

# How to Say Things with Words

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## §1. Introduction

You really don't need us to tell you how to *say* things with words, any more than you (or your ancestors) needed J.L. Austin or his student John Searle to tell you how to *DO* things with words. Austin's *How to do things with words* (1961) and Searle's *Speech Acts* (1969) offered a theory to explain how we do things that go *beyond saying*, that is, how we perform illocutionary and perlocutionary acts in and by saying things.

In this paper, we develop Austin's concept of a locutionary act, using the "reflexive-referential theory" of meaning and cognitive significance as developed in Perry's *Reference and Reflexivity* (2001).<sup>1</sup> We distinguish the locutionary content of an act both from what a speaker says and what a speaker intends to say. These three concepts often coincide, but keeping them separate is important in reconstructing the plans of speakers and the inferences of hearers, for those cases in which the concepts diverge are often of great theoretical interest.

Our plan is as follows. In §2 we give an overview of our reasons for distinguishing locutionary content from what is said. In §3 we explain locutionary content in the context of speakers' plans. In §4 we look at a number of examples to show how locutionary content can diverge from what is said. In §5 we compare our concepts to Austin's, and consider Searle's misgivings about locutionary acts. (We should emphasize that, although there are some differences between our concept of locutionary act and Austin's, and although we disagree with Searle's rejection of locutionary acts, we see our concept of locutionary content as a friendly amendment to the basic ideas of the Austin-Searle theory of speech acts.)

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<sup>1</sup> See the appendix for a brief introduction to this theory.

## §2. Locutionary content versus “what is said”

Pragmatics and the philosophy of language have put a number of pressures on the concept of what is said by (the speaker of) an utterance. First, David Kaplan and others grounded the concept of “the proposition expressed” in intuitions about what is said, to support arguments that the contribution names, indexicals and demonstratives make to the proposition expressed is the object referred to, rather than some identifying condition that the referent meets.<sup>2</sup>

Kaplan distinguishes between the character and content of a sentence in a context. The character of the sentence, together with the context, determines the content; semantics spells this out. Since the content of a sentence is the proposition expressed, which is explained in terms of what is said, it creates a second pressure: *what is said* is (more or less) equated with what semantics provides.

A third pressure comes from Grice's (1967) distinction between what is said and what is implicated by an utterance. In the standard case, the hearer takes what is said as the starting point in inferring implicatures. So what is said has another role to fill, serving as the starting point of Gricean reasoning about implicatures.

These combined roles for “what is said” give rise to what we will call the “classic” picture of the relation between semantics and pragmatics. Semantics provides what is said as the input to pragmatics. In both speech act theory and Gricean pragmatics, as originally developed, pragmatics is focused on what is done with language *beyond saying*.

We don't think the ordinary concept of saying is quite up to meeting all of these pressures, and that this has obscured some issues about the interface between semantics and pragmatics. There are (at least) the two following difficulties.

On the one hand, as we argued in “Three demonstrations and a funeral” (Korta and Perry 2006), it is not always the *referential* content of an utterance that provides the input to Gricean reasoning about implicatures. Often it is some kind of *utterance-bound* or *reflexive* content. In section §5 we extend this point to speech act theory. Information that is required to determine the illocutionary

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<sup>2</sup> See the Peter-Paul argument in Kaplan (1989), pp. 512ff.

force of an utterance is sometimes lost at the level of referential content, but available at the level of reflexive content.

On the other hand, and our main point in this paper, it is necessary to distinguish between acts of saying and locutionary acts. Our locutionary content is, like the classical picture of "what is said," a form of referential content, and is intended to give grounding to the ubiquitous concept of "the proposition expressed." The problem is that the ordinary concept of saying is shaped by the everyday needs of folk-psychology and folk-linguistics, and does not quite carve phenomena at its theoretical joints, in the following ways.

First, saying is naturally taken to be an illocutionary act, of the same species as asserting, with perhaps somewhat weaker connotations. A speaker is committed to the truth of what she says. But propositions are expressed in the antecedents and consequents of conditionals, as disjuncts, and in many other cases without being asserted.

Second, the concept of saying is to a certain extent a *forensic* concept. One is responsible for the way one's remarks are taken by reasonably competent listeners. But locutionary content is not sensitive to actual and hypothetical mental states of the audience.

Finally, what we take as having been said is sensitive to the information that the speaker is trying to convey. Intuitively, Joana doesn't say the same thing when she says "I am Joana," as she does when she says, "Joana is Joana" or "I am I". An utterance of "I am I" would not commit her to having the name "Joana," but this might be the main information she is trying to convey when she says "I am Joana." Locutionary content does not have this sensitivity to the information the speaker is trying to convey to sort this out. Our theory is quite sensitive to such matters, but we do not handle this by stretching the concept of what is said to cover all needs, but replace it, for theoretical purposes, with a number of other concepts.

