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V. LINGUISTIC ACTS

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WHEN a person says something, we can generally distinguish three sorts of acts which he is performing (or, if you prefer, we can distinguish three levels of his activity). First, he is uttering some sentence, or sentence-surrogate, e.g., "Would you open the door?" Second, he succeeds in bringing about one or more results of his utterance, e.g., he gets the hearer to open the door, he irritates the hearer, he pleases a third party. Third, he does something which I shall for the moment characterize only negatively by saying that it is something which one can do only when one utters a sentence or sentence-surrogate, but which is not simply the uttering of that sentence, and which does not consist in, or require, the production of any particular effect of the utterance, e.g., asking someone to open the door.[1] Without going beyond this very inadequate characterization, we can find a large number of terms in the language which denote acts of this sort: report, announce, predict, admit, opine, reprimand, ask, request, suggest, order, propose, express, congratulate, promise, thank, exhort.

I am concerned with this third type of linguistic action, for which I shall henceforth reserve the designation, "linguistic act." My own interest in linguistic acts stems largely from a conviction, which I have defended elsewhere, that sameness of meaning of two words is a function of their interchangeability in a wide range of sentences without altering the suitability of each of those sentences for performing the linguistic acts it is used to perform. But a consideration of linguistic acts is philosophically important for other reasons as well. In virtually every branch of philosophy the consideration of one or another sort of linguistic act sometimes becomes of crucial importance. In logic and epistemology we hear much of that large amorphous class of linguistic acts termed assertions or statements. A great deal of ethical theory turns on discussions of reprimands, behests, exhortations, and imputations of obligation. Much of aesthetics is concerned with critical judgments of various sorts—appraisals, evaluations, etc. It is, therefore, of the first importance to get some idea of the conditions under which one could be said to be performing a certain linguistic act. But although suggestions have sporadically appeared concerning linguistic acts of particular local interest in one or another corner of philosophy, there has been no real attempt to tackle the problem as a whole.[2] This paper is the inital stage in such an attempt. I shall proceed by concentrating on a particular linguistic act in the hope that what emerges will be generalizable in one way or another to others.

I

What is it to ask someone to open a door? One thing that is required is that I utter a sentence, or some sentence-surrogate, i.e., some other conventional device which is functioning as a substitute for a sentence; another is that the person addressed be in the vicinity. But obviously these are not sufficient. Even if we specify a particular sentence, such as "Would you open the door?" it is clear that the utterance of this sentence is not enough to constitute asking someone to open the door: I might utter the sentence in the course of giving an example or testing my voice, in which case I would not have asked anyone to open a door. What else is required?

This turns out to be an extraordinarily difficult question to answer. It does seem clear that there are certain conditions which are related in some intimate way to the making of that request.

1. There is a particular door to which something in the context is calling H's (the hearer's) attention.
2. That door is not open.
3. It is possible for H to open that door.

[1] This scheme is very similar to the threefold classification in the late John Austin's William James Lectures, *How To Do Things With Words*, (ed. J. O. Urmson, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962) between locutionary, perlocutionary, and illocutionary. But there are important differences between the two sets of classifications—differences into which I cannot go in this essay.

[2] What we have in Austin's William James Lectures is a quantity of rich and insightful material bearing on the problem, rather than a direct attack.

4. S (the speaker) has an interest in getting the door open.

This intimate connection can be indicated initially by pointing out that if any of these conditions are not satisfied, something has gone wrong with the request; it is defective or untoward in one way or another. For example, if 1 or 2 does not hold, there is nothing which H could possibly do by way of complying with the request. If 3 does not hold, the request is pointless, since the possibility of this H complying is absent. And in the failure of 4 we have an insincere request, one made under false pretenses.

