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Illocution and Understanding

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Abstract: What are the connections between the successful performance of illocutionary acts and audience understanding or uptake of their performance? According to one class of proposals, audience understanding suffices for successful performance. I explain how those proposals emerge from earlier work and seek to clarify some of their interrelations.

Keywords: Speech Acts; Illocutionary Acts; Understanding; Uptake; J.L. Austin; Paul Grice; John Searle; John McDowell; Jennifer Hornsby.

1. Introduction.

The aims in light of which one attempts to tell someone something characteristically include the aim of being understood. How should we understand that aim? And is it a necessary or sufficient condition for successfully telling someone something that one achieves it? On the natural assumption that telling is a form of illocutionary act, those questions interact with more general questions about illocution. Is it a necessary or sufficient condition on successfully performing any illocutionary act that one achieves uptake—that one’s audience understands one’s attempt to perform it? And can the bounds of the illocutionary be specified by appeal to operative uptake conditions? My aim is to gain clarity about some answers that have been offered to these questions as a step towards addressing them.

I proceed historically, beginning with J. L. Austin (§2), and then explaining, first, how Paul Grice’s approach to illocution might be seen as an attempt to build on Austin’s (§3), and, second, how John Searle’s, John McDowell’s, and Jennifer Hornsby’s approaches build on Grice’s (§4). §5 takes stock by setting out some of the options that emerge from the foregoing and raising a question about telling.

2. Austin.

We often perform one act in order to perform others. Thus, for example, one might boil a kettle in order to make tea. Similarly, in the case of acts of

speech, one might ask someone the time in order to arrive fashionably late. And one might state one thing in order to insinuate another, and do the latter, in turn, in order to offend an eavesdropper. Where one thing is done in order to do another, both are done intentionally. But a similar structure can be discerned in which at least some of the things that are done are not done intentionally. For example, one might upset someone unintentionally by—again, unintentionally—revealing something about their partner, and do the latter by telling them that Smith is an embezzler; and one might do that, in turn, by saying that Smith is an embezzler, and do that by uttering the sentence, “Smith is an embezzler.”

Austin thought that it would be worthwhile to impose a structure on such chains of things that can be done by speaking, by distinguishing three kinds amongst such acts: locutionary acts; illocutionary acts; and perlocutionary acts. To a first approximation, his idea was that illocutionary acts are the fundamentally *communicative* things we do, while locutionary and perlocutionary acts are conditions and consequences, respectively, of the performance of illocutionary acts. The performance of locutionary acts is a characteristic requirement on the performance of illocutionary acts—so that we can perform illocutionary acts *in* performing locutionary acts. Thus, we might tell someone that their collar is crooked *in* saying that their collar is crooked. And the performance of perlocutionary acts is a further consequence of the performance of illocutionary (and perhaps locutionary) acts, so that we can perform perlocutionary acts *by* performing illocutionary acts. Thus, we

might induce someone to fix their collar *by* telling them that it is crooked. (Austin 1962.)

Austin was not satisfied that he had successfully delineated a sharp boundary around the illocutionary acts (Austin 1962: 99, 121–132). And others have agreed that Austin's appeal to the distinction between things we do *in*, and things we do *by*, doing other things is too blunt an instrument to achieve this aim. (See e.g. Hornsby 1994: 189. See also Bird 1981; Hornsby 1988.) However, an important class of attempts to improve on Austin's have built on a further idea of his, according to which illocutionary acts might be marked out from others by their especially close association with audience uptake. The idea surfaces in the following two passages:

Unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act will not have been happily, successfully performed. This is not to say that the illocutionary act is the achieving of some effect. I cannot be said to have warned an audience unless it hears what I say and takes what I say in a certain sense. An effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out. How should we put it best here? And how should we limit it? Generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution. So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of *uptake*. (Austin 1962: 116–117, his emphasis.)

Similarly,

it is always possible, for example, to try to thank or inform somebody yet in different ways to fail, because he doesn't listen, or takes it as ironical, or wasn't responsible for whatever it was, and so on. (Austin 1962: 106.)

