RECANATI ON MOOD, FORCE, AND SPEECH ACTS

Indrek Reiland
(University of Vienna)

Résumé
Dans cet article, je discute de deux idées intéressantes et peu explorées de Recanati qui vont à l'encontre de l'orthodoxie searlienne dans la théorie de l'acte de langage et reviennent dans la direction d'Austin. La première idée est que la notion d'acte locutoire introduite par Austin peut être défendue contre la critique de Searle en la comprenant comme une présentation d'un acte illocutoire réalisé. La seconde idée est que le mode indicatif est spécial en ce qu'il n'encode aucune force illocutoire parce que les phrases déclaratives peuvent être utilisées pour accomplir des actes de langage à la fois constatifs et performatifs. Je soutiens que si ces deux idées vont dans la bonne direction, aucune ne va assez loin. Et je montrerai que si nous adoptons une conception plus austinienne des actes locutoires, qui les comprend de manière totalement indépendante des actes illocutoires, nous pouvons non seulement rendre pleinement justice à ses affirmations sur le mode indicatif, mais aussi voir que la même idée se généralise aux autres modes.

Abstract
In this paper I discuss two Recanati's interesting and underexplored ideas that go against the Searlean orthodoxy in speech act theory and move back in the direction of Austin. The first idea is that Austin's notion of locutionary act can be defended against Searle's criticism by understanding it in terms of a presentation of an illocutionary act as being performed. The second idea is that the declarative mood is special in not encoding any illocutionary force because declarative sentences can be used to perform both constative and performative speech acts. I argue that while both are a step in the right direction, neither goes far enough. And I will show that if we adopt a more Austinian conception of locutionary acts which understands it completely independently of illocutionary acts, we can not only do full justice to his claims about the declarative mood, but also see that the same insight generalizes to other moods.

1. Introduction

Francois Recanati's *Meaning and Force: The Pragmatics in Performative Utterances* (1987) is a wide-ranging study of performatives, embedded in an original picture of the relation between the meaning of sentential mood, force, and speech acts.[1] It contains two very interesting and underexplored ideas that go against the Searlean orthodoxy in speech act theory and move back in the direction of Austin. The first idea concerns Austin's distinction between the linguistic, locutionary act resulting from the use of a sentence with its meaning (e. g. saying) and the social-communicative illocutionary acts that go beyond mere language use and are in need of uptake or require an extra-linguistic conventional procedure to be successfully performed (e. g. assertion). The Searlean orthodoxy rejects this distinction and replaces it with a distinction between forceless propositional acts and forceful determinable (e. g. saying) and determinate illocutionary acts (e. g. assertion) (Searle 1968). On this view determinable illocutionary acts like saying are understood in a *Top-Down* manner in terms of what's

---

[1] This book derives from Recanati's doctoral dissertation (1978) and is an updated version of his *Les Enonces Performatifs* (1981).

common to the *performance* of a host of determinate ones like assertion, conjecturing, guessing etc. However, this threatens to muddle the distinction between the merely linguistic and the more widely social-communicative. Recanati charts a middle course by arguing that the Austinian notion of a linguistic, locutionary act is an important category, but also that it can still be understood in a *Top-Down* manner in terms of a *presentation* of an illocutionary act as being performed (Recanati 1987, Ch. 9; 2013, 2019).

The second interesting idea concerns the relation between sentential mood and illocutionary force. Many philosophers think that mood doesn't encode any illocutionary force which always requires something beyond mere language use like seriousness, intentions etc. (for a classic statement of this view, see Davidson 1979). In contrast, the Searlean orthodoxy holds that every mood encodes a particular *determinable* illocutionary force: for example, declaratives encode assertive or constative force and imperatives encode directive force. Recanati again charts a middle course. He argues that the *declarative* mood is special in not encoding any illocutionary force because declarative sentences can be used to perform both constative and performative speech acts. Instead, declaratives simply represent a state of affairs and are *neutral* between constative and performative force (Recanati 1987, Ch. 6).

In this paper I discuss these two ideas, their merits, and the relation between them. My main critical claim is that while both are a step in the right direction, neither goes far enough. We can appreciate this by seeing that they're in tension. As I will argue, on Recanati's conception of locutionary acts we can't uphold the claim that declaratives simply represent a state of affairs and are neutral between constative and performative force, but rather have to say that they're *ambiguous* between these two types of force. This problem is generated by the fact that his conception of locutionary acts is still too Searlean in understanding them in a *Top-Down* manner, in terms of the presentation of determinate illocutionary acts. I will show that if we adopt a more Austinian conception of locutionary acts on which they're understood in a *Bottom-Up* manner, completely independently of illocutionary acts, we can do full justice to his claims about declarative mood. However, we can then also see that they don't go far enough since the same insight also generalizes to other moods.

I will proceed as follows. First, I'll explain Austin's general theory of speech acts taken at face value and spell out Searle's view and what Recanati calls the *Standard Picture* of speech act theory that he is reacting against (Sections 1-2). Next, I'll discuss Recanati's conception of locutionary acts and his argument to the effect that the declarative mood doesn't encode illocutionary force and show that they're in tension (Sections 3-5). Finally, I'll present an Austinian conception of locutionary acts and show how it enables us to accommodate and generalize Recanati's insight about the declarative mood (Sections 6-7).

2. Austin at Face Value

In order to understand the set of issues under discussion we need to first review Austin's general theory of speech acts, taken at face value, and contrast it with Searle's view and what Recanati calls the *Standard Picture* of speech act theory.