But it is clear that these conditions are not, as they stand, necessary conditions of the performance of the act. They are not related to this linguistic act in the way the existence of a door is related to the act of opening the door. Even if the only door in the vicinity is already open, it is not impossible for me to ask you to open the door. It would be a pointless request to make, but if, e.g., I were under the mistaken impression that the door was closed (perhaps because I hadn't looked), I might still make the request. And in such a situation you would not deny that I had asked you to open the door. You wouldn't reply, "You're not making any request," or "I suppose you think you're asking me to do something"; but rather "What a silly thing to ask," or "How can I? The door is already open." These replies carry the presupposition that I have made the request.

This kind of case suggests that requesting is an "intentional" act, the nub of which is to be found not in any external circumstances, but rather in what the speaker takes those circumstances to be. If so, we might make the following simple transformation of the conditions. Preface each condition with "The speaker supposes that. . . ," or "To the best of the speaker's knowledge. . . ." But although this would handle mistakes, it would fail to grapple with cases of deceit, in which the person makes a request in full knowledge that one of the conditions does not hold. E.g., I might ask you to open the front door for me, knowing full well that the door is already open, just in order to get you out of the kitchen momentarily. Again in such a case, when you discovered the true state of affairs, you would not deny that I had made such a request. On the contrary, you would say something such as, "You knew the door was already open; the only reason you asked me to open it was to get me out of the kitchen." Again the complaint clearly presupposes that the request was made.

The above case might suggest a different transformation. Clearly my stratagem would work only if I succeeded in getting you to think that the conditions do hold. If you hadn't supposed the door to be closed, you wouldn't have taken my request seriously. That is, I at least had the purpose of getting you to think that the original conditions held. Hence we might revise the conditions by prefacing to each: "The speaker utters the sentence to get the hearer to suppose that. . . ." Will this make them necessary? I don't think so. For one thing, I might ask you to open the door in a situation where it is perfectly obvious to me that you already know the door is closed; in this case I could not have the purpose of getting you to believe this. We could complicate the phrase to read: ". . . in order to get H to suppose that S believes that. . . ." But again, the situation might be such that it is perfectly clear to S that H already realizes that S knows very well that the condition holds. (They are both in the room, and a cold wind is blowing in through the open door.) Here there could be no question of S doing something in order to acquaint H with the fact that he, S, takes the condition to hold. No doubt one could construct a still more complicated condition in terms of purpose to take care of this example, but I suspect that no matter how complicated the formulation of this sort of condition becomes, counter-examples can always be provided. And no doubt one can, for any linguistic act, formulate one or more purposes which is (are) the standard purpose(s) for the performance of that act, i.e., the purpose(s) for which it is normally performed. And it is not inconceivable that such standard-case purposes are the best we could do by way of an analysis. But I am inclined to persevere a little longer in the search for a set of conditions which will have a tighter and more unexceptionable connection with the act, in the light of which we could understand why this request is normally made for certain purposes.

II

Let's consider how we would actually go about determining, in a particular case, what linguistic act has been performed. To sharpen the issue, let's take a sentence which is often used to perform two or more different acts—e.g., "You're not going out this evening," which is commonly used both to issue an order and to make a prediction. How can we tell on a particular occasion which act is being performed? (There are characteristic differences in the intonation patterns for the two acts; but these

requirements are loose enough to allow some uncertainty to creep in sometimes.) I suggest that a crucial test would be to note whether S will take certain retorts, cavils, criticisms, complaints to be relevant, i.e., whether he will recognize that if the fact alleged in the retort holds, there is something wrong with what he is doing. Thus, S says to H, "You're not going out this evening." H, supposing S to be issuing an order, retorts indignantly, "You have no right to be ordering me around." Now if A were issuing an order, he will take this complaint to be relevant (though he may not overtly do so), to the point, and will either admit that his order was out of order or try to justify his assumption of an authoritative position. If, on the other hand, he were making a prediction, he will reply in some such way as "That's beside the point," or "What does that have to do with it?" or "So what?" and then possibly give a clearer exhibition of what he was doing. If H supposed S were making a prediction, he might reply, "How do you know what I'm going to do?" "I'll bet you wish you knew," or "You're wrong, I wouldn't miss that show for a million dollars." Here S would recognize these cavils to be appropriate if he were making a prediction, but not if he were issuing an order. ("It's not a question of knowing what you're going to do.")