These three differences we illustrate and discuss by going through a number of examples in §4.

### §3 Locutionary Acts and Locutionary Content

The central concept in our approach is that of a *speaker's plan*. This is a natural outgrowth of the Austin-Searle concept of language as action, and of Grice's

concept of speaker's meaning. Paradigmatically, a speaker utters a sentence with the intention of producing an utterance with certain truth-conditions, and thereby achieving further results, such as conveying information to a hearer, and perhaps thereby getting the hearer to do something. So, for example, Keba might say the words "I'm hungry" with the intention of uttering the English sentence "I'm hungry," so that his utterance is true if and only if he, the speaker, is hungry, and so informing John that he is hungry, implicating that he'd like to break off work to go to lunch, and eliciting John's response as to whether that seems like a good idea.

We take an *act* to be a specific occurrence, an *action* to be a type of act. In analyzing any species of action, one takes certain actions that can be performed at will, at least in circumstances taken as normal for the analysis, as basic.<sup>3</sup> These actions are *executions*; usually they can be thought of as bodily movements. By executing movements, the agent brings about results, depending on the circumstances. These actions, what the agent brings about, are *accomplishments*. Accomplishments can be thought of as nested, each action being *a way of* bringing about further accomplishments in wider and wider circumstances. We use "accomplishment" in such a way that accomplishments need not be intended. By moving his arms in certain ways, in certain circumstances, John may pick up the coffee cup, by doing that he may spill the coffee on his lap, by doing that he may burn himself. Keba may say, using "accomplish" in the way we have in mind, "My, look at what you have accomplished."

For our purposes, we assume that we are dealing with competent speakers who can utter (speak, type, write, or sign) meaningful words, phrases and sentences of English at will, as a part of a plan that marshals the requisite intentions to perform locutionary acts. This involves:

- (1) Producing grammatical phrases of English, by speaking, writing, typing, signing or other means;
- (2) Doing so with appropriate intentions that resolve:
  - a. which words, of those consistent with the sounds uttered (or letters typed...), are being used;

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<sup>3</sup> See Goldman (1970), and Perry, Israel and Tutiya (1993).

- b. which meanings of those permitted by the conventions of English for the words and phrases being used, are being employed;
  - c. which of the syntactic forms consistent with the order of words, intonations, etc. are being employed;
  - d. nambiguities; that is, issues about the reference of names which various persons, things, or places share;
  - e. the primary reference of demonstratives and other deictic words and issues relevant to the reference of indexicals;
  - f. anaphoric relations;
  - g. the values of various other parameters that are determined by speaker's intentions.
- (3) Having (possibly quite minimal) beliefs about the facts that resolve the semantic values of indexicals;
- (4) Having the intention of producing an utterance that will have certain reflexive truth-conditions, and of thereby producing an utterance with certain referential truth-conditions, in accord with the beliefs in (3).
- (5) Having (possibly quite minimal) intentions to accomplish other results by producing his utterance: conveying implicatures, performing illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, and the like.
- (6) Accomplishing other results by doing all of this: conveying implicatures, performing illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, and the like.

In determining the locutionary content, the speaker's intentions (1) and (2) are determinative; actual and possible misunderstandings, however easily the speaker could have foreseen and prevented them, are not relevant. Thus the intended reflexive truth-conditions will be what the speaker intends them to be, so long as the meanings and structures the speaker intends are allowed by the conventions of English. The speaker's beliefs in (3) are *not* determinative for locutionary content, however. The *intended* locutionary content will be the referential content of his utterance *given* his beliefs in (3). But the *actual* locutionary content will be determined by the facts, not by the speaker's beliefs about them.

Suppose, for example, that John is in the philosophy lounge, but thinks that he is in the CSLI lounge. "Kepa is supposed to meet me here," he says. He intends to use "here" indexically rather than deictically, and intends the range of "here" to mean the room he is in, not, say, the campus he is at or the nation in which he resides. These intentions are determinative. The locutionary content of his utterance is that Kepa was to meet him in the philosophy lounge, the actual referent of his use of "here". The intended locutionary content, however, is that Kepa was to meet him in the CSLI lounge, the place he thought would be the referent of his use of "here".

#### §4. 'Locuted' but not said: some examples

Grice's main distinction in his analysis of utterance meaning is between what is said and what is implicated. Grice also remarked that there are implicatures in cases in which the speaker says nothing, but only 'makes as if to say'. Irony is a case in point. Let's assume that X, with whom John has been on close terms until now, has betrayed a delicate secret of John's to an academic rival. John and Kepa both know this and they both see X passing by. John utters:

(4.1) *He is a fine friend.*<sup>4</sup>

Mere reflexive content will not do:

(4.1.1) That *the person that John is referring to by his use of 'he'* is a fine friend. [The reflexive content of (4.1)]

Kepa must go through sentence meaning to the locutionary content of (3).