Austin starts developing his theory by drawing a distinction between *phonetic* acts, *phatic* acts, and *rhetic* acts, the performance of all of which together results in a *locutionary* act:

> "The phonetic act is merely the act of uttering certain noises. The phatic act is the uttering of certain vocables or words, i. e. noises of certain types, belonging to and as belonging to, a certain vocabulary, conforming to and as conforming to a certain grammar. The rhetic act is the performance of an act of using those vocables with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference. Thus 'He said "The cat is on the

mat'", reports a phatic act, whereas 'He said that the cat was on the mat' reports a rhetic act. A similar contrast is illustrated by the pairs:
'He said "I shall be there"', 'He said he would be there';
'He said "Get out"', 'He told me to get out';
'He said "Is it in Oxford or Cambridge?"'; 'He asked whether it was in Oxford or Cambridge'" (Austin 1962, 95)

A *phonetic* act is an act of making certain sounds (or making certain marks). In contrast, a *phatic* act is an act of making certain sounds that count as belonging to some language and uttering them *as* belonging to that language. A *rhetic* act is an act of performing a phatic act while using the expression *with* a "certain more or less definite 'sense' and more or less definite 'reference' (which together are equivalent to meaning)" (Austin 1962: 93, 95). In Kaplan's simpler terms, it's to *use* the expression *with* its *meaning* (or one of its meanings, if it's ambiguous), while doing whatever is needed to fix the reference of the expressions that need their reference fixed (Kaplan 1989: 603). In the case of sentences, these are the acts of saying, asking, and telling-to.

Every rhetic act is also a phatic and a phonetic act. Since Austin thought that these are distinctions to be drawn on the way to developing the notion of a locutionary act, it's commonplace to think that the *rhetic* act is identical to a *locutionary* act (e. g. Forguson 1973, 166; Hornsby 1994, 204; Recanati 1987, 240; Sbisa 2013, 28). However, this is not quite correct. Austin said at least some things that suggest that he took the words used to be constitutive of the rhetic act. Thus, consider the following passage:

When different phemes are used with the same sense and reference, we might speak of rhetically equivalent acts ('the same statement' in one sense) but not of the same rheme or rhetic acts (which are the same statement in another sense which involves using the same words). (Austin 1962, 97-98)

Here Austin seems to say that for two rhetic acts to be the *same* rhetic act, the same words need to be used. However, if different words are used with the same sense and reference then we will have two *rhetically equivalent* acts. Thus, take the synonymous English and Estonian sentences 'Two plus two is four' and 'Kaks pluss kaks on neli'. On the interpretation suggested by the above passage, if you use the English sentence with its meaning you perform one rhetic act, but if you use the synonymous Estonian sentence you perform a different rhetic act. However, since the two sentences have the same meaning and there is no further need to contextually fix the reference of anything, the acts performed are *rhetically equivalent*: in both cases you *say* that two plus two is four (Austin 1962: 97). Ball has therefore suggested that what Austin had in mind by a locutionary act is the class of rhetically equivalent acts (Ball 2021). This patterns nicely with the fact that in 'say'-reports we abstract away from the concrete sentence used. Thus, the rhetic act of using a sentence with its meaning is not identical to, but *results* in a locutionary act. And different rhetic acts can result in the same locutionary act.

To sum up, what matters for us here is the conception of rhetic and locutionary acts as purely linguistic acts that consist in or result from simply using a sentence with its meaning in a language plus providing the relevant contextual supplementation (for recent discussion see Kasa & Larsson 2023, Reiland 2024). Every use of a sentence with its meaning results in a rhetic and a locutionary act. Nothing further is needed or relevant for fixing its nature.

After having arrived at the above conception of locutionary acts, Austin distinguishes them from illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. *Illocutionary* acts are social-communicative acts that one performs *in* performing locutionary acts, that is, *in* saying, asking, and telling-to (Austin 1962: 99). When one says that p or asks a question or tells someone to do something one usually does these things in order to do something further. As Austin puts it: "To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an illocutionary act"

(Austin 1962: 98, for discussion see Bird 1981: 353). When one says that p one is usually not just saying that p for its own sake, but is doing something with social-communicative significance like asserting, guessing, issuing a warning, predicting etc. Similarly, when one asks a question one is either inquiring into the answer or examining someone and if one tells an addressee to do something one is either ordering, requesting, advising etc. Some illocutionary acts are *communicative*: they aim at communication in the sense of transferring information (e. g. telling-that). Some are *social* or institutional: they aim at the creation or modification of social facts and in some cases require a conventional procedure to be performed (e. g. christening a ship, marrying someone).

While illocutionary acts are acts one performs *in* saying, asking, and telling, perlocutionary acts are acts one can perform *by* performing locutionary or illocutionary acts. *Perlocutionary* acts are a matter of the production of certain causal effects in the audience, speaker, or other persons (Austin 1962: 101). For example, in saying that p one might be arguing that p is the case. And by arguing that p is the case one might further manage to achieve the effect of convincing someone that p is the case. Similarly, in telling someone to do something one might be requesting that they do it. And by requesting that they do it one might further manage to achieve the effect of persuading them to do it. The acts of arguing and requesting are illocutionary acts whereas the acts of convincing and persuading are perlocutionary acts.

We can sum up the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts in the following table:

Mood	Linguistic/ Locutionary	Social-Communicative/ Illocutionary
Declarative	saying	asserting, guessing etc.
Interrogative	asking	inquiring, examining etc.
Imperative	telling-to	ordering, requesting etc.

