1977, p. 205, italics added).

Unsurprisingly, a footnote appended to the last sentence in the passage quoted above directs the reader to Searle's own paper 'The logical status of fictional discourse' (Searle, 1979d). In other words, "the history of the subject" that he so confidently invokes is one which he himself inaugurated and is determined to defend at any cost.<sup>13</sup>

True to his words, Searle is not projecting himself as someone holding a brief for Austin; he is saying that he *is* the person authorised to speak on behalf of Austin, and that, as far as Derrida's objections go, he, Searle, is, to all intents and purposes, an 'Austin incarnate'. As Shaw (1990, p. 91) puts it: "[...] Derrida's most telling refutations of Austin/Searle refute words employed and *copyrighted* by Searle" (italics added). Small wonder that Searle's reaction (cf. Searle, 1977) to what he saw as a wanton act of provocation by Derrida was predictably packed with acerbities. He was, after all, speaking on the strength of what he believed had become an indisputable fact, viz. his own status as the unchallenged custodian of the theory he had so laboriously helped construct — as far as the theory of speech acts was concerned, he was, he believed, monarch of all he surveyed and his right there was none to dispute. In fact, so great is his confidence in his own authority that, in the following passage, we find him unabashedly basking in the success of the theory and, even assuming an air of false modesty by denying his own central role in the theory's development and consolidation:

Systematic study of speech acts has now gone on for over 30 years. During that time there has been genuine progress, and something like consensus has emerged on many issues. Speech act theory has two features which would have

<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that what Derrida is doing is no less an act of claiming exclusive interpretative rights over the Austinian text. As Scholes (1988, p. 284) has put it, "'Limited Inc.' is obviously a no-holds-barred battle with Searle, but its predecessor 'Signature Event Context' was a struggle for power and position before Searle intervened at all: not merely a contest with Austin or with Jakobson but an argument over philosophical space." Derrida has been accused of gross misreading of Searle's text by Eco (1986, p. 115) who writes: "Focused as a new and unfaithful Torah, the text of Searle allows Derrida to read in it something else, other than his adversary believed it to mean, and by and through which he in fact has been meant." Also important to the present discussion is Rorty's insightful remark that if at all there is any inconsistency in Derrida's acrimonious rebuttal (Derrida, 1977b), it has to do with his desire to beat Searle at the latter's own favourite ball game. Says Rorty (1995, p. 462): "That is why Derrida looks bad whenever he attempts arguments on his opponents' turf; those are the passages in which he becomes a patsy for John Searle."

enormously pleased its founder, J. L. Austin, because he regarded them as essential in fruitful intellectual work. First, it is possible for different people to work on the theory. It is not the property of one person or of even one ideological group. And second, agreement is possible. People of widely differing ideologies and philosophical commitments can agree on the facts about promises, assertions, apologies, etc. (Searle, 1991, p. 81).

But Searle does give the game away because immediately following the above remark he goes on to furnish us with some subtle indication as to where one should look in order to locate the source of the consensus:

Among the items in the area of general agreement that I hope to take for granted [...] are the following: there is a distinction between illocutionary forces and propositional content so that, in general, speech acts have the structure  $F(p)$ . This distinction supersedes Austin's original distinction between illocutionary acts and locutionary acts (Searle, 1991, p. 81).

In other words, Searle's theoretical foray into the theory of speech acts is itself an enormous speech act (of asserting his own status as the standard bearer of the theory), or a protracted speech event consisting of several such acts, each with its own felicity conditions (and all the rest of the theoretical paraphernalia that Searle himself has proposed over the years). The success of the theory is to be credited, among other things, to the historical circumstances in which Searle put it forward and the alacrity with which he has cashed in on every opportunity, as and when it came along, to maintain the hold on his own role as the theory's lynchpin. Ripeness was all; but so too was, no doubt, Searle's readiness.

Searle's tactic is best understood in terms of Foucault's insightful observations in his essay 'What's an author?' (Foucault, 1979). Foucault makes the interesting point that the authorial function has to do with the person who claims for herself the full credit and responsibility for guaranteeing the unity and coherence of a certain discourse. The author is, furthermore, the one person who has given everybody to understand that she has been 'authorised' by the discursive community in question to act as the guarantor of that unity. As it happens, however, the unity claimed is often more illusory than real. Rather than the authorial function emerging from the unity of a particular discourse, it often turns out that it is the very appearance of unity of that discourse that draws its sustenance from the authorial function, especially when it is deemed to be already filled in and under no immediate threat. But the unity of the discourse (in our case, the discourse of speech act theory) and, along with it, the authorial function that underwrites it, often come under heavy strain. As we saw in Section 6, this is just what happened in the case of Wittgenstein: it was no longer possible to insist on the putative unity spanning his entire philosophical career, so the philosophical community hit upon the next best solution under the circumstances which was to posit, not one, but two unities.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that some commentators — acutely aware of the tension discussed by Nigel Love (1999) in Searle's thought — have sought to portray

Searle as a philosopher divided against himself (Burkhardt, 1990; Harnish, 1990; Liedtke, 1990; McDonough, 1990; Apel, 1991). The dividing line is usually believed to be somewhere between Searle's earlier theory of speech acts (Searle, 1969, 1979) and his later theory of intentionality (Searle, 1983). For Harnish, "there are important and irreconcilable differences between these two works" (Harnish, 1990, p. 170). McDonough is of the opinion that there is a systematic movement back and forth in Searle's career, e.g. "a step forward, as in Searle's *Speech Acts* and, two backwards, as in his *Intentionality*" (McDonough, 1990, p. 264). Many think that, in his earlier phase, Searle was a lot closer to Austin than in the later phase. In Love's words, "It is ironic that what started out as a development of Austin's theory of speech acts should demonstrate so clearly the disastrous consequences of supposing otherwise" (Love, 1999, p. 24).

The fact remains, nevertheless, that, in spite of their growing numbers, such complaints and critiques are still mostly cries in the wilderness and Searle's solid reputation has remained untarnished by allegations of swapping theoretical horses in mid-stream. Our primary aim in this paper was to unravel the mystery as to how Searle has gone about the amazing task of living up to the ultimately irreconcilable twin claims of (a) being a mouth-piece for Austin and (b) being an independent philosopher holding 'no brief for' his Oxford mentor. In light of our discussion, I think there can be no doubt whatsoever that Searle has adroitly staked out — and, from the looks of it, has been amply successful in maintaining — a solid reputation for himself that rests on both simultaneously. He has been, in other words, amazingly successful at the incredible feat of eating the Austinian cake and having it too.

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