(4.1.2) X is a fine friend. [The referential content, and hence the locutionary content, of (4.1)]

Independently of what John might intend to communicate---typically, the opposite, or something implying the opposite, of (4.1.2)---and how the understanding process exactly works, it seems clear that for Kepa to take the utterance as ironic he has to identify the referent of 'he' and the property of 'being a fine friend', i.e., the locutionary content. Without identifying X and the property ascribed to him in the locutionary content of John's utterance, and as the X that has betrayed John's confidence on him, Kepa will not grasp John's utterance as ironic, and will miss the point. John may be *making as if to say* (Grice

<sup>4</sup> We will use citations like "(4.1)" to refer to sentence types and also to hypothesized utterances involving those types; context should make it clear which.

1967), *pretending* (Clark & Gerrig 1984) or *echoing* (Sperber & Wilson 1986) a proposition, but definitely he is not saying it, he is not committing himself in any way to the truth of the locutionary content. However, this content has a role to play in the understanding of John's ironic utterance.

However the difference between saying and just making as if to say should be characterized, it seems clear that when a speaker is being ironic she refers to objects and predicates properties so as to provide content for her utterance, that the hearer is intended to grasp. From the perspective of the speaker, this content plays a role in her utterance plan; from the perspective of the addressee, it plays a role in understanding the utterance. This content does not count as what she said, because, possibly among other things, she is overtly not committed to its truth, and she expects the hearer to understand that she is not so committed, but it is a content anyway; a content that is locuted but not said.

In the case of many logical operators and other sentence embedding constructions, propositions are locuted but not said, as Frege pointed out, and Geach reminded a generation of ordinary language philosophers<sup>5</sup>. When someone says, "If Hillary is elected, Bill will enjoy his return to the White House," she doesn't say either that Hillary will be elected, or that Bill will return to the White House. These seem to us like sufficient reasons for keeping a place for locutionary content in a theory of utterance content.

#### (4.2) *John is turning red*

In a discussion with alumni about politics on campus, Kepa says, "John is turning red." He means that JP's face is turning red, perhaps from anger, or eating a hot pepper. The alumni take him to say that JP is becoming a communist. Kepa should have seen that people were likely to interpret his remark that way. Later he may protest, "I didn't say that." John might retort, "You didn't mean to say it, but you did, and I had to do a lot of explaining." Perhaps this retort is not correct. But the fact that the issue is debatable suggests that our ordinary concept of what is said is to some extent responsive to uptake on the part of the audience. What is saying seems to have both illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects. In contrast, our concept of locutionary content will not depend on effects on the listener.

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<sup>5</sup> Frege (1879), Geach (1965).

**(4.3) *Flying planes can be dangerous.***

Kepa produces the sounds necessary to say "Flying planes can be dangerous" [(1)].<sup>6</sup> He intends to be producing a token of "planes," not of "plains" [(2a)]. He intends to be using "plane" with the sense of airplane, not flat surface [(2b)]. He intends to use "Flying planes" as a verb phrase, rather than a noun phrase [(2c)]. These intentions are all determinative for the locutionary act.

They might not be determinative for what is said. Suppose Kepa and John are flying kites on a hill near the airport with some other folks. People have been discussing the dangers that birds, power lines, electrical storms and other phenomena pose for kite flyers. Kepa hasn't really been paying attention, but is daydreaming about being a pilot. He utters, "Flying planes can be dangerous," somewhat loudly, to remind himself of the reasons for forgoing his dreams. Everyone takes him to have used "flying planes" as a noun phrase, and to have added a warning to the list generated by the conversation about the dangers of flying kites on the hill. Any semantically competent listener who had been listening to the conversation would have taken Kepa that way, and Kepa himself would have realized this if he hadn't been daydreaming.

When Kepa realizes how he has been taken he can surely protest, "I didn't mean to say that." But it is at least arguable that he *did* say it. Our ordinary concept of saying has a forensic element; Kepa would be responsible if a member of the group, frightened by his observation, quit flying kites. A discussion of whether he *did* say what he meant to, or said what he didn't mean to, would likely devolve into a discussion about his responsibility for the effects of his remarks on others. But, to repeat, with respect to our theoretically defined concept of locutionary content, there is no room for debate. There are no "uptake" conditions, no forensic dimension, to consider.

**(4.4) *Aristotle enjoyed philosophy.***

Graduate students are discussing the life and times of Jackie Kennedy and Aristotle Onassis in the lounge. John comes in, and hears a debate about whether Aristotle Onassis enjoyed philosophy. What he hears is a loud assertion: "Aristotle despised philosophy and philosophers." He thinks the conversation is about the philosopher, and says, "That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. Aristotle enjoyed philosophy." His intention in using the name

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<sup>6</sup> Bracketed items refer to list of elements of a speaker's plan given in §3.