Although Austin touches here on the idea that illocutionary acts are distinctively subject to an uptake requirement, his discussion is brief and elusive. He doesn't make plain either the precise nature or the generality of the uptake requirement. As Maximilian de Gaynesford notes, Austin's opening sentence elides his own distinction between failures to perform—Austin's *misfires*—and unhappy but otherwise successful performances—Austin's *abuses* (de Gaynesford 2011: 123). It thereby fails to make clear whether the uptake condition is a necessary condition on performance or only on *felicitous* performance. (On a natural construal of abuses, they would involve representing oneself in a misleading way. For example, in asserting, one might represent oneself as knowing, so that, if one failed to know, one would thereby have abused the capacity so to represent oneself. Unless one were willing to allow that in telling, one represents oneself as being understood, that model would not apply to otherwise felicitous attempts at telling that failed to achieve uptake. In that case, the category of successful but unhappy performances would be wider than the category of abuses.)

Furthermore, it isn't clear whether Austin intends the uptake condition to apply generally to all illocutionary acts. He explicitly affirms uptake as a

necessary condition on performance only with respect to the act of warning. And the definite article in the immediately following sentence—“if *the* illocutionary act is to be carried out”—indicates that the necessary condition it imposes is restricted to that possibly special case. Similarly, the concluding sentence tells us only that performance “*involves* the securing of uptake,” rather than that it *requires* uptake, whilst the preceding sentence’s opening “generally” suggests that “bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution” may be only a special case of uptake. Finally, in the second quotation, Austin suggests that audience understanding of the non-ironical force of an utterance might be necessary for thanking and informing, but again leaves open that those two acts might be special cases.

At first sight, Austin seems to take a firmer stand here:

Moreover, comparing stating to what we have said about the illocutionary act, it is an act to which, just as much as to other illocutionary acts, it is essential to ‘secure uptake’: the doubt about whether I stated something if it was not heard or understood is just the same as the doubt about whether I warned *sotto voce* or protested if someone did not take it as a protest, &c. (Austin 1962: 139.)

However, Austin’s purpose here is to defend the view that stating is susceptible to the same requirements as other examples of illocutionary acts, whatever they are, rather than to defend any particular views about those requirements beyond those that he had expressed earlier and which we have

just considered. Thus, although Austin seems at first explicit that “it is essential” to secure uptake, he does not make clear whether he takes uptake to be essential to the *performance* of illocutionary acts, or only to their *felicitous* performance. And rather than making the straightforward claim that one who was not heard or understood could not have stated, Austin avers only that the same *doubt* attends their having done so as attends other cases in which uptake is absent. (For illuminating further discussion, see de Gaynesford 2011: 122–125.)

3. Grice.

Austin’s guardedness notwithstanding, it has seemed to some other theorists that reflection on uptake might provide the key to unlocking illocution. Grice, in particular, has presented an account of the constitutive conditions on the communicative act of meaning something that, on natural assumptions, gives rise to an account of distinctively communicative acts on which a form of uptake is both necessary and sufficient for successful performance.

Grice’s stated aim in presenting his account is to specify necessary and sufficient conditions for someone’s meaning something in, or by, doing something else—say, uttering some words. This is what Grice calls *non-natural* or *speaker meaning*, *meaning_{NN}*. However, he makes clear that a central target of his account is the putatively illocutionary act of telling:

What we want to find is the difference between, for example, “deliberately and openly letting someone know” and “telling” and between “getting someone to think” and “telling.” (Grice 1957: 218.)

So, it is natural, if not inevitable, to treat Grice’s proposal as part of an attempt to characterise a range of distinctively illocutionary acts, including telling, in the performance of which someone means_{SNN} something. (The initial impetus for this treatment of Grice’s account, as an attempted elaboration of Austin’s, comes from Strawson 1964. In pursuing the line of descent from Austin that goes via Grice, I largely ignore those lines that focus on another aspect of Austin’s discussion, also highlighted by Strawson: his idea that illocutionary acts are distinctively conventional. As will become apparent during the following discussion, however, Grice’s own proposal cannot be accepted as it stands, and the successor proposals to be considered have important commonalities with more explicitly convention-based approaches. For further discussion and development of convention-based approaches, see e.g. Bauer 2015; Bird 1981; Crary 2007; Langton 1993; Laugier 2017.)