That this is Austin's basic framework should be uncontroversial. But questions remain. One question pertains to the relationship between mood, locutionary acts, and illocutionary acts. It is clear that there is a relation between mood and locutionary acts: using a declarative sentence with its meaning results in the locutionary act of saying, while using an interrogative or an imperative results in an asking and telling-to. However, is there a further essential relation between locutionary acts and illocutionary acts? We will come back to this in the last section. Another question pertains to whether locutionary acts like saying are forceful and in what sense. This is what Searle's criticisms of Austin focused on and what we'll turn to next.

3. Searle's Criticism of Austin and the Standard Picture

Searle rejects Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts and replaces it with a threefold distinction between propositional acts, determinable illocutionary acts and determinate illocutionary acts. At the heart of the matter is Searle's reinterpretation of the term 'illocutionary'. Whereas Austin understands it in terms of the performance of a particular kind of act with social-communicative significance that goes beyond mere language use, Searle focuses on the idea that illocutionary acts go beyond the mere expression of a proposition and are *forceful* in the sense of both representing the world correctly/incorrectly and/or committing the speaker to such representation.[2] Given this reinterpretation, Austin's distinction seems to collapse since locutionary acts already look like illocutionary acts, in this new sense.

To look at this in detail, consider whether Austinian locutionary acts are forceful. One possibility is that the locutionary act resulting from using 'p' with its meaning is equivalent to

---

[2] Searle is not completely unaware that he's using 'illocutionary' differently than Austin (Searle 1969, 23, fn. 1).

what Searle calls the *propositional* act: the act of expressing a proposition without taking any stance towards it. This act is neutral or forceless in the sense of 'force' as presentation-as-true.[3] You don't represent the world correctly/incorrectly if you merely express the proposition that p. To express the proposition that p is just to present it as an object. This can be seen from the simple fact that if you use 'p or q' with its meaning then you can be reported as having *expressed* the proposition that p, the proposition that q, and the proposition that p or q. However, you're clearly not presenting either the proposition that p or the proposition that q as true, but, at best, only the proposition that p or q.

The first option is thus that what Austin meant by a *locutionary act* is simply what Searle calls a *propositional* act. The problem with this interpretation is that this is widely taken to be inconsistent with what Austin said about locutionary acts (Hare 1971, 108-109, Forguson 1973, 182; Recanati 1987, 245-248; Searle 1968). As we saw above, Austin thought that the act that results from using a declarative sentence 'p' with its meaning is that of *saying* that p. But, as all the commentators agree, saying is not a neutral, but a *forceful* act in the sense of 'force' as presentation-as-true! You do represent the world correctly/incorrectly if you say that p. To say that p is not simply to express the proposition that p, but to present it as true. This can again be seen from the simple fact that if you use 'p or q' with its meaning then you *can't* be reported as having said that p nor said that q, but just as having said that p or q.

Similar points apply to uses of interrogatives and imperatives with their meaning. As we saw above, Austin thought that the acts that result from using these sentences with their meanings are that of *asking* a question and *telling* someone *to* do something. And like saying, these are not neutral but *forceful* acts in something like the representational sense of 'force'. Supposing that interrogative contents are questions which can be modelled as sets of propositions, to ask one is not to just express it, but to present it as to be answered. Supposing that imperatival contents are actions which can be thought of as certain properties, to tell someone to perform one is not just to express it, but to present it as to be performed.

Thus, it seems that what Austin had in mind by a *locutionary act* can't be what Searle calls a propositional act since it is forceful in the above sense. But now, since Searle simply uses 'illocutionary' to pick out forceful acts, then, for him, 'say', 'ask', and 'tell-to' are already illocutionary act verbs and the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts collapses. This is Searle's conclusion:

> "...no sentence is completely force-neutral. Every sentence has some illocutionary force potential, if only of a very broad kind, built into its meaning. For example, even the most primitive of the old-fashioned grammatical categories of indicative, interrogative, and imperative sentences already contain determinants of illocutionary force. For this reason there is no specification of a locutionary act performed in the utterance of a complete sentence which will not determine the specification of an illocutionary act. Or, to put it more bluntly, on the characterization that Austin has so far given us of locutionary as opposed to illocutionary acts, there are (in the utterance of complete sentences) no rhetic acts as opposed to illocutionary acts at all." (Searle 1968, 412)

---

[3] This is one aspect of the notion of 'force' in play in the recent debates over propositional content and the *Content-Force* distinction (Hanks 2015, Recanati 2019, Reiland 2019, Soames 2015). Searle's propositional act is thus the linguistic analogue of the neutral mental act of *entertaining* a proposition (Kriegel 2013, Soames 2015). We will look at the notion of force in more depth in section 6.

Thus, on Searle's view, Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts should be replaced with a distinction between neutral propositional acts and forceful illocutionary acts:

> "We need to distinguish the illocutionary act from the propositional act - that is, the act of *expressing the proposition* (a phrase which is neutral as to illocutionary force). ... Symbolically, we might represent the sentence as containing an illocutionary force-indicating device and a propositional content indicator. Thus: F(p)
> where the range of possible values for *F* will determine the range of illocutionary forces, and the *p* is a variable over the infinite range of possible propositions." (Searle 1968, 420-421)

Thus, for Searle, and many others following him, Austin's linguistic, locutionary act of saying is better thought to be already an illocutionary act, just of a determinable kind vs. a more determinate one like asserting, guessing etc. (Searle 1968, 416-417, see also Alston 2000, 20-23; Hare 1971, 111; Recanati 1987, 248-250).