This method for discriminating between linguistic acts suggests a simple way of relating our initial list of conditions to the act of asking someone to open a door. We can say that one is performing this act only if he is prepared to recognize the following complaints[3] to be relevant.

1. There is no door anywhere around here.
2. The door is already open.
3. It is obviously impossible for me to open the door.
4. You don't care whether the door is open or not.

Each of these complaints alleges that one of the conditions in our list is not satisfied. Now in view of the fact that one is prepared to recognize the pertinence of a complaint to the effect that a condition is not satisfied only if he has taken responsibility for that condition being realized, this can be restated as follows. One is performing the action (of asking someone to open a door) only if in uttering the sentence in question he takes responsibility[4] for the satisfaction of the following conditions.

1. There is a particular door to which something in the context is calling the hearer's attention.
2. That door is not open.
3. It is possible for the hearer to open that door.
4. The speaker has an interest in getting that door open.

A linguistic act, so construed, exhibits a striking analogy with a move in a game. Since chess has been badly overworked in philosophical literature of late, I shall take my example from tennis. If we set out to analyze the concept of a serve in tennis, the problems we encounter will largely parallel those we have just been through. To serve is not just to make certain physical movements, even in certain circumstances. Then what else is required? Not specific effects on my opponent. My shot may inspire him with fear, terror, despair, exultation, contempt, or boredom, all without diminishing a whit the reality of my serve. Nor will purposes of the server do the trick. The standard purpose of serving is to place the ball in the appropriate forecourt in such a way that it will be difficult for the opponent to return it. But then in a particular case the server may not care about that. He may be trying to make it easy to return because he is playing with his son, who is just learning. Or he may be trying to miss the forecourt, because he wants to lose. Then what does change when, after a few practice shots, I call to my opponent, "All right, this is it," and then proceed to serve? The new element in the situation, I suggest, is my

[3] By using such terms as "complaint," "cavil," "criticism," etc., I mean to suggest that the retorts in which I am interested involve passing some sort of negative judgment on the initial speaker's action, judging it unfavorably by reference to some sort of criterion or standard. But of course none of the replies we have cited have the form of a complaint about, or criticism of, the action. They simply cite certain facts. However, the context of utterance, the tone of voice, and perhaps a prefatory "but" would make it perfectly plain in each case that the fact is being cited as a ground for complaint about the first speaker's action. They could all be more explicitly spelled out as, "Your action is out of order because of the fact that. . . ." We might call them implicit complaints. I spell this out, at the risk of being pedantic, because "complaint" is a crucial term in my discussion, and I want to remove any compunction that might be felt about its use here.

[4] We must also be careful with the term "responsibility." Of course we are not saying that the speaker takes on a responsibility for bringing it about that these conditions are realized. Obviously I do not have to shut the door myself in order to be able to ask you to open it. It is rather that I take responsibility for the conditions being satisfied when I utter the sentence, in the sense in which an official spokesman takes responsibility for the accuracy of his statement, i.e., for those facts being as represented, although usually he did not bring those facts about; and in something like the sense in which an administrator is responsible for the efficient functioning of the departments in his charge. In all these cases responsibility for x implies that the man responsible can be called to account if x is not the case.

readiness to countenance certain sorts of complaints, e.g., that I stepped on the baseline, hit the ball when my opponent was not ready, or was standing on the wrong side of the court. In the other terminology used above, I actually *serve* when, in hitting the ball, I take responsibility for having seen to it that certain conditions hold. (Compare also trumping a trick in bridge.)