"Aristotle" is to refer to the philosopher, and this is determinative for the locutionary content [(2d)]. The locutionary content of John's remark is a true proposition about the ancient philosopher. But it is at least not totally clear that this is what he has said.

One might object at this point that we are abusing the concept of reference. We are assuming that one could consistently say that John *locuted* (for we will now allow ourselves this verb) truly that one fellow liked philosophy, while, in the very same act, *saying* falsely that another fellow did. But surely he referred to one or the other, or perhaps neither, but not both.

Two points are in order here. First, the reflexive-referential theory sees propositions as abstract objects that are used to *classify* events of certain types (cognitive states and utterances, paradigmatically) by conditions of truth (or other relevant forms of success)---used explicitly by theorists such as ourselves, and implicitly in the practice of those who have mastered the propositional attitudes and similar constructions. We do not see propositions as denizens of a third realm to which some quasi-causal relation relates us, but as devices by which we can classify events along different dimensions of similarity and difference. Different propositions can be used to classify the same act, relative to different frameworks for associating success-conditions of various sorts.

A normal assertive utterance will express a belief on the part of the speaker, it will have a locutionary content, it will count as saying something, it will be taken a certain way by listeners. When things go right, the same proposition will get at the truth-conditions of the belief, of the locutionary act, of the saying, and of the resulting beliefs. But not when things go wrong. John's assertion expressed his belief that the philosopher enjoyed philosophy, locuted the same thing, but conveyed something different.

There are two quite intelligible routes from John's utterance of "Aristotle" to potential referents. One proceeds through his own system of mental files, back through centuries of commentary, to an ancient Greek philosopher. The other proceeds through the ongoing use of "Aristotle" in the conversation of which his remark is a part, back through the minds of the other participants, to decades of commentary in various supermarket tabloids, to the shipping magnate. While our ordinary concepts of reference and "what is said" are keyed to the successful cases, our theoretical concepts need to be more flexible. In a

case like this, one choice of referents is suitable for understanding the utterance as the production of a person with John's beliefs; another is more suitable for understanding the effects of his utterance on the other conversants.

An analogy from the philosophy of action may be helpful by way of our second point. Indeed, given the Austin-Searle perspective of language use as a type of action, it is more than a mere analogy. We can classify the results of action propositionally, as is done with the concept of accomplishment explained above. By spilling his coffee in his lap, John accomplished a number of different things. He dampened his pants, that is, brought it about that his pants were damp. He wasted the coffee; that is brought it about that his coffee was wasted. And he brought it about that Kepa was amused. And so on. Each of these accomplishments is used to characterize the act given various circumstances and connections.

We can also characterize acts by accomplishments they were intended to have, or would have had in various counterfactual conditions. John wanted to bring it about that he got a drink of coffee, he might have brought it about that he had a seriously burned lap, or that Kepa laughed so hard he had a stroke.

Our practice of saying, and our concepts for classifying what we do in speaking, have the feature that, when things go right, a great number of different aspects of the act will be classifiable by the same proposition: the conditions under which the belief that motivates the utterance is true, the conditions under which the intended locutionary content is true, the conditions under which the locutionary content is true, the conditions under which what is said is true, the conditions under which the beliefs that the utterance leads the audience to adopt or consider are true. This gives rise to the picture of a single proposition that is passed along, from a speaker's belief, to his utterance, to the mind of his audience. But the picture breaks down when things don't go right, and we need different propositions to classify different aspects of the act, relative to different circumstances and interests.

#### *(4.5) You are late.*

Here is the situation. Kepa and John were supposed to meet at 10:30 at their office at CSLI. It's 10:35. Kepa hears the door handle turn, and hears the door begin to open. He looks towards the door and sees the shoulder of the

person who is coming in, whom he takes to be John. He utters the words, "You are late."

Kepa's plan is as follows. He intends to produce a certain string of sounds that count as a token of the English sentence "You are late"[(1), (2a)]. He intends to produce these sounds as words and phrases with certain of the meanings permitted by English: "you" as a the second person singular pronoun, which refers to the person the speaker addresses; "are late" as a verb phrase that is truly predicated of a person if that person, at the time of the utterance, is late for an event, which event being determined by the speaker's intentions [(2b)]. He intends to be referring with "you" to the person entering the room, whom he is addressing [(2e)], and he intends to predicate being late for the meeting they had scheduled, which is the event he has in mind [(2g)]. So he intends to produce an utterance **u** that has the reflexive truth-conditions:

(4.5.1) That *the person the speaker of (4.1) is addressing* is late for *the event that the speaker of (4.1) has in mind*.

Given that Kepa is the speaker and the event he has in mind is the appointment, the incremental truth-conditions are:

(4.5.2) That *the person Kepa is addressing* is late for **Kepa's 10:30 appointment with John** [Truth-conditions with speaker and (2g) parameters fixed.]