In later work Searle draws the distinction between the *illocutionary point* of a speech act which is best understood in terms of a particular direction of fit versus its specific *illocutionary force.* For example, all speech acts in the family of assertives have the same particular illocutionary point and direction of fit, they represent the world as being a certain way, while determinate acts in the class like assertions and guesses have a further specific illocutionary force (Searle 1979a, 12-14). The notion of a determinable illocutionary force seems to map neatly into the notion of illocutionary point.

We can sum up Searle's view in the following table:

Mood	Propositional	Linguistic/ Determinable Illocutionary	Social- Communicative/ Determinate Illocutionary
Declarative	expressing p	saying	asserting, guessing
Interrogative	expressing p	asking	inquiring, examining
Imperative	expressing p	telling-to	ordering, requesting

On this view, there is a relation between mood and determinable illocutionary acts: using a declarative sentence with its meaning results in a saying, while using an interrogative or an imperative results in an asking or telling-to. But, importantly, there is also a relationship between determinable and determinate illocutionary acts. Saying is here thought to be a *determinable* of assertive illocutionary acts and thus understood in a *Top-Down* manner, in terms of what is common to all determinate illocutionary acts in the assertive family, their illocutionary point. Thus, it doesn't really have an independent existence. To say is always in fact to *perform* a particular determinate illocutionary act like asserting or guessing. It follows that on this view you can't simply say something without performing any illocutionary act at all. Second, it follows that using 'Can you open the door?' to request that the addressee open the door is an *indirect* illocutionary act. One performs the determinable illocutionary act of asking the question by first performing a determinate illocutionary act in the inquisitive family, and via this act, indirectly performs the illocutionary act of requesting (Searle 1979b, 30-32).

We can now state the two theses of what Recanati calls the *Standard Picture* of speech act theory that are most important for us here and that he's reacting against[4]:

> *Thesis 1*: The notion of a locutionary act doesn't make sense. There are neutral propositional acts and forceful determinable and determinate illocutionary acts where the determinable ones are understood in terms of the *performance* of the determinate ones.
>
> *Thesis 2*: Every sentence mood encodes a determinable illocutionary force or an illocutionary point. Declaratives encode assertive or constative force and imperatives encode directive force.

As we will see next, Recanati takes some important steps back towards Austin by rejecting both theses.

4. Recanati on Locutionary Acts

We saw that Searle rejects the Austinian notion of locutionary act because he thinks that locutionary acts are forceful and thus determinable illocutionary acts and because he also thinks that determinable illocutionary acts are understood in terms of the *performance* of determinate ones. Recanati thinks that giving up on the notion of a linguistic, locutionary act is a mistake and that we can rehabilitate it by distinguishing between two concepts of force. He thinks that the basic notion of force can be traced back to Frege's distinction between merely grasping or expressing a thought and judging or asserting it:

> "The notion of force goes back to Frege. Frege, like many others, distinguished between grasping a thought and judging it to be true. On the linguistic level there's a corresponding distinction between expressing a thought and asserting it. An asserted thought is a thought expressed with an assertive 'force'." (Recanati 1987, 260).

Let's call this notion of force that distinguishes between a neutral entertaining or expression of a proposition and acts in which the proposition is presented as true *representational force*.[5] We will look at this in more detail later. For now, what matters is that Recanati thinks that force in this sense needs to be distinguished from 'force' in the sense of speaker's commitment to the truth of the content presented as true. Let's call this notion *truth-committal force*.[6] Recanati thinks that one way to understand the distinction between representational force and truth-committal force is by co-opting Hare's distinction between two ways of thinking about force-indicators like Frege's assertion-sign '⊢'. Hare claimed that Frege's assertion-sign

---

[4] Recanati also mentions another thesis of the *Standard Picture*, namely that content is uniformly propositional in the sense that sentences in the different moods all encode a proposition, differing from each other only in encoding a different type of generic illocutionary force. I reject this as well, but this won't play a role in this paper.

[5] Similar distinctions can be drawn for interrogative and imperatival contents. Supposing that interrogative contents are *questions* which can be modeled as sets of propositions, we can distinguish between neutral entertaining or expressing a question and presenting it as to be answered. Supposing that imperatival contents are *actions* which can be thought of as certain sorts of properties, we can distinguish between a neutral entertaining or expressing an action and presenting it as to be performed.

[6] For interrogative and imperatival cases this won't be truth-committal force, but something like *desiring-* or *desirability*-committal force, e. g. a speaker might not just present a question as to be answered, but also commit to wanting to know the answer or to regarding it as desirable that it be answered. Similarly, a speaker might not just present an action as to be performed but commit to wanting the addressee to perform it or to regarding it as desirable that the addressee perform it.

can either play a *tropic* or a *neustic* role. As a tropic it's a "sign of mood" and just signifies the generic type of representational act the sentence is standardly used to perform: propositional vs. imperatival etc. As a neustic it's a "sign of subscription" and signifies that the speaker utters the sentence with *serious intentions* and has a commitment to its content's truth etc. (Hare 1970, 11). Recanati's favorite example as to how the tropic and neustic force can come apart is the following dialogue:

> A: You're an imbecile.
> B: I'm an imbecile. Thank you!

On his construal of the dialogue, A both says and asserts that B is an imbecile. B says that he's an imbecile but does it while *echoing* A and *ironically*, which means that he doesn't assert that he's an imbecile. A utters a declarative with its meaning and also further performs an assertion and his utterance therefore has both tropic and neustic force. B utters a declarative with its meaning and so his utterance has tropic force, but since he's merely echoing A, his utterance doesn't have neustic force (Recanati 1987, 263).