In games, at least in well-established ones of the sort we have been considering, when such complaints are made, the objector is said to be charging the player with a violation of the rules. And he can, if necessary, back up his charges by referring to a list of rules for the game in question. That is, in this area the practice of making and accepting complaints has been "formalized" in an official set of conditions, for the satisfaction of which a player takes responsibility at a certain stage of the game or for the non-satisfaction of which he will be taken to task. With this formalization behind us, we can give this part of the analysis of serving in the following form. One is serving only if in hitting the ball he takes responsibility for observing the following rules. . . . And this in turn can be restated—only if he recognizes that the following rules apply to what he is doing. There is no reason why we should not use the same terminology for linguistic acts, and give a third formulation in terms of rules for the observance of which he is taking responsibility, i.e., rules which he recognizes to govern what he is doing. It is true that there are no manuals in existence which list such rules. But we should not confuse a rule with a formulation of a rule. Rules exist wherever there is a regular practice of making and accepting complaints according as certain actions are performed in the absence of certain conditions. (I am not saying that all rules are of this sort.) We then *formulate* the rules by putting these conditions in the form of stipulations about the conditions which are to be satisfied if the actions are to be performed. Whether the rules governing a mode of activity are actually formulated by the participants is relatively peripheral, and still more peripheral is the question whether or not such formulations are published with the sanction of some official body. It may be that the *participants* would not speak of rules until such formulations are made. But it remains true that in this case one formulates the conditions the presence or absence of which governed the making and accepting of complaints in the earlier period. (I am thinking of a situation in which the practice has been going on before any rules were formulated. Where rules are explicitly laid down to launch a new practice, we could make the same point through asking: What is the promulgator saying when he lays down the rules and what would it be to follow his rules?) Thus speech can be said to be rule-governed in substantially the same sense as games like tennis and bridge. And we can formulate the third condition for asking someone to open the door as follows:

> The speaker recognizes the following rule (or rules, depending on how you want to count rules) to govern his action.
> *s* (the sentence uttered by the speaker) is not to be uttered unless the following conditions hold.
> 1. There is a particular door to which something in the context is calling the hearer's attention.
> 2. That door is not open.
> 3. It is possible for the hearer to open that door.
> 4. The speaker has an interest in getting that door open.

This formulation does not imply, as it might seem to imply, that this sentence can be used for the performance of no other linguistic act, i.e., that it can be subject to no other sets of rules. If there were such an implication, the formulation would have to be dropped or amended, for a given sentence can be used in the performance of more than one linguistic act. But all that the above condition requires is that on this occasion the speaker utters the sentence subject to these rules. This in no way rules out the possibility of the sentence being uttered subject to other rules on other occasions.

I should make it explicit that to "recognize the relevance of" or to "countenance" a complaint, in the sense in which I have been using these terms, is not necessarily to admit the justice of the complaint, for it is not necessarily to admit that the condition in question is not in fact satisfied. It is merely to grant the pertinence of the complaint, i.e., to recognize that if the factual claim made in the complaint is sound then the complaint is justified and there is something wrong with what the speaker is doing. It is merely to recognize a possible ground for complaint. And, of course, even if the condition is not satisfied, there are still complex issues to be considered before deciding whether the speaker can be *blamed* for its failure. Just as a rule in tennis (of the sort we were considering) can be violated either from carelessness, unavoidable ignorance of the facts, ignorance of the rule, or deliberate deception, so also in speech. Thus if condition 2 in our list, that the door not already be open, is violated, it may be for any of the following reasons:

(1) The speaker has carelessly neglected to determine whether the door is already open or not.
(2) The speaker had every reason to think the door was shut, but unknown to him, someone had opened it.
(3) He does not know, or has forgotten, that one normally takes responsibility for this condition holding when he utters the sentence "Would you please open the door?" in these sorts of circumstances.
(4) He knows the door is already open, but he has a reason for getting the hearer to make a start at opening it.

And these various possibilities will have differing implications for the applicability, and severity, of blame.