Kepa takes it that the person he is addressing is John [(3)], and so intends to produce an utterance with these referential truth-conditions:

(4.5.3) That **John** is late for **the 10:30 meeting between Kepa and John**.

This is the *intended locutionary content*. If Kepa had been right about whom he was addressing, it would also be the locutionary content. But given that it is not John, but Tomasz, whose shoulder Kepa sees, the actual locutionary content of his act is

(4.5.4) That **Tomasz** is late for **the 10:30 meeting between Kepa and John**.

In this case, Kepa produced an utterance with the reflexive content that he intended, but not with the locutionary content he intended. The locutionary content depends on the actual features of context relevant to indexical features of language.

We need to use the concept of the speaker's plan to approach concepts like "intended referent" or "speaker's referent" with the needed delicacy. Did Kepa refer to the person he intended to refer to? Yes, because he referred to the person he was addressing, just as he intended? Or no, because he referred to Tomasz, when he meant to refer to John? The answer is that Kepa intended to refer to whomever was playing a certain role vis a vis the utterance, and in this he succeeded, and he intended by doing that to refer to John, and in this he failed. Because his belief was false, his utterance did not have the locutionary content he intended it to have.

The conventions of English permit one to use "is late" to predicate being late for an appointment or other event, which need not be articulated, and it is in this way that Kepa intended to use the phrase [(2g)]. The conventions also permit one to predicate the property of arriving later than one usually arrives. Perhaps, independently of appointments, John usually shows up by eight, and is in the office before Kepa arrives after his train trip from the city. John might take Kepa to have used "late" in this sense and to convey not criticism in hopes of producing chagrin, but curiosity in hopes of obtaining information about what happened to get John off to a late start on this particular day.

For the locutionary act, however, Kepa's intentions in the matter are determinative. Even if John understands Kepa to have used "are late" in the second way, it doesn't matter. Even if any fair-minded observer would have taken Kepa to have used them in that sense, it doesn't matter for the locutionary content.

**(4.6) *I am Joana***

With identity statements what is said seldom coincides with locutionary content. When Joana says (4.6) to John, the locutionary content of her utterance is:

(4.6.1) That **Joana** is **Joana**.

If this were what she said, she would have said the same thing by saying,

(4.7) Joana is Joana

or

(4.8) I am I

But only those with intuitions twisted by theoretical commitments would suppose that this is correct. So what is going on?

There are many people in the world who share the name "Joana," a number of whom Joana knows, and uses the name to refer to. The issue of which Joana she refers to is settled by her intention [(2d)]. In this case, of course, she refers to herself. So Joana intends to produce an utterance (4.6) with the reflexive content

(4.6.2) That *the speaker of (4.6) is the person the speaker of (4.6) is referring to with the name "Joana"*.

Joana realizes that she is the speaker, and that she intends to use "Joana" to refer to herself, and so intends, by producing an utterance with (4.6.2) as its reflexive truth-conditions, to produce one with (4.6.1) as its referential truth-conditions. She succeeds in this, and so (4.6.1) is the locutionary content of her remark.

But our ordinary concept of "what is said" is responsive to the information the speaker is attempting to convey, which may be lost at the level of referential content. In this case, Joana might be trying to convey that her name is "Joana." This would be likely if she were talking to someone for a while, whom she did not have any reason to believe had ever heard of Joana Garmendia, but had obtained a concept of her, and would like to know her name. The relevant information might be identified as the truth-conditions with the context and the meanings, other than the referent of "Joana," fixed:

(4.6.3) That I am *the person with the name "Joana" to whom the speaker of (4.6) intends to refer*.

Or perhaps Joana's interlocutor has been waiting for Joana Garmendia to show up to give a talk, but doesn't recognize her. Then the information she manages to convey is that the person he is looking at, and whose utterance (4.6) he hears, is Joana. She conveys this information by conveying the truth-conditions of her utterance with the meanings fixed, including that of "Joana," but the context allowed to vary, so what the interlocutor grasps is:

(4.6.4) That *the speaker of (4.6) is Joana*.

Since the interlocutor identifies (4.6) as "the utterance I am hearing," and the speaker of it as "the woman in front of me," he learns that the person he has

been waiting for is now in front of him, something he wouldn't have learned had Joana said (4.7) or (4.8).

### §5. Locutionary vs. propositional content

Our concept of a locutionary act is intended to be similar to Austin's. His definition was:

The utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain 'meaning' in the favourite philosophical sense of that word, i.e. with a certain sense and with a certain reference. (Austin, 1961, p. 94).