Grice summarises his proposal in the following way:

Shortly, perhaps, we may say that “*A* meant_{NN} something by *x*” is roughly equivalent to “*A* uttered *x* with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention.” (Grice 1957: 219.)

Here, Grice specifies necessary and sufficient conditions for the act of meaning something, by appeal to the intentions with which a distinct act, the act of uttering, is performed. His proposal entails that it is necessary and sufficient for successfully attaining one's ends in meaning something that one's communicative intention—to have this communicative intention recognised—be recognised. In that sense, success requires uptake. However, Grice's account allows that one can successfully perform an act of meaning something—for example, an act of telling—whether or not one's intentions are recognised. What is required for successful performance of the act is only that one act with the required communicative intentions. It is not required, in addition, that the ends set by those intentions are achieved.

However, it is natural to hold that where an act cannot be performed except with specific intentions, then that is because the ends set by those intentions are constitutive ends of the act itself, and not merely essential accompaniments. Why else should it be that performance of the act is dependent on acting with those very intentions? Accordingly, it is natural to hold that since an act of meaning can be performed only by someone with the communicative intentions that Grice describes, it is a constitutive end of the act of meaning something that the intentions with which it is undertaken be recognised. For example, if it is impossible to tell someone something unless one does so with the communicative intentions that Grice specifies, then it is natural to think that that is because those intentions are required in order intentionally to tell someone something. But it is natural to think that that is so only because intending to tell someone something is intending to achieve

the constitutive ends of telling someone something, which include recognition of the performance of that very act. In that case, successful performance of an act of meaning something—for example, an act of telling someone something—requires more than mere accompaniment by appropriate communicative intentions. It requires, in addition, that the constitutive ends of one's act be achieved. So, on this alternative treatment of Grice's proposal, it is construed as an account of what speakers intentionally do, or try to do, rather than as an account of what they merely intend to (try to) do. (A defender of Grice's own presentation of his proposal might prefer to view his account as an account of a system of accompanying intentions rather than of a kind of act. However, Grice's proposal would then lose its potential bearing on the bounds of illocution and its hope of characterising the act of telling.)

We can approach this alternative treatment of Grice's proposal from a slightly different direction. A worry that is sometimes raised about Grice's proposal is that it makes meaning something too easy, since someone might in principle intend more or less anything by more or less any performance. For example, one might produce a squeak with the communicative intentions that might otherwise have accompanied one's telling one's audience that Peano Arithmetic is incomplete. Although it would ordinarily be unreasonable to expect one's audience to recognise the communicative intentions with which one squeaked, having sufficiently unusual beliefs about one's audience might make it possible so to intend. Since it seems implausible that one meant anything by one's squeak—and especially implausible that, in

squeaking, one told one's audience that Peano Arithmetic is incomplete—there is a difficulty here for Grice's proposal. One sort of response would be to add to Grice's account the condition that its subjects must be reasonable. But it is a short step from there to the requirement that, in order for one's communicative intentions to be reasonable, the act one performs with those intentions must be suitable to enable one's audience to recognise the intentions with which one acts. And that leads, by another route, to the alternative view, on which meaning something is performing an act the constitutive end of which is the recognition of the communicative ends with which it is undertaken. (We'll return below to a possible weakening of this proposal, on which the constitutive aim of the act of telling is making one's communicative intentions *recognisable*, rather than having them recognised.)

Even if we treat Grice's proposal as an account of the nature of a range of specifically communicative acts, it faces a fundamental difficulty that is disguised by the formulation on which we have focused to this point. According to that formulation, the intentions with which one acts when one means something include the intention of inducing a belief in one's audience. However, acting with that intention is an almost trivial corollary of acting with the intention that one's intention be recognised. For recognising what someone intends is a way of knowing, or coming to know, what they intend; and knowing what someone intends plausibly requires believing that which one knows. So, the presently operative statement of Grice's proposal serves to disguise a problem that arises when more is said about the beliefs one who means something must intend to instil.