We should also note that to recognize relevance is not necessarily to overtly admit relevance. I may order you to stay at home, but then when you react violently, I may back down and pretend I was only predicting, thereby rejecting your defiance as irrelevant. But whatever my overt activity was, I did recognize your response as relevant, though in this case I did not let it appear that I had. By making this point explicit, we reveal that our analysis is not in behavioral terms. There is no air-tight public criterion for a recognition which is private and may be concealed. This should not be surprising. A linguistic act no more consists solely of publicly observable components than any other psychologically interesting act.

Various questions might be raised as to our inclusion of certain rules in our list and our exclusion of other possible candidates. One such question seems especially worthy of mention. One can complain not only about the objective conditions not holding (e.g., the door's being already open) but also about the speaker's not really believing that they hold, or about the speaker's having no sufficient grounds for supposing they hold. Thus in reply to your asking me to open the door I might well say, "You know perfectly well that it is already open," "What makes you think it isn't already open?" or "Do you really think it is shut?" and it would seem that if you were indeed making that request you would have to recognize the pertinence of these complaints. Hence it looks as if we shall have to triple the number of rules, i.e., to each rule requiring the condition, C, add rules stipulating (1) that the speaker believes that C is satisfied, and (2) that the speaker has adequate grounds for this belief. (Although if there are conditions, e.g., those concerning his feelings, about which the speaker could not be mistaken, the second supplement would be idle.)

But actually this is not necessary. To take responsibility for the satisfaction of certain conditions whenever one performs a certain action is to undertake not to perform that action unless one has ascertained that those conditions are satisfied. Hence, if one acts without taking every reasonable precaution to see that the conditions are satisfied, or acts while supposing that the conditions are not satisfied, then he has failed to carry out his responsibility as stated, whether or not the conditions are in fact satisfied. This means that the statement in terms of objective conditions already has all the force which we require.

III

Now I want to go back to the first condition for the performance of a linguistic act, viz., that some sentence, or sentence-surrogate be uttered. Is it enough to stipulate that some sentence be uttered, or is a further restriction in order? This amounts to asking: "Can one say something by uttering *any* sentence? Or can he do it only with some sentences and not with others?" (Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 510. "Make the following experiment: Say 'It's cold here' and mean 'It's warm here.' Can you do it? And what are you doing as you do it?")

Consider the following case. A man, intending to inform us that his battery is dead, suffers a slip of the tongue, and utters the sentence, "My beagle is dead." Are we to say that he did inform us that his battery was dead? Surely not. When the man sees his mistake, he will say, "Oh, what I *meant* to say was that my battery is dead." Note the indirect discourse form. He is not just saying that he meant to utter "My battery is dead," but that he meant to *say that* (or tell us that) his battery is dead. This presupposes that he did not actually succeed in telling us that his battery was dead. Moreover, if the slip goes unremarked, it would be in order later to upbraid him for not having told us that his battery is dead, provided he had been under an obligation to do so. He could mitigate the blame by saying that he had thought he had told us, but he could not wholly escape by making out that he had in fact told us.

If our analysis is to reflect this aspect of linguistic-act concepts, we shall have to tighten up our first condition somewhat as follows. "S utters a sentence which would normally be used to perform L (the linguistic act in question)."

And yet this seems wrong. Surely I can use a given sentence in any way I choose, bestow any meaning on it I like. I can even set up a private code in which various English words have senses very different from the usual ones. And in this code I might very well use the sentence "It's cold here," to report that it is warm here. And of course I can coin new expressions, which so far are not normally used to do anything, and use them in any way I choose.