According to Austin, locutionary acts are what saying consists in in its full general sense. They are the acts *of* saying something in contrast with the acts performed *in* saying something. We formulate it as the difference between the act of 'locuting' something (with a certain content, in our favored sense of the word) and the act of 'saying' it (telling it, asking it) to someone. How faithful to Austin this is depends on just what he had in mind, which has been a matter of debate (cf. Searle (1968), Strawson (1973), Forguson (1973), for an early discussion).<sup>7</sup>

Surprisingly, Searle rejected Austin's distinction between locutionary acts and acts of (illocutionary) saying, arguing that 'it cannot be completely general, in the sense of marking off two mutually exclusive classes of acts' (Searle 1968, p. 143).<sup>8</sup> From our point of view, this would mean that the same act could be an instance of two different actions, locuting and saying, and wouldn't constitute a problem. Setting this argument aside, it seems that Searle followed Austin's lead, and offered a concept of locutionary act under a different label: the *propositional* act.

So, in order to clarify our concept of locutionary content, a comparison with Searle's propositional content will help. In (5.1) – (5.5) Kepa is talking to John; John is the speaker in (5.3), Kepa in the others, and all occur on Monday, May 14.

(5.1) Will I finish the paper by tomorrow?

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<sup>7</sup> Our locutionary content would probably be closer to Strawson's B-meaning, but we are not interested in exegetical issues here.

<sup>8</sup> Searle does not distinguish between meaning and content, and this makes him sound quite a literalist, i.e. as defending that sentence meaning determines utterance content. That would contrast with his better-known contextualist views as exposed in Searle (1980), for example.

- (5.2) I will finish the paper by tomorrow.
- (5.3) Kepa, finish the paper by tomorrow!
- (5.4) [I hope] to finish the paper by tomorrow.
- (5.5) If I finish the paper by tomorrow, [John will be pleased].

According to Searle, the same propositional content is expressed by the unbracketed parts of all of these utterances.

Within the reflexive-referential theory, there is more than one candidate for this content. For each utterance except (5.3) we can identify a reflexive content:

- (5.x.1) That *the speaker of (5.x) finish the paper referred to by the speaker of (5.x) before the day after (5.x) is uttered*

But this will not do. First of all, since the reflexive truth-conditions are conditions on the utterance itself, the reflexive truth-conditions for each utterance are different. Second, a proposition of this sort will not do for (5.3), where John is the speaker. So it seems our candidate for the common propositional content must be the referential content:

- (5.x.2) That **Kepa finishes the paper by May 15, 2006**

That seems to work for all of the utterances. They are all about a person and his finishing a certain paper by a particular date. They use this content in different ways but all locute or express it. It fits well our intuitions that, on Wednesday, May 16, Kepa could express it uttering:

- (5.8) I finished the paper by yesterday,

or by John addressing Kepa,

- (5.9) You finished the paper by yesterday [as you promised].

It seems, then, that our locutionary content is just another label for Searle's propositional content. But there are some points where Searle's propositional content diverges from our locutionary content.

First of all, according to Searle's original view, there would be no difference in the propositional content of utterances (5.1)—(5.5) on the one hand, and (5.10), on the other:

(5.10) I promise to finish the paper by tomorrow.

Thus, the content of the (sub-)utterance of 'I promise' would vanish from the content of (5.10) because, its meaning, he thought, determines the illocutionary force and that is what are trying to contrast the proposition with.

On our view the locutionary content of the subordinate clause in (5.10) is the proposition (5.x.2), but the whole of (5.10) has a more complex locutionary content:

(5.11) That **Kepa** promises at **the time of (5.10)** to bring it about that **Kepa** finishes **the paper** before **the day after the time of (5.10)**.

However, Searle changed his view on this point in his later essay, "How performatives work" (1989), where the propositional content does include the content of the 'performative verb' and its subject, so this is a moot point.

There is a second and more important difference between propositional content and locutionary content, however. An important concept in Searle's theory is the concept of the propositional content conditions of a speech act. Some of these conditions are determined, according to the theory, by the illocutionary point. The commissive illocutionary point, for instance, establishes that the propositional content of a speech act with that point---e.g., a promise---must represent a future act of the speaker. The directive illocutionary point, in contrast, determines that the propositional content of a speech act with that point---e.g. a request---must represent a future act by the addressee.

We think that the locutionary content (or Searle's propositional content) is not the content that could satisfy the 'propositional content' conditions of the speech act. Recall our basic picture: a speaker plans to produce an utterance with certain reflexive truth-conditions, and intends to thereby produce an utterance with certain referential truth conditions, i.e. locutionary content. The level of reflexive content is crucial, because many of the effects that a speaker will intend for his utterance to have will depend on the hearer's recognition of the reflexive content. This was illustrated by the section on identity statements in the section §4. Joana's plan for conveying the various bits of information she wants to convey involves the hearer hearing the utterance and grasping its reflexive contents. The hearer can combine this content with what he already knows, and infer the information she is trying to convey. In one case, this was the name of

the person he is talking to; in another, it was the whereabouts of someone whom he already had a "file" on, namely, that Joana is the person talking to him.