As is well known, Grice says more about the target beliefs. Focusing on the case of broadly assertoric communicative intentions, including those required for telling someone something, Grice wavers between requiring of one who asserts that *p* the intention to induce in their audience the belief that *p*, and requiring of them the intention to induce in their audience the belief that they (the speaker) believe that *p*. (See e.g. Grice 1968: 123, 1982: 300.) Grice is forced into making a proposal of this sort by the ambitious nature of his project. For his project is not only to account for what is distinctive of illocutionary acts, but also to provide accounts of the variety of specific acts that fall within that boundary. He therefore needs to explain the differences amongst those specific acts, including, for example, the difference between telling someone something and asking them something. And now given that he aims to provide that explanation by appeal to speakers' intentions, his resources are quite limited. He cannot appeal to the marker of communicative intentions in general—that they are intentions to have themselves be recognised—since, being general, that marker fails to discriminate amongst communicative acts. He is therefore forced to appeal to audience directed intentions that are able to discriminate amongst communicative acts. And it is more or less inevitable at that stage to seek to account for what is distinctive of broadly assertoric communicative acts, including the act of telling, by appeal to intentions to induce in one's audience states of belief or knowledge either concerning the subject matter of the telling or concerning the speaker's own beliefs about that subject matter.

Given his ambitious project, then, Grice is compelled to adopt the view that in order to tell someone something, one must act with the intention that one's audience form an appropriate belief or acquire appropriate knowledge. The difficulty now is that, although intending that one's audience acquire the sorts of beliefs or knowledge that figure in Grice's proposal is quite characteristic of the act of telling, it is not obviously a necessary or constitutive condition.

Ian Rumfitt offers the following case:

In the course of their interrogation by the police, it must have become clear very quickly to the members of the Birmingham Six that nothing they could do or say would persuade their interlocutors *either* that they (the suspects) had not planted the bombs *or* that they (the suspects again) *believed* that they had not planted the bombs. For all that, when they uttered the words "We did not plant the bombs", the suspects certainly meant that they did not plant the bombs, and asserted as much. (Rumfitt 1995: 834.)

One cannot intend something that one knows (or believes) to be impossible. Since the suspects in the case that Rumfitt presents knew that it was impossible for them to induce in their audience either the belief that they had not planted the bombs, or the belief that they believe that they had not planted the bombs, the suspects could not speak with the intention of inducing such beliefs. Nonetheless, it is plausible that they were able to undertake a form of

telling their interrogators that they did not plant the bombs. (Rumfitt 1995: 832–834. See also McDowell 1980: 37–41; Searle 1969: 46–47; Strawson 1964: 398–399. We’ll return in §5 to the question whether something like Grice’s condition might hold of other forms of telling.)

This difficulty arises because the resources to which Grice appeals are inadequate to characterise a minimal form of telling. At best, those resources are able to specify characteristic, but inessential, further ends of episodes of that form of telling. That is, they provide an account not of that illocutionary act of telling, but rather of a characteristic class of perlocutionary acts that are performed by means of that act. However, the failure of Grice’s ambitious analytic project leaves intact his contribution to the more modest project of characterising the general distinction between illocutionary and other speech acts. For purposes of that project, differences amongst the various specific illocutionary acts can be taken as primitive. (See e.g. McDowell 1980: 42.) Grice’s contribution to the more modest project is then the idea that the act of telling, and so the intention to tell, incorporates the constitutive end of having one’s act understood. Thus, the lines of objection to Grice considered here provide convergent support for approaches according to which the natures of acts of telling, and of illocutionary acts more generally, explain, rather than being explained by, the intentions with which speakers act. (For further, broadly convergent critical discussion of Grice’s ambitious project, see especially Travis 1991.)

4. Searle, McDowell, and Hornsby.

Searle presents the consequent picture of the communicative function of telling in the following way:

Human communication has some extraordinary properties, not shared by most other kinds of human behaviour. One of the most extraordinary is this: If I am trying to tell someone something, then (assuming certain conditions are satisfied) as soon as he recognises that I am trying to tell him something and exactly what it is I am trying to tell him, I have succeeded in telling it to him. Furthermore, unless he recognises that I am trying to tell him something and what I am trying to tell him, I do not fully succeed in telling it to him. (Searle 1969: 47.)

On this view, both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are bound up with effects, but the illocutionary acts constitutively involve only what Searle calls the distinctively “illocutionary effect” of one’s audience understanding one’s act (Searle 1969: 47).