Recanati now claims that Austin's locutionary-illocutionary distinction can be understood with the help of the tropic-neustic distinction. While locutionary acts like saying are representationally forceful, they're not truth-committally forceful. As you might remember, Searle thought that to perform a determinable illocutionary act is to always *perform* a determinate one, and hence the notion of a locutionary act doesn't make sense. Recanati thinks instead that to perform a locutionary act is not to *perform* a determinate illocutionary act, but to *present* someone, whom Recanati later calls the *enunciator*, as performing a determinate illocutionary act (Recanati 2019, 1410). Usually who the enunciator presents the illocutionary act as performing is themselves. But not always. In the above dialogue A's act of saying that B is an imbecile consists in presenting the enunciator as asserting that B is an imbecile, and in that case A himself is the enunciator who performs that assertion. Similarly, B's act of saying that he's an imbecile consists in presenting the enunciator as asserting that he's an imbecile. However, in this case he isn't himself the enunciator and doesn't perform that assertion.[7]

The key idea here is that we can make sense of the notion of a linguistic, locutionary act as a forceful act that goes beyond a mere expression of a proposition without thinking of it in terms of the *performance* of a truth-committal illocutionary act. I think this is correct. Nevertheless, I think that Recanati's specific way of implementing this idea is problematic and still too Searlean in understanding locutionary acts in terms of the *presentation* of determinate illocutionary acts as being performed. We can see why by seeing how it is in tension with his claims about the declarative mood which we'll look at next.

5. Recanati on the Declarative Mood

---

[7] As ingenious as this view is, to my mind it is not plausible as a reconstruction of Austin. One important though often neglected aspect of Austin's view is that his description of the successive series of acts from locutionary to perlocutionary is completely *Bottom-Up*. To characterize locutionary acts he doesn't see any need to mention illocutionary acts. This contrasts with the Gricean *Top-Down* order of explanation which explains everything starting from intentions to achieve perlocutionary effects (Grice 1957). Now, unlike Austin's view and more like Grice's and Searle's, Recanati's view is *Top-Down* in explaining the notion of a locutionary act through the notion of an illocutionary act which has the consequence that the latter is treated as more fundamental than the former (Recanati 2013: 624). Like Strawson and Searle, he can therefore be accused of Grice-fying Austin's views (Sbisa 2009: 35-37).

Many philosophers think that mood doesn't encode any illocutionary force which goes beyond mere language use. I think that this was also Austin's view, though this is bound to be interpretively controversial. In contrast, the Searlean orthodoxy holds that every mood encodes a particular *generic* illocutionary force: for example, declaratives encode assertive or constative force, and imperatives encode directive force. While Recanati's general sympathies are with this view, he argues that the *declarative* mood is special in not encoding any illocutionary force because declarative sentences can be used to perform both constative and performative speech acts. Instead, declaratives simply represent a state of affairs and are *neutral* between constative and performative force. To understand this argument, we need to start with the Austinian distinction between constative and performative acts as understood by Recanati.

The paradigm *constative* acts are judgment and assertion. In both cases we take a stand on how things already are in pre-existing reality. In general, to perform a constative act is to *report* on pre-existing reality and do something that is, in some sense, *correct* if and only if it fits it. This is why judgments and assertions themselves can be said to be true or false (and not just their contents).

In contrast, consider declaring a session open by using a sentence like 'The session is open' or giving someone something by using the sentence 'It's yours' (as opposed to using what Austin called an *explicit* performative like 'I hereby open the session' or 'I hereby give it to you'). Austin thought that to do these things is not to do something constative. Rather, it is to do something *performative*, something that isn't a matter of taking a stand on how things already are in pre-existing reality, but instead a matter of seeking to change it. For example, to perform the above sorts of declarations is not to report on pre-existing reality, but to change it by creating new *social* facts, and thus to do something that is, in some sense, *correct* only if the speaker has the requisite authority (Recanati 1987: Ch. 6).[8] This is why it's highly unintuitive to call performative acts like declarations true or false.[9]

Now, the *Standard Picture* assumes that sentences of a particular mood encode a generic type of illocutionary force and thereby give it an illocutionary-force potential. For example, imperatives like 'Leave!' are tied to the determinable, *directive* force which is common to particular directive illocutionary acts like ordering, requesting etc. In both ordering and requesting you *direct* the hearer to do something even though the determinate way you do it differs. Similarly, the *Standard Picture* assumes that declaratives like 'The cat is on the mat' are tied to the determinable, *assertive* or *constative* force which is made determinate in performing a particular assertive illocutionary act like asserting/claiming, guessing etc. In both asserting and guessing you're constating, reporting on pre-existing reality even though the determinate way you do it differs. We can sum up this picture in the following table:

Mood	Force-Potential	Determinate Acts
Declarative	assertive/constative	assertion, guessing
Imperative	directive	ordering, requesting

Now, consider the following sentences, each of which can be used to perform both a constative, reportive act, and a performative, creative act:

1. 'The session is open' (reporting on the status of the session vs. changing it)
2. 'It's yours' (reporting on property facts vs. changing them)

---

[8] Recanati thinks that performative acts fall into three kinds. First, there are the above sorts of declarations where the utterance aims to directly change social reality. Second, there are *commissive* acts like promises where the utterance aims to make it the speaker's responsibility to change reality. Finally, there are *directive* acts like orders where the utterance aims to make it the hearer's responsibility to change reality (Recanati 1987: 156-157).
[9] Note that this is still compatible with thinking that felicitous performatives *make* their contents true. What matters is that to do something performative isn't to do something that is *correct* if it fits pre-existing reality.