However, cases of these sorts do conform to the spirit of the above formulation. The phrase "which would normally be used to perform L" carries an implicit reference to a language community within which this norm exists. That is, in adding this restriction we are stipulating that there be a language community within which the sentence is normally used to do L. And in the cases just mentioned we have reduced forms of language communities. With a private code we have one sort of limiting case, in which the membership of the community is reduced to one. (But here there must be at least the intention that utterances in the code will subsequently be understood by the individual in the stipulated way. One person at one moment does not constitute even a limiting case of a community!) Where I propose some new terminology, and where it has not yet been accepted, we have an even more reduced case, one in which the community exists only *in potentia*, exists only as proposed or envisaged. That is, what makes this terminology usable in linguistic acts is the fact that I act as if the proposed uses were accepted in the circle within which I am speaking. Thus, given a sufficiently flexible concept of a language community, the condition holds in these cases. Nor do these extensions rob it of all force. It still rules out slips of the tongue and variants owing to ignorance of the language, i.e., those cases in which the sentence uttered is not being used in any standard way, without there being any intention of following or inaugurating a new standard in some (actual or proposed) subsegment of the larger community.

The fundamental truth reflected in this restriction is this. Performing a linguistic act is not just a matter of what is happening, or what exists, on that particular occasion, but necessarily involves a reference to something general, some regularity of practice, even if that is limited to one person, and even if what extends beyond the particular occasion is only a possibility of future conformity to a pattern. In speaking one can go beyond the sentences which are set apart in existing languages for the performance of a certain act, but only if one creates a microcommunity in which that sentence is tapped for that job.

As formulated above, "S utters a sentence which would normally be used to ask someone to open a door," the condition is circular. For it mentions the act in the definition of which it occurs. To remove the circularity we should have to make explicit what it is that makes a given sentence usable, in a given community, for the performance of a certain linguistic act, without mentioning that act in doing so. And it seems that we can do this in terms of the rules which are mentioned in the third condition. For what makes a sentence usable for the performance of a certain linguistic act and not others is the fact that in the community utterances of the sentence are regularly held subject to certain rules, viz., the ones which enter into the definition of the act via the third condition. Thus we can restate the first and third conditions as follows (in outline):

1. The speaker utters a sentence, *s*, which in some language community, is regularly held subject to the following rules:
3. The speaker recognizes the rules listed in 1 to govern his utterance.

We can think of the regularity with which a given sentence is used to perform a certain linguistic act as itself the reflection of a rule which assigns that sentence to that linguistic act. For it is not just that the sentence is often used to perform that action; attempts to perform other acts with it become the subject for complaints, as we saw above with "My beagle is dead," in a way which we have seen to justify us in speaking of rules. This sort of rule will turn out to be a second-order rule. The rule which assigns "Could you reach the salt?" to the action of asking someone to pass some salt, is a rule which stipulates that utterances of this sentence are to be held subject to the rules which are involved in the definition of that request.

The formulation just given to the first condition runs aground on the fact that a particular sentence can be used to perform more than one linguistic act; (or at least it will do so unless we understand "regularly" in a suitable way). The fact of multivocality makes it quite unrealistic to require that the speaker choose a sentence which is always held subject to the rules in question. We could avoid this difficulty by simply requiring him to choose a sentence which is *sometimes* held subject to those rules. But if we do this, we shall have simply moved from too strong a condition to one which is too

weak. It does not seem that one is always free to employ a sentence for any job for which it is ever employed. If, in the course of dinner, when neither comparative arm-length or anything related has been under discussion, I say "Can you reach the salt?" and then when someone passes the salt, I say "Oh, I wasn't asking you to pass the salt. I just wanted to get some information about the length of your arm"—in that case I would be out of order, though perhaps not as definitely as if I had uttered the sentence, "Can you beach the malt?" There seems to be something wrong with using that sentence to ask that question in that context.

This example suggests that in stating our conditions we should take into account the context in which the sentence is uttered as well as the particular sentence which is uttered. Perhaps what the locutionary condition should require is that the speaker choose a sentence to which the appropriate rules are regularly applied in the sort of context in which he uttered it. It would then read:

(1) The speaker utters a sentence, *s*, in a certain kind of context; in some language community *s* is regularly held subject to the following rules when uttered in that kind of context.

Of course there does not exist, at present, a classification of contexts of the sort which would be required to apply this scheme to a wide variety of concrete cases. But I suppose that in a rough way it is clear enough what is involved. There must be something either in the previous conversation or in the non-linguistic environment to single out the act in question as an appropriate one.