Like Austin’s putative endorsement of uptake as a necessary condition for performance of an illocutionary act, Searle’s presentation of necessary and sufficient conditions is qualified. First, he characterises the conditions with respect only to the specific act of telling, rather than with respect to a more general class of illocutionary acts, thus leaving open that different conditions might apply to different acts. (Indeed, his proposal about telling would be consistent with denying that telling is an illocutionary act.) Second,

the sufficient condition is qualified by the parenthetical requirement that “certain conditions are satisfied”. Searle’s thought here seems to be that in order to suffice for understanding, recognition must be the upshot of a special sensitivity to a restricted class of features of the attempt—roughly, its semantical features. So, for example, recognition that was based largely on information about the act that was acquired in some other way—say, by testimony—would not suffice for successful performance (Searle 1969: 47–50). And third, the necessary condition is not presented as a requirement on successful performance, but only as a requirement on *fully* successful performance. We’ll return below to what the distinction between successful and fully successful performance might amount to.

For our purposes, the third qualification is the most important. It is captured in a particular way in McDowell’s version of Searle’s proposal:

The primary communicative intention is the intention, for instance, to say such-and-such to the audience. The appropriate mutual awareness is awareness that the speaker has indeed said that such-and-such to the audience. Speech acts are publications of intentions; the primary aim of speech is to produce an object—the speech act itself—that is perceptible publicly, and in particular to the audience, embodying an intention whose content is precisely a recognizable performance of that very speech act. Recognition by an audience that such an intention has been made public in this way leaves nothing further needing to happen for the intention to be fulfilled. (McDowell 1980: 41.)

McDowell's version imposes conditions that are apt to seem in some ways more demanding, and in some ways less demanding, than Searle's. One respect in which McDowell's version is apt to seem more demanding than Searle's is that, while Searle localises the uptake condition with the audience, McDowell suggests that uptake involves *mutual* awareness on behalf of the speaker and their audience. For present purposes, the more important seeming difference concerns the shift from Searle's specification of conditions as involving *recognition* to McDowell's specification of conditions as involving only *recognizability*. Since it is possible for the performance of an act to be recognizable without being recognised, but not *vice versa*, this is apt to seem a respect in which McDowell's conditions are weaker than Searle's. However, since being recognised entails being recognizable, McDowell's version agrees with Searle's in making recognition a sufficient condition for successful performance. Furthermore, since it is possible for an act to be recognizable without being recognised, McDowell's version endorses what Searle's leaves open, that recognition is not a necessary condition on successful performance. On the reasonable assumption that aiming to make one's performance of an act recognizable is characteristically at the service of having it be recognised, McDowell could allow a reasonable sense in which a recognizable but unrecognised attempt would amount to a successful performance whilst failing to be *fully* successful. The act of telling would have been performed successfully but the characteristic intention with which

the act was undertaken—the intention that the act be recognised—would not have been fulfilled.

Hornsby articulates a closely related account of the illocutionary boundary, drawing on the idea of *reciprocity*:

When reciprocity obtains between people, they are such as to recognise one another's speech as it is meant to be taken. (Hornsby 1994: 192.)

Her idea is that reciprocity is a standing power of certain groups of people such that members of each group are able to recognise some of the communicative acts attempted by members of the group, and so members of the group are able to perform communicative acts that are recognizable by members of the group. Hornsby's account of the illocutionary boundary is then the following:

Allowing ourselves a background of reciprocity, illocutionary acts might be circumscribed thus:

ϕ -ing is an illocutionary act iff a sufficient condition of a person's ϕ -ing that p [for arbitrary p] is that an attempt on her part at ϕ -ing that p causes an audience to take her to be ϕ -ing that p .

(Hornsby 1994: 193–194, with interpolation from a suppressed footnote.)

Hornsby's condition for being an illocutionary act is framed by appeal to an audience's *taking* an attempt to perform an act in a particular way—namely, as a successful performance of the act. On the face of it, Hornsby's condition is weaker than the analogous conditions imposed by Searle and McDowell, on which the sufficient condition for successful performance involves *recognition*. Amending Hornsby's condition so that it incorporated recognition, rather than taking, would deliver the following:

- (R1) ϕ -ing is an illocutionary act iff a sufficient condition of a person's ϕ -ing that p [for arbitrary p] is that an attempt on her part at ϕ -ing that p causes an audience to *recognise* her to be ϕ -ing that p .