3. 'You're fired' (reporting on job status vs. changing it)
4. 'One must drive on the right' (reporting on a traffic rule vs. making one)

The simple fact that each of these sentences can be used to perform both constative and performative acts seems in prima facie tension with the claim that the declarative mood encodes constative force. This tension can be resolved in four ways.

First, one could hold on to the view that declaratives encode assertive/constative force and claim that the performative acts are performed only *indirectly*, via a Gricean mechanism. On this view when you utter 'It's yours' you directly perform some assertive/constative act like reporting on the property facts. However, since what you utter is blatantly false, the Gricean mechanisms kick in and through them you indirectly perform the performative act of giving (for discussion see Recanati 1987, 139-143, 166-168). Recanati finds this unintuitive. Furthermore, this view would entail that one can perform commissive acts like promises only indirectly, which is, again, unintuitive (Recanati 1987, 166).

Second, one could try to find a common type of generic illocutionary force that constative and performative uses are both a determinate of and then claim that the declarative mood encodes this force (for discussion see Recanati 1987, 143-150). The problem with this option is that there simply isn't such a generic type of illocutionary force since the most fundamental way of dividing forces is via their direction of fit and constative and performative acts have different directions of fit (Recanati 1987, 152-154).

Third, one could think that the declarative mood is *ambiguous*, encoding two different types of force. Recanati thinks we should avoid this on parsimony grounds if other options are available (Recanati 1987, 165).

Finally, and this is Recanati's preferred solution, one can reject the thesis that declaratives encode any particular illocutionary force and claim instead that they're illocutionarily *neutral*:

> "In my view, declarative sentences are illocutionarily neutral or "unmarked" in contrast to non-declarative sentences." (Recanati 1987, 168)

In contrast to other clause-types, declarative sentences do not correlate with any category of illocutionary force. They are illocutionarily neutral. A declarative sentence represents a state of affairs, that is all; how the representation is interpreted (in illocutionary terms) is left to context (Recanati 2013, 630).

There are two related claims here. First, that declaratives simply represent a state of affairs and don't encode any illocutionary force. Second, that declaratives are neutral between constative and performative force. Both together amount to a rejection of *Thesis 2* of the *Standard Picture.* I find these claims very plausible. The problem, as we will see next, is that Recanati's conception of locutionary acts doesn't allow us to uphold them.

6. The Tension

Let's see how to combine Recanati's conception of locutionary acts with his views about the declarative mood. On his conception of a locutionary act, to perform one is to *present* an enunciator as performing a determinate illocutionary act. What sort of an act? Given his claims about the declarative mood, this can't uniformly be an act in the assertive or constative family nor uniformly a performative act. But, and this is the key point, since to perform a locutionary act is to present an enunciator as performing a determinate illocutionary act, it always has to be one or the other! The problem is that this doesn't to yield the dual claims that declaratives simply represent a state of affairs and don't encode any illocutionary force, and

that the declarative is neutral between constative and performative force. Since to say that p is to present the enunciator as performing either a constative or a performative act, it looks like on this view the declarative does more than just represent a state of affairs. Furthermore, it entails that the declarative is not neutral, but rather *ambiguous* between the two forces.

In my view, Recanati's claims about mood are plausible and the problem here is with his conception of locutionary acts which is still too Searlean in understanding locutionary acts in terms of the presentation of determinate illocutionary ones. Thus, I'll next show that if we adopt a more Austinian conception of locutionary acts that are understood completely independently of illocutionary acts, we can accommodate his insight about the declarative mood.

7. Understanding Force: Representation vs. Truth-Commitment

To be prepared for the conception of locutionary acts I'll be presenting we need to gain a better understanding of talk of neutrality and force. We saw above that Recanati conceptually distinguished between representational force and truth-committal force. But we also saw that he understood this in terms of semantically encoded (tropic) versus intentional force (neustic). While the conceptual distinction is on the right track we will now see that it goes much deeper than the difference between semantically encoded and intentional force.

A lot of the literature in speech act theory as well as in the *Act-Based* tradition of thinking of propositional content operates with a very coarse-grained understanding of the division between what is "neutral" and what is "forceful". The paradigmatic neutral acts are thought to be entertaining and expressing a proposition. When one entertains a proposition one just brings it to mind as an object, that is, without taking any attitude or stance towards it (Kriegel 2013: 9-11). Similarly, when one expresses a proposition one just presents it as an object. The paradigmatic forceful acts are thought to be judgment and assertion. When one judges or asserts a proposition one *represents* a state of affairs and *commits* oneself to things being this way in pre-existing reality. "Neutrality" is thus understood in terms of a lack of truth-commitment, and "forcefulness" is understood in terms of constating and truth-commitment. We can sum this view up in a simple table:

	Neutral	Forceful
Mental Acts	entertaining	judgment
Speech Acts	expressing	assertion

The problem with this coarse-grained understanding of neutrality and forcefulness is that it completely neglects acts which are unlike entertaining and expressing insofar as they don't consist simply of bringing a proposition to mind or presenting at as an object, while at the same time also not being truth-committal. Thus, consider the acts of *imagining* that p or *supposing* that p. To imagine or suppose that p is not just to neutrally bring a proposition to mind qua an object that one can then do something further with. Instead, it is to represent the world as being some way, to present the proposition as true. If you imagine or suppose that p and it's not the case that p then you represent the world incorrectly. However, this doesn't immediately mean there's something wrong with your imagining or supposition. Imagining and supposing are representational acts, but, unlike judgment and assertion, not constative or truth-committal acts in that they're not making claims about pre-existing reality and are thus not *normed* for correctness. In contrast, judging and asserting are both representational and constative or truth-committal in making claims about pre-existing reality and are thus normed for correctness. If you judge or assert that p, and it's not the case that p then you not only represent the world incorrectly, but there's also something wrong with your belief or judgment.