We call the constituents of the locutionary content, the places, things and people that are constituents of the proposition expressed, the *subject matter* of the utterance. So Joana is the subject matter of her utterance, "I am Joana". Often, the elements of the subject matter play a role in the utterance situation. Indexicals, of course, are the most explicit means of conveying this information. When Joana says "I am Joana," she conveys not only the trivial locutionary content, but the important fact that the person in the subject matter of the locutionary content is also playing the role of the speaker of the utterance itself. When John says to Kepa, "You must finish the paper," Kepa is an element of the subject matter, the paper-finisher, but also a part of the utterance situation, the addressee. This information is conveyed by "you". This sort of information is lost at the level of locutionary content. If the speaker doesn't get the reflexive content right, even if the locutionary content is grasped, important information will be lost.

We agree with Searle that the illocutionary point of an utterance is not part of the locutionary content or propositional content. It is a fact about the utterance that it is important for the listener to grasp, but it is not part of the proposition expressed. And we agree that certain illocutionary points (and forces) of utterances put conditions on the content. But it is up to the reflexive content, not the locutionary content, to satisfy these conditions.

It is in grasping the reflexive content that the hearer understands the intended relationships between the speaker and the utterance, including the time of the utterance and the addressee.

Consider again

(5.2) I will finish the paper by tomorrow.

and now compare it with

(5.12) Kepa finishes the paper by May 15, 2006

Both of these utterances could arguably be uttered as commissives, that is, with that intended illocutionary point on the same locutionary content. But (5.12) puts a greater cognitive burden on the listener. To understand (5.12) as a commissive, the hearer has to have at least the information that the speaker is

Kepa and the time of utterance is prior to May 15, for one can only commit to future actions, and one can only commit *oneself*. (5.8), on the other hand, cannot be understood as a commissive. The reflexive content of (5.2) imposes the right utterance roles on the finisher of the paper and the time of finishing; the reflexive content of (5.12) is *consistent* with them having the right roles in the utterance, and the reflexive content of (5.8) is *inconsistent* with them playing the appropriate roles; the finishing has to be in the *past*. Similar remarks apply to (5.3), uttered as a directive.

Searle's theory of speech acts poses two different tasks for the concept of propositional contents. On the one hand, it represents the basic content on which the diverse illocutionary forces operate. On the other hand, it is the content that meets the conditions imposed by certain illocutionary points and forces. But, as we argued for the case of the ordinary concept of what is said, these two tasks cannot be accomplished by a single content. The locutionary or referential content of an utterance can be taken as that basic shared content of different speech acts but, instead of locutionary content, reflexive content is needed to serve as the content fulfilling Searle's 'propositional content conditions.' The theory of speech acts, as well as the theory of implicatures as we showed in "Three Demonstrations and a Funeral," and the theory of meaning, content and communication, in general, would benefit if they adopted a pluralistic view of utterance content in terms of locutionary and reflexive contents as the one we sketch here. They all are too demanding on a single content, whatever it is called: "what is said," "propositional content," "proposition expressed" or "truth-conditions of an utterance."

## §6. Conclusion

The main focus of this paper is the development of the concept of locutionary content, as a theoretical concept that is better suited than the ordinary concept of *what is said* for some of the theoretical purposes to which the latter has been put, especially that of grounding the concept of *the proposition expressed by an utterance*.

What does this tell us about how to say things with words? The important lesson, we believe, is that the intentions involved in saying something are not simply a matter of choosing a proposition to serve as locutionary content, and hoping that the uptake circumstances are such that one manages to convey

the information one wishes; instead one has to focus on the reflexive truth-conditions of the utterance one plans to produce, for only at this level can much of the crucial information, necessary to producing the intended cognitive and non-cognitive effects, including the grasping of the intended illocutionary force, be found. The reflexive-referential theory allows us to incorporate this point of view into a theory that ties the pragmatics of an utterance closely to the semantics of an utterance, conceived (more or less) traditionally as a matter of its truth-conditions.

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## Appendix: the reflexive-referential theory

The reflexive-referential theory of meaning and content (RRT) has the following basic tenets and uses the following notation:

1. The basic subject matter of semantics and pragmatics are the *contents* of utterances, where utterances are taken to be intentional acts, at least typically involving the use of language. Utterances are assumed to occur at a time, in a place, and to have a speaker.
2. The paradigm is the use of a declarative sentence. For such utterances, the contents of utterances are *propositions*. Propositions are abstract objects that are assigned *truth-conditions*. Propositions are conceived as classificatory tools, rather than denizens of a third realm. Theorists use propositions to classify utterances by the conditions under which the utterances are true. This use of propositions is a development of a

capacity of ordinary speakers, who classify not only utterances but also other cognitive states and activities by their truth-conditions, typically, in English, with the use of "that"-clauses.