Since recognising that an audience is ϕ -ing that p plausibly requires taking it that the audience is ϕ -ing that p , but not *vice versa*, one could meet Hornsby's condition without meeting (R1), but not *vice versa*. Now it might be thought that other features of Hornsby's position bring it closer to (R1). One such feature is her appeal to "a background of reciprocity," and a natural reading of her proposal is that the takings to which she appeals must be the upshot of exercises of the power of reciprocity. Since the power of reciprocity is a (collectively instanced) recognitional capacity, that would make her takings the upshots of such exercises. Furthermore, Hornsby's condition specifies that the taking to which it appeals must be caused by an appropriate attempt at ϕ -ing. Finally, on Hornsby's proposal, an audience's taking it that a speaker

is ϕ -ing that p would suffice for the speaker's ϕ -ing that p , so there is a form of non-accidental connection here between takings and truth. One might expect, therefore, that the form of taking to which she appeals is a fairly close approximation to recognising. (Since recognising plausibly entails knowing, some of the remaining distance between the accounts will be due to the distance between, on one hand, knowledge about events and, on the other hand, beliefs about events that are the upshot of exercises of capacities to know that are causally triggered by the target events.) Still, one might naturally retain a preference for an account framed by appeal to recognition over one framed by appeal to the weaker attitude of taking.

In fact, however, there is a good reason for Hornsby to frame her account by appeal to taking rather than recognising. For (R1) fails to mark a useful distinction between illocutionary and other acts. Like knowing, recognising is factive: recognising that p entails that p . It follows, for arbitrary ϕ , that if someone, A , recognises someone, B , to be ϕ -ing, then B is ϕ -ing. So, it is a sufficient condition for the successful performance of *any* act, and not only an illocutionary act, that someone recognise one to be doing it. This is the reason why Searle and McDowell do not specify their sufficient condition for successful performance by appeal to recognition of performance, but appeal instead to recognition of *attempt* (Searle) or *intention* (McDowell). Thus, the closest alternative to Hornsby's proposal framed by appeal to recognition would be this:

(R2) ϕ -ing is an illocutionary act iff a sufficient condition of a person's ϕ -ing that p [for arbitrary p] is that an attempt on her part at ϕ -ing that p causes an audience to *recognise* her to be *attempting to ϕ* that p .

Proposals of this form are required either to appeal to an appropriately weak attitude—e.g. taking rather than recognising—or an appropriately weak object—e.g. attempting rather than succeeding.

Hornsby agrees with Searle and McDowell not only that a form of uptake is sufficient for illocutionary success, but also that that form of uptake is not necessary for success (Hornsby 1994: 197). And she helpfully articulates an account of why uptake might nonetheless be necessary for *fully* successful performance:

There is surely something right about thinking that performances of illocutionary acts in the absence of reciprocity are in some way defective. For such performances are not such as to further the usual communicative ends of language. Someone who does an illocutionary act in spite of the fact that, in the particular case, her action does not have the effect characteristic of such an act, is not fully understood: she is likely, for instance, to be frustrated in doing any perlocutionary acts she might have intended to go in for. (Hornsby 1994: 198.)

Hornsby's idea is that non-defective—that is, fully successful—performance of illocutionary acts depends on more than mere successful performance. For the performance of such acts is usually not an end in itself, but rather a means to the attainment of further ends. (For the stronger claim that the performance of illocutionary acts is *never* an end in itself, see Davidson 1984: 272.) And achieving those further ends often depends on uptake. In the absence of reciprocity, then, illocutionary performance would lose much of its point. So, although uptake is not a necessary condition on individual illocutionary performance, it is close to a necessary condition on worthwhile performance and, hence, on maintenance of the practice (Hornsby 1994: 198–200. See also Bird 1981: 361–366).