The existence of things in this middle category suggests that we do away with the coarse-grained division of acts into neutral and forceful. Entertaining and imagining are both neutral in the sense of lacking truth-commitment. But they're far from being on a par. Entertaining and expressing are non-representational, *objectual* acts where the object is a proposition (Reiland 2019). In contrast, imagining, supposing, judgment and assertion are all representational, contentful acts with propositions as contents. To get a better grip on this distinction consider Grzankowski's recent discussion of the difference between the objectual fear of the proposition that p vs. fearing that p:

When an attitude has propositional content, the attitude is sensitive to the truth of the proposition. To put things in general terms, for any attitude V, V is a propositional attitude just in case for a subject S and proposition p such that S stands in V to p, if p were true, then things would be as S V's them to be. For instance, when one believes that p, if p were true, things would be as one believes them to be. If one fears that p, if p were true, things would be as one fears them to be. With this observation on the table, we can draw a clear contrast with the non-propositional attitudes for they do not appear to have conditions of accuracy, satisfaction, and so on. ... Propositional attitudes have propositions as contents, which is to say that they are sensitive to the truth of the proposition in the way outlined above. Non-propositional attitudes directed at propositions merely have propositions as objects and so are not sensitive to the truth of the propositions they are about. (Grzankowski 2016, p. 318-319).

Entertaining and expressing are *objectual* acts towards propositions and as such they aren't sensitive to the truth of the propositions in any way.[10] In contrast, imagining, supposing, judgment and assertion are all *representational*, contentful, propositional acts which are sensitive to the truth of their propositional contents.[11]

So the first division is between acts that are objectual and acts that are representational, contentful, or propositional: the former are not representationally correct/incorrect, whereas the latter are. We can also put this by saying that while the former lack any direction of fit, the latter have a mind to world direction of fit: they're correct if they fit the world. The second division is within the category of representational acts between those that are non-constative and non-truth-committal and those that are constative and truth-committal: imagining and supposing are not, judgment and assertion are. We can sum up this division as follows:

	Non-Representational/ Objectual	Representational/ Contentful	
		Non-Truth-Committal	Truth-Committal
Mental Acts	entertaining, grasping, understanding	imagining, supposing	judgment
Speech Acts	expressing	saying	assertion

---

[10] Two referees for this journal both doubt the claim that 'entertain' and 'express' don't pass Grzankowski's test above. Consider: 'If one entertains/expresses the proposition that p, and if p were true, then things would be as one entertains/expresses them to be'. To me, it is clear that this doesn't make any sense. In entertaining/expressing the proposition that p (NP), one doesn't entertain/express that things are in any particular way and so the latter half doesn't make any sense. Compare 'grasp' and 'understand' which similarly take noun phrases and are objectual. Consider: 'If one grasps/understands the proposition that p, and if p were true, then things would be as one grasps/understands them to be'. Again, this doesn't make any sense. In grasping/understanding a proposition that p, one doesn't grasp/understand that the world is a particular way. To talk about the sorts of acts or states where we grasp/understand that the world is a particular way we have to talk of grasping/understanding the *fact* that p. And it clearly doesn't follow from the dual facts that one grasps the proposition that p and p is true, that one grasps the fact that p. Much more is needed for that.

[11] Note that according to this contrast between 'objectual' vs 'propositional' acts what Searle calls propositional acts, acts of expressing propositions, are really objectual acts.

Non-representational acts are truly neutral or forceless. In contrast, representational acts are representationally or tropically forceful, but not truth-committally or neustically forceful. Finally, truth-committal acts are both representationally and truth-committally forceful. It's important to be clear that since these distinctions make already sense in the mental realm, this goes much deeper than Recanati's understanding of the conceptual distinction in terms of semantically encoded versus intentional force.[12]

With these distinctions under our belt, I can now present the Austinian conception of locutionary acts on which they're representationally, but not truth-committally forceful.

8. An Austinian View of Locutionary Acts

On Austin's view, a locutionary act is an act performed simply by using a sentence with its meaning. The key is to understand the notion in a completely *Bottom-Up* manner: as independent from either the performance or presentation of illocutionary acts. On the view I favor, both as a reading of Austin and on its merits, there is no essential relation between locutionary and illocutionary acts (Kasa & Larsson 2023, Reiland 2024). Saying has independent existence. To say is simply to use a declarative sentence with its meaning (Bach 2001: 41). It follows that, unlike on Searle's view, we can simply say something without performing any illocutionary act at all, and unlike on Recanati's, we can say something without presenting anyone as performing an illocutionary act. Second, although in saying we typically assert or guess etc. and it is the most convenient way of doing so because all of these acts have the same kind of content, we might say and in doing so query or order etc. instead. It follows that using 'Can you open the door?' to request that the addressee open the door is *not* an indirect illocutionary act. One performs the locutionary act of asking the question and only the illocutionary act of requesting. And unlike on Searle's view, one performs the latter act *directly*, that is, not via first performing an inquisitive illocutionary act.

