INTEGRATIONAL LINGUISTICS AND THE SPEECH ACT

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'The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating' (Austin 1975 [1962]: 148). This Austinian dictum was once cited by Roy Harris as a thematic text for the whole integrationist enterprise; and speech-act theory, with its focus on communication, has an obvious if superficial link with integrational linguistics. What is superficial about the link is hinted at in the caveat that Harris immediately goes on to enter: that, unlike Austin, integrational linguistics should not be content 'to base the analysis of the total speech act on taking "linguistic meaning" for granted' (Harris 1981: 166).

Taking linguistic meaning for granted, in this context, means treating speech acts in a given language as parasitic on a context-neutral semantic description of the language itself, which in turn implies that performing a given speech act is no more than a use to which the relevant part of the language may be put. In Saussurean terms, if you take linguistic meaning for granted speech-act theory becomes part of *la linguistique de la parole*, and therefore something additional to or superimposed on *la linguistique de la langue.*

But is this how speech-act theorists themselves view the matter? J.R. Searle, for one, might at least seem to be denying it, when he says:

> The theory of speech acts is not an adjunct to our theory of language, something to be consigned to the realm of 'pragmatics', or performance; rather, the theory of speech acts will necessarily occupy a central role in our grammar, since it will include all of what used to be called semantics as well as pragmatics. (Searle 1979 [1975]: 178)

However, Harris has pointed out what 'including' semantics amounts to in practice, with reference to Searle's rules for performing the speech act of promising. Those rules specify the conditions that must be satisfied if a given utterance of a promise-making formula is to have the illocutionary force of promising. What is missing is any account of what constitutes a promise-making formula, beyond the stipulation that 'the sentence uttered is one which, by the semantical rules of the language, is used to make a promise' (Searle 1969: 61). But, Harris asks, 'was not making a promise precisely the notion we originally set out to explicate?' (Harris 1987: 152). Speech-act theory may 'include' semantics, but evidently not in any sense that might oblige speech-act theorists to investigate it themselves.

But taking linguistic meaning for granted is only the iceberg-tip of the problem with Searle's philosophy of language. (I focus on Searle in particular because he has done more than most

speech-act theorists to locate his theorising about speech-acts within a wider philosophical perspective.) In Searle's view, speech-act theory is the central component of a more general theory of language whose chief task is to explain how we 'get from the brute facts of the making of noises to the institutional facts of the performance of illocutionary acts of human communication' (1979: 178). Now whether Searle or any one else has in fact succeeded in elaborating a theory of language that achieves this, or whether this is mere hand-waving, is a question that might have been allowed to remain unasked had not Searle himself taken the further step of inserting this putative theory of language into the broader project of explaining the connection between what he calls 'brute facts' and what he calls 'institutional facts'. That is to say, in a recent book (Searle 1995) he has embarked on the project of giving an ontologically unified explanation of how there can be

> an objective world of money, property, marriage, governments, elections, football games, cocktail parties and law courts in a world that consists entirely of physical particles in fields of force, and in which some of these particles are organised into systems that are conscious biological beasts, such as ourselves (Searle 1995: xi).

The point is that in this list of institutions, along with money, property, marriage and so forth, Searle might have mentioned language and languages. He has now committed himself to coming clean about the theory of language of which the theory of speech acts forms part.

What makes it particularly pressing that he discharge this commitment is that, as might have been expected, the link between brute facts and institutional facts turns out to be forged by language itself. The details of Searle's account cannot be entered into here: suffice it to say that the creation of institutional facts is dependent on the existence of symbolic devices, such as words, that by convention mean or represent or symbolise something other than themselves, and the fundamental act involved in creating an institutional fact is a speech act of the general form 'X counts as Y' where X is a brute-fact description of a certain object or state of affairs, and Y redescribes X in terms that confer on X a function or status that goes beyond what is manifest in the physical properties of X, and which is intrinsically language-dependent in that there is nothing extra-linguistic that one can perceive or otherwise attend to in addition to X. Searle offers the example of scoring points in a game:

> Without a language, we can see a man cross a white line holding a ball, and without language we can want a man to cross a white line holding a ball. But we cannot see the man score six points or want the man to score six points without language, because points are not something that can be thought of or that can exist independently of words or other sorts of markers. And what is true of points in games is true of money, governments, private property, etc. (Searle 1995: 68)

The essential move is to say: 'in such and such conditions, crossing a certain line *counts as* scoring six points'. (The game in question is American gridiron football.)

How does such an account of the creation of institutional facts deal with language itself? As Searle observes, linguistic facts are themselves institutional facts. 'So it looks as if language requires language. Does this not lead to an infinite regress...?' (Searle 1995: 72). He concedes that

If it is true, as it surely is, that there is nothing in the physical structure of the piece of paper that makes it a five dollar bill, nothing in the physical structure of the piece of land that makes it into my property, then it is also true that there is nothing in the acoustics of the sounds that come out of my mouth or the physics of the marks that I make on paper that makes them into words or other sorts of symbols.