5. Taking stock.

We are now in a position to frame a range of proposals about the connection between illocutionary acts and understanding, along two main dimensions. Along the first dimension, the question is whether understanding, or understandability, are necessary or sufficient conditions on illocutionary success. The second dimension concerns the operative conception of understanding. So, along the first dimension, we have the following views, where ϕ is restricted to illocutionary acts:

- (US1) A sufficient condition of a person's φ -ing that p [for arbitrary p ; henceforth suppressed] is that an attempt on her part at φ -ing that p is understood by her audience.
- (UN1) A necessary condition of a person's φ -ing that p is that an attempt on her part at φ -ing that p is understood by her audience.
- (US2) A sufficient condition of a person's φ -ing that p is that an attempt on her part at φ -ing that p is understandable by her audience.
- (UN2) A necessary condition of a person's φ -ing that p is that an attempt on her part at φ -ing that p is understandable by her audience.

The two main conceptions of understanding, and so understandability, that have been operative in the foregoing can then be captured in the following ways:

- (REC) An audience understands an attempt on a speaker's part at φ -ing that p iff the audience recognises the speaker to be attempting to φ that p .

(TAK) An audience understands an attempt on a speaker's part at φ -ing that p iff the audience takes the speaker to be φ -ing that p .

As we saw in considering Searle's and Hornsby's proposals, there are some grounds for imposing further restrictions on the modes of recognition or taking employed in versions of (REC) and (TAK). If that is right, then one way of imposing those restrictions would be via appeal to specific modes of sensitivity to the illocutionary force and content of attempts at φ -ing that p , or to the more basic features of actions that help to comprise them as acts with that force and content. As well as underpinning the specific modes of recognition or taking that figure in (REC) and (TAK), such specific modes of sensitivity might also play some of the cognitive roles of instances of recognising, or taking, a speaker to be attempting to φ that p . Thus, such sensitivity might be exercised without issuing in recognition or taking, and yet its exercise might still have some of the downstream cognitive consequences usually attributed to recognition or taking. (For one recent attempt to articulate the required form of sensitivity, and the upshots of its exercise, see Longworth 2018.) Using "primitive understanding" as a label for the upshot of exercises of the proposed form of sensitivity, a further conception of the mode of understanding that figures in uptake conditions would be the following:

(UND) An audience understands an attempt on a speaker's part at ϕ -ing that p iff the audience primitively understands the speaker to be (attempting) ϕ -ing that p .

Twelve initial options arise from our brief survey, the pairs (US1) + (UN1), (US1) + (UN2), (US2) + (UN1), and (US2) + (UN2), each pair taking the three forms made available by (REC), (TAK), and (UND). However, since meeting the weaker sufficient condition, (US2), doesn't guarantee meeting the stronger necessary condition, (UN1), we can exclude the three (US2) + (UN1) options, leaving nine options. I've also suggested that, although the views that we've considered here are presented as if they took the (US1) forms, on which understanding is sufficient for successful performance, the fact that understanding entails understandability means that they can also be captured by appeal to the weaker (US2) forms, on which understandability suffices for success. On the view shared by Searle, McDowell, and Hornsby, that the (US2) forms appropriately specify sufficient conditions—and, in particular, that the (UN1) forms don't appropriately specify necessary conditions—we would thereby be in a position also to exclude the six (US1) options, leaving only the three (US2) + (UN2) options. However, whether those options ought to be excluded turns on the question whether uptake is a necessary condition on performance, and although Searle, McDowell, and Hornsby appear to agree that it isn't, others have demurred. (For discussion, see e.g., de Gaynesford 2011, 2018; Langton 1993; Moran 2018.)

Rather than pursuing further the harried question whether uptake is necessary for successful illocutionary performance, I'd like briefly to consider the question whether (US2) can be used to specify the illocutionary boundary by considering again the standing of telling and informing. Hornsby follows Searle (and Austin 1962: 162) in counting telling as an illocutionary act, and considers the following objection:

[An] objection to treating telling as illocutionary may come from someone who thinks (a) that no one is told that *p* unless he becomes informed that *p*; and (b) that a piece of recognition cannot make the difference to whether someone comes to be informed that *p*. (Hornsby 1994: 202.)