This revision has recommendations other than its capacity to get us out of a difficulty. Unless there were rules embodied in our linguistic practice which put contextual restrictions on the use of a sentence to perform a certain act among those it is, at one time or another, used to perform, it would be impossible for one person to tell from the context which of the acts performable by uttering a sentence was at issue on a certain given occasion. He should have to either ask the speaker or just guess. But the former technique could not be universally usable; for if you told me what act you were performing, I should then have to decide what act you were performing by this second utterance, and an infinite regress would be launched. However, in fact we can often tell, and not just guess, what a person has said on a given occasion.

To sum up, to say that A has asked someone to open the door is to say that the following conditions have been satisfied:

(1) A has uttered a sentence, *s*, in a certain kind of context; in some language community *s* is regularly held subject to the following rule when uttered in that kind of context:

s is not to be uttered unless the following conditions hold.

1. There is a particular door to which something in the context is calling the hearer's attention.
2. That door is not open.
3. It is possible for the hearer to open that door.
4. The speaker has an interest in getting that door open.

(2) The person addressed is actually in the vicinity.

(3) A recognizes the rules listed in (1) to govern his utterance.

IV

This discussion has been almost entirely restricted to a single linguistic act. Indeed, I make no claim that the analysis, as here presented, is a complete analysis even of this single act. But I am sure that what we have here is at least a very significant part of the analysis of this particular act. And I believe that the pattern of analysis would be found suitable, in substance, for any other, although special problems may arise for some which we have not encountered in the simple request which we have been discussing. But if we were to attempt to move from the analysis of this request to a general definition of "linguistic act," we should encounter certain difficulties. In such general talk about linguistic acts as I have indulged in I have, as the canny reader will not have failed to notice, spoken of such an act as constituted (partly) by the readiness of the speaker to countenance *certain* complaints, by his taking responsibility for *certain* conditions, or by his recognizing his action to be governed by *certain* rules. But what complaints, what conditions, what rules? I have given no indication as to how, in general, those complaints, conditions, or rules which enter into the definition of a linguistic act are to be distinguished from those which do not. So long as we are concerned, as in the body of this essay, with a particular linguistic act our procedure is sufficient for identifying those conditions which enter into the rules defining that linguistic act. We simply determine what conditions are such that one could not be said to be performing that linguistic act unless he is willing to take responsibility for those conditions holding. If a person does not recognize the justice of a

complaint made on the grounds, e.g., of the door already being open, then he has *not* asked anyone to open the door, regardless of what sentence he uttered.[5] But if we are to construct a general definition of "linguistic act" we shall have to provide a general criterion of the sorts of conditions which are related in this way to linguistic acts. There is a problem here because of the fact that for any utterance there are many complaints which might conceivably be made, but which are such that the acceptance or rejection of their pertinence by the speaker has no bearing on what linguistic act is being performed. Consider the following complaints that might be made following an utterance of "Would you open the door?"

1. Don't talk so loud!
2. Please enunciate your words more distinctly!
3. Say "please"!
4. Don't speak to me in such a sullen tone of voice!
5. Oh, I can't stand your Brooklyn accent!
6. Confound it, you interrupted me just when I was on the point of remembering the name of that town.
7. I'm afraid you made Smith think you were hinting that it was time for him to go.

Clearly the consideration of these complaints will throw no light on the question of what linguistic act is being performed. That is, one might be performing a given linguistic act on this occasion, e.g., asking someone to open a door, whether or not he recognized the pertinence of any of these complaints, i.e., whether or not he recognized a responsibility for speaking softly, enunciating words distinctly, speaking in a non-sullen tone of voice, etc. And since this is so, we are faced with the question: Is there any general feature which distinguishes those complaints which are constitutive of linguistic acts from those which are not?