3. We adopt a notation for propositions that is compatible with a number of different theories of what propositions are, and choices of abstract objects to model them. The proposition that **Elwood** lives in **Dallas** can be thought of as the set of worlds in which Elwood lives in Dallas, or the function that yields truth for worlds in which he does and falsity for worlds in which he doesn't, or as a sequence of the relation of living, Elwood and Dallas, or in a number of other ways.

Now suppose that Elwood is in fact the shortest podiatrist. The proposition that **the shortest podiatrist** lives in **Dallas** will be the same proposition as that **Elwood** lives in **Dallas**. The roman boldface in our language for specifying propositions indicates that the constituent of the proposition are the objects designated (named or described) by the boldface term, rather than any identifying condition that may be associated with that term.

On the other hand, the proposition that *the shortest podiatrist* lives in **Dallas** does not have Elwood as a constituent, but the identifying condition of being the shortest podiatrist; this is what is indicated by the boldface italic. This proposition will be true in worlds in which, whoever the shortest podiatrist is, he or she lives in Dallas. The proposition that *the shortest podiatrist* lives in *the city in which **John F. Kennedy was shot*** is true in a world in which whoever the shortest podiatrist is, he or she lives in whatever city in which Kennedy was shot. This will be the same proposition as that *the shortest podiatrist* lives in *the city in which **the 34<sup>th</sup> President was shot***. The boldface roman indicates that Kennedy himself, the person described by "the 34<sup>th</sup> President," is a constituent of the condition that identifies the city. On the other hand, the proposition that *the shortest podiatrist* lives in *the city in which **the 34<sup>th</sup> President was shot*** is true in worlds in which whoever is the shortest podiatrist lives in the same city in whoever was the 34<sup>th</sup> President was shot.

4. RRT assigns *contents* to utterances based on the idea of *relative truth-conditions*: Given certain facts, what *else* has to be the case for the utterance to be true? We illustrate the idea with an example. Let **u** be an utterance of "You are irritating David," by Kepa, addressed to John, and expressing the proposition that John is getting on David Israel's nerves.
- a. Given that **u** is uttered by Kepa in English, and given the meanings of the words &c., and that Kepa is addressing John, and that Kepa is using "irritate" with its meaning of "get on the nerves of," and that Kepa is using "David" to refer to David Israel, **u** is true iff **John** is getting on the nerves of **David Israel**.

The proposition that **John** is getting on the nerves of **David Israel** is called, at various times, the *referential* content of **u**, the *official content* of **u**, and the content of **u** with the facts of meaning and context fixed and nambiguities resolved, notated "Content<sub>c</sub>". ("Nambiguity" is the phenomenon of more than one person, place or thing having the same name.)

- b. Given *only* that **u** is uttered in English, and given the meanings of the words, but none of the other facts listed above, **u** is true iff there are *x*, *y*, and *z* such that *x* is the speaker of **u**, *x* is addressing *y*, *x* is exploiting a convention that assigns "David" as a name of *z* to refer to *z*, and either (i) *x* is using "irritate" with its meaning of "get on the nerves of" and *y* is getting on *z*'s nerves, or (ii) *x* is using "irritate" with its meaning of "cause inflammation" and *y* is causing the inflammation of some part of *z*.

The proposition identified by the sentence to the right of the "iff" is what the RRT calls a *reflexive content* of **u**. The word "reflexive" honors the fact that the proposition in question has **u** itself as a constituent; it gives us the truth-conditions for **u** in terms of conditions on **u** itself.

- c. Given everything in (b), plus the fact that the speaker of **u** is using "irritate" to mean "get on the nerves of," and is using "David" to refer to David Israel, **u** is true iff there are  $x$ , and  $y$  such that  $x$  is the speaker of **u**,  $x$  is addressing  $y$ , and  $y$  is getting on **David's** nerves. This is also a reflexive content; it is what we call *indexical content* or  $\text{Content}_M$  --- content with the meanings fixed and ambiguities resolved, but not the contextual facts.
- d. Given everything in (b), plus the fact that Kepa is the speaker, he is speaking to John, and is using "irritate" to mean "get on the nerves of," **u** is true iff there is a  $z$  such that **Kepa** is using "David" to refer to  $z$  and **John** is getting on  $z$ 's nerves. Here the context is given, and the meanings that are being exploited, but the nambiguity is not resolved. Notice that the proposition expressed by the sentence to the right of the "iff" is not reflexive in our official sense; its constituents are Kepa and John, and don't include the utterance. However, it is not fully referential either, since it involves an identifying condition of David, and not David himself. Sometimes such contents, which no longer have the utterance itself as a constituent, are called "incremental," and the referential content is called "fully incremental."
5. The official or referential content is what is ordinarily taken as the proposition expressed, or *what is said*; that is the basis of the account of locutionary content in the article. But the other contents are available to describe the various communicative intentions and uptakes that occur, as is also illustrated by examples in the article.