Now Hornsby presents the worry here as directed towards her inclusion of telling amongst the illocutionary acts. However, the objection that she considered to so treating telling is bound up with her own proposal about necessary and sufficient conditions on an act's being illocutionary. Thus, the worry could equally be viewed as one to the effect that telling *should* be included amongst the illocutionary acts even though it would appear to be *excluded* by Hornsby's proposal. For Hornsby's proposal tells us that in order for telling to be an illocutionary act, taking an attempt to be a telling must suffice for successful telling, while the objection alleges that successful telling requires, in addition, at least accepting what one is told. On either construal of the worry it would be open to Hornsby to respond that "it is a

matter of theoretical decision how to use ‘illocutionary’” (Hornsby 1994: 195 fn.20). However, Hornsby instead presents a two-pronged response:

(a) It is not obvious that we cannot tell people things that they reject and thus do not become informed of.... (b) Awareness of what a speaker is up to can be part and parcel not only of understanding but also of the actual communication of facts. (Hornsby 1994: 203.)

The first prong, (a), is a straightforward rejection of the objector’s claim (a), and I allowed earlier, in discussing Grice (§3), that it is plausible that there are forms of telling on which it does not require the audience to become informed. However, that leaves open that there might be other forms of telling that are subject to the stronger condition. The second prong, (b), rejects the objector’s (b), but less straightforwardly.

Although Hornsby doesn’t elaborate, one natural attempt to develop the idea that awareness of what a speaker is up to can be part and parcel of the communication of facts would be the following. Telling someone something as the objector conceives it—or, perhaps better, informing someone of something—is, in part, a matter of letting them know something that one knows. Fully successful performance of such an act would therefore require that one possessed the operative knowledge. And recognising such a performance would require recognising the speaker’s possession of that knowledge. Suppose that one thereby recognised that the speaker knows that *p*. Since knowledge is factive, the speaker cannot know that *p* unless *p*.

Assuming, then, that the audience knows that obvious truth about knowledge, their recognising that the speaker knows that p will put them in a position to detach, and thereby come to know that p for themselves.

Alternatively, merely taking it that the speaker has spoken knowledgeably would require one to take it that p , whether or not that taking amounted to a case of recognising. And something similar would hold even where the sufficient condition for success was recognition of an attempt. Attempting an act of informing doesn't obviously require one to satisfy sufficient conditions for being in a position successfully to inform and, so, doesn't obviously require one to possess the operative knowledge. However, it plausibly does require one to take it that one possesses the operative knowledge. Consequently, fulfilling the sufficient condition for the speaker's telling one something by recognising their attempt would require recognising that the speaker takes it that they possess the operative knowledge. By the factiveness of knowledge, the speaker couldn't take it that they know that p without, thereby, taking it that p . So, recognising that the speaker takes it that they know that p translates into recognising that the speaker takes it that p .

The last two proposals give rise to significant mismatches between the primary aim of informing, that the audience comes to share the knowledge that p , and the proposed upshots of understanding, that the audience take it that p , or take it that the speaker takes it that p . If that is right, then one might hope that versions of Hornsby's (b) response could be buttressed by an appropriate (a) response, on which illocutionary informing aims at less than the sharing of knowledge. However, it is a matter of some delicacy whether

that could work, since the (a) response would seem to depend on the fact that informing aims at sharing knowledge. By contrast, the first proposal harmonises well with the primary aim of informing. However, since it appeals to the recognition of acts, rather than attempts, it is of the wrong form to figure in an account of the bounds of illocution (see again §4).

The upshot is that acts aimed constitutively at sharing knowledge plausibly cannot be counted by the present proposals as illocutionary, since understanding them is plausibly insufficient for full success. I leave open the question whether such acts include forms of telling and, if they do, whether it is reasonable to exclude those forms of telling from the class of illocutionary acts. (But see again the discussion of Grice in §3.)

My aim has been to gain clarity about some answers that have been offered to the question whether understanding is necessary or sufficient for telling or for the successful performance of illocutionary acts more generally. I outlined a way in which Austin's idea that understanding plays a central role in illocution (§2) has been developed, first by Grice (§3) and then by Searle, McDowell, and Hornsby (§4). On the basis of that discussion, I set out some of the major options for connecting illocution and understanding and raised the question whether those options can treat informing as an illocutionary act.

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