This problem has a more familiar parallel in the idiom of rules. Previous attempts to analyze meaning in terms of rules have failed for lack of any workable distinction between semantic rules and rules of other sorts which also apply to linguistic performances. (Though we must not forget that Carnap boldly cut the Gordian knot by characterizing semantic rules as those which are labeled "Semantic Rules.") And our analysis of linguistic acts in terms of rules would seem to be in danger of an analogous failure. The above difficulty can be restated in terms of rules. That is, the complaints listed could each be formulated, with varying degrees of plausibility, as allegations that a certain rule had been violated, e.g., a rule requiring that one speak distinctly. And how are we, in general, to distinguish, among the rules governing linguistic performances, between those which are definitive of linguistic acts and those which are not?

There is, indeed, a rather simple way of excluding the undesirable candidates so far considered. The rules we have included in the definition of our sample request, and the complaints from which we derived them, all have to do with the satisfaction or non-satisfaction of certain conditions at the time of utterance; whereas the complaints in our new list have to do rather with the mode or manner in which the utterance is performed, or with some of its consequences. This gives us a general way of excluding a large class of irrelevant rules. We can say that to perform a linguistic act is (in part) to recognize that one's utterance is governed by certain rules which stipulate that certain conditions are to be satisfied when the utterance is made. This restriction is already contained in one of the other formulations —the one in terms of the conditions for the satisfaction of which the speaker takes responsibility.[6]

But unfortunately there are other complaints and other rules which we need to exclude, but which cannot be excluded in this way. Consider the following complaints.

1. Shh! Aunt Agatha is still just outside.
2. I'm tired! Can't you show any consideration?

These have the preferred form; they are allegations that the utterance was made in the absence of certain conditions. And the rules which might be extracted therefrom would stipulate that the sentence not be uttered unless certain conditions held

[5] A good rule of thumb, but no more than a rule of thumb, is this. Ask yourself what conditions are such that if the speaker were to overtly admit that one of these conditions did not hold, it would be impossible for him to be performing the linguistic act in question. (Thjs is a logical, not psychological, impossibility. It really means that, given this admission, one would *not* say that he was performing that linguistic act.) Thus if someone says, "I know that that door is already open, but would you please open it?" and if he is using "I know that that door is already open" in the usual way, then he can't be asking you to open that door. He may be making a joke, or testing your reactions to absurd utterances, but he is not asking you to open a door. (This remark indicates a connection between this analysis and talk about presuppositions, contextual implications, etc., a connection which I do not have time to follow up in this essay.)

[6] We can see in these distinctions between classes of rules a reflection of the distinction between what action is being performed, how it is performed, and what consequences it has.

with respect to the audience or the state of the addressee. And yet it is clear that they are not analytically connected with the linguistic act being performed. It is clear that one might be asking the hearer to open a certain door whether or not he is prepared to countenance a complaint on the basis of thoughtlessness or the presence of certain auditors, i.e., whether or not he recognizes his action to be governed by rules restricting the utterance of this sentence in terms of the state of the addressee or the composition of the audience.

In the face of examples of this sort I am, reluctantly, forced to conclude that there is no general feature which marks off rules constitutive of linguistic acts from those which are not, or at least no general feature which can be formulated without using the notion of a linguistic act. And this means that it is not at all clear how one could go about trying to construct a general definition of "linguistic act" along the lines of this essay. But I believe that, even in default of such a definition, what has been presented here goes a long way toward clarifying the notion of a linguistic act. For one thing, I have given a schema which can serve as a guide for the analysis of any particular linguistic act in which one happens to be interested. And, second, I have shown in what general category linguistic acts are to be placed. They are what we might call "rule-recognition acts"; i.e., they are acts which are (at least in part) constituted not by consequences of bodily movements, or by purposes, or by the fact that certain rules are being followed, but by the fact that the agent recognizes his behavior to be governed by certain rules. This is an extremely important point, and, because of its subtlety, one liable to be missed. This point alone should save us from many tempting oversimplifications and false assimilations in the many contexts in which consideration of this or that linguistic act enters into philosophical discussion.

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