So how then are linguistic institutional facts created? What is the process by which noises or marks on paper are transformed into language? Searle makes short work of this problem. He continues:

The solution to our puzzle is to see that language is precisely designed to be a self-identifying category of institutional facts. The child is brought up in a culture where she learns to treat the sounds that come out of her own and others' mouths as standing for, or meaning something, or representing something. And this is what I was driving at when I said that language doesn't require language in order to be language because it already is language. (Searle 1995: 72-73)

Whatever else one might want to say about this 'solution', it might at least have been clearer had Searle deployed a less jejune and more discriminating terminology than the single word 'language'. It is one thing to take for granted that the sounds that come out of mouths when people are interacting with one another have a semiotic function, and that they are to be apprehended as communicating *something* other than their own intrinsic acoustic or auditory properties. If that is all Searle means by saying that language identifies itself (i.e. that it identifies itself *as language*), the quarrel one might want to have with him would be very different from what is in dispute if he is claiming as self-identifying not just language as such, but language plus some metalinguistic superimposition on language of the kind required for creating some of his own examples of linguistic institutional facts. (For instance, the fact that in certain contexts uttering the sounds 'the cat is on the mat' counts as making the statement that the cat is on the mat, or the fact that 'Mount Everest has snow and ice at the summit' is a sentence of English). If these are among the institutional facts in question, it is absurd to say that they are self-identifying – let alone 'designed' to be self-identifying. (Designed by whom?) In short, there is a gaping hole in this theory of language. We seem to be confronted by a theory of speech acts that takes linguistic meaning for granted, which is itself part of a theory of language that takes language for granted.

How does this state of affairs come about? One key to an answer emerges if we examine the fundamental distinction between 'brute' and 'institutional' facts. He draws the distinction as follows:

Without implying that these are the only kinds of facts that exist in the world, we need to distinguish between *brute facts* such as the fact that the sun is ninety-three million miles from the earth and *institutional facts* such as the fact that Clinton is president. Brute facts exist independently of any human institutions; institutional facts can exist only within human institutions. Brute facts require the institution of language in order that we can *state* the facts, but the brute facts *themselves* exist quite independently of language or of any other institution. Thus the *statement* that the sun is ninety-three million miles from the earth requires an institution of language and an institution of measuring distance in miles, but the *fact stated*, the fact that there is a certain distance between the earth and the sun, exists independently of any institution. Institutional facts,

on the other hand, require special human institutions for their very existence. (Searle 1995: 27)

The problem here is that if all facts depend on language for their statement, then there is a sense in which all facts are institutional. This is so if a fact is taken to be, not a state of affairs, but the linguistic expression of a state of affairs. This is not to deny that there is a state of affairs regarding the spatial relations between the earth and the sun, which is what it is irrespective of the existence of any institutions. But the fact that there is no *saying* what that state of affairs *is* (indeed, no possibility of representing it to ourselves as a state of affairs at all) except via the medium of language is less trivial than Searle seems to think. It would only be trivial if we could rely on language to provide a transparently accurate mapping of states of affairs. The reasons Austin gave for denying that language can do any such thing were in part what led him to elaborate a theory of speech acts in the first place.

Searle's theory of language exemplifies the dilemmas that attend theorising about language in a culture that has adopted a certain conception of the natural sciences and their role in our cognitive and epistemological scheme of things. The story told by science is that the world consists of a hierarchy of phenomena which, in Searle's terms, goes roughly like this: physics, chemistry, biology, consciousness, intentionality, language, other social and cultural institutions. Language is thus a product of everything below it in the hierarchy, but, at the same time, the *sine qua non* for telling the story at all. The validity of this story, including the validity of representing language as epiphenomenal on the matters that fall within the scope of physics, chemistry, biology, etc., seems to depend on accepting that language can give true reports of the reality dealt with by physics, chemistry, biology, etc. Science tells us that speech acts only emerge in the world at a high level in the ontological hierarchy, yet everything we know about that hierarchy consists, in a sense, of nothing but speech acts. Language, it appears, must simultaneously be explained and taken as given. Searle's theory of language is a conspicuous example of the stultification that can ensue.

It seems that one of the dilemmas here arises from nothing more profound than an ambiguity in the word 'science', which names both an activity and the results of that activity. It would be absurd to deny that language is part of the subject matter of science: our verbal behaviour undoubtedly is a phenomenon in the world, and to that extent liable to whatever scientific analysis of it may be possible. It would be no less absurd to deny that science is part of the subject matter of linguistics: the illocutionary acts of stating and describing that we call 'science' are a product of our verbal behaviour, and to that extent liable to whatever linguistic analysis of them may be possible. But what this affects is not the results of the activity but, at most, its epistemological status. As Austin observed, illocutionary acts of stating and describing have 'no unique position' (1975 [1962]: 149), whatever value or significance we may attach to those statements and descriptions that constitute what we call 'science'. In particular, they are not in the unique position of being underwritten by a theory of language projected by the metalinguistic attitudes and processes that made our conception of science possible in the first place. It is ironic that what started out as a development of Austin's theory of speech acts should demonstrate so clearly the disastrous consequences for linguistics of supposing otherwise, and of forgetting that (to revise Austin along integrational lines) the total speech act in the total speech situation is, in the first *and* the last resort, the only actual phenomenon we are engaged in elucidating.

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