How about force? Take the locutionary act of saying that p. As Austin, Searle etc. all agree, this act isn't neutral in the sense of consisting of a mere expression of a proposition. Unlike 'entertain', 'say' doesn't take NP-s like 'the proposition that p', but that-clauses. We entertain or express the proposition that p but say that p and that is clearly a representational, contentful act. So, saying is representationally forceful. But this doesn't automatically mean that it is constative or truth-committal. Much like to imagine or suppose that p, to say that p is to represent a state of affairs, to present a proposition as true, but not commit to its being true in pre-existing reality.

Thus, the declarative mood encodes representational force. To say is not just to express a proposition, but to present it as true. But, as we saw above, representational force is not yet *constative* or truth-committal: representation of pre-existing reality. Rather, the declarative mood and saying present the proposition as true in a way which is *neutral* between constating vs. performance.[13] This view allows us to do justice to Recanati's insight that declaratives

---

[12] What does all of this have to do with the notion of 'illocutionary force'? As we have seen, in Austin's original use, 'illocutionary act' picks out acts that go beyond the linguistic and have social-communicative significance. So 'illocutionary force' just picks out the specific nature of the social-communicative speech act and doesn't have any necessary conceptual connection to either representational or truth-committal force. There are representationally and truth-committally forceful mental acts that aren't illocutionary acts in Austin's sense.

[13] Note that this picture is entirely compatible with the view that representation is fundamentally a matter of constative force and truth-commitment (Hanks 2015). On such a view, attitudes like imagining and supposing are taken to be somehow derivative of something like judging. Similarly, one could think that the attitude that saying expresses is derivative of judging. But this doesn't force one to think of the linguistic, locutionary act of saying in terms of illocutionary acts. Of course, the view is also compatible with views which take representation to be divorced from constative force and truth-commitment, to which the latter can be optionally added.

simply represent a state of affairs and that they're neutral between constative and performative force. Consider again the following sentences:

 1. 'The session is open'
 2. 'It's yours'
 3. 'You're fired'
 4. 'One must drive on the right'

To use any of them with its meaning is to say something and to do that is to present a proposition as true. But, as we have seen, to present a proposition as true or represent a state of affairs, in this sense, is not yet to do anything constative nor performative. It is only at the illocutionary level that one further performs either a constative act like assertion, committing things being thus and so in pre-existing reality; or a performative act like a declaration, attempting to make things thus and so by one's very act.

The Austinian conception of locutionary acts enables us to do full justice to Recanati's insight that the declarative simply represents a state of affairs and is neutral between constative and performative force. But it also shows that his claims didn't go far enough because the insight generalizes to sentences of other moods. They similarly encode only representational force and are neutral insofar as inquisitive or directive force. To perform a locutionary act of asking is to present a question as to be answered. But it is not yet to do something genuinely *inquisitive* or commit oneself to wanting it to be answered or to regarding it as desirable that it's answered. Thus, take the interrogative sentence 'What was Wittgenstein's nationality?". To use it to perform the locutionary act of asking what Wittgenstein's nationality was is to present the question as to be answered. But it is only at the illocutionary level that one further either queries into its answer, expressing a wondering or a desire to know the answer, versus examining someone, merely wanting to know whether they know the answer.

Similarly, to perform a locutionary act of telling the addressee to do A, is to present the action as to be performed. But it is not yet to do something genuinely *directive* or commit oneself to wanting the addressee to do it or to regarding it as desirable that they do it. Thus, take the imperative sentence 'Go to hell!'. To use it to perform the locutionary act of telling the addressee to go to hell, is to present the action as to be performed. But one might do so jokingly or ironically in which case one isn't directing them to do that at all.

9. Conclusion

Austin distinguishes between linguistic, locutionary acts, and social-communicative, illocutionary acts. In contrast, the Searlean orthodoxy rejects the notion of a locutionary act and instead draws a distinction between propositional and determinable and determinate illocutionary acts. Furthermore, it takes sentence mood to encode generic, determinable illocutionary force which is ultimately understood in terms of the performance of determinate illocutionary acts. As we have seen, Recanati departs from the Searlean orthodoxy and takes some important steps back in the direction of Austin. His first claim is that Austin's notion of locutionary act is an important category and can be thought of as forceful in the representational sense without being truth-committal. His second claim is that the declarative mood simply represents a state of affairs, doesn't encode any generic illocutionary force, and is neutral between constative and performative acts. However, as I've argued, his specific conception of locutionary acts on which they're understood in terms of presentation of illocutionary acts is still too Searlean and doesn't enable us to uphold his claims about the declarative mood. We can do better by going fully back to Austin and understanding locutionary acts completely independently of illocutionary ones. If we do this, we'll arrive on a

view on which mood encodes representational force and saying, asking, and telling-to are representationally, but not committally forceful. This allows us to not only capture Recanati's insight about the declarative mood, but also see that it generalizes to other moods.

Bibliography

Alston W., *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000.

Austin J. L., *How To Do Things With Words*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962.

Bach K., "You don't say", in *Synthese*, 128, 2001, p. 15-44.

Ball B., "Speech Acts, Actions, and Events", in P. Stalmasczyk (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Philosophy of Language,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 335-348.

Bird G., "Austin's Theory of Illocutionary Force", in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 6, 1981, p. 345-369.

Davidson D., "Moods and Performances", in A. Margalit (ed.), *Meaning and Use*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1979, p. 9-20.

Grice P., "Meaning", in *Philosophical Review*, 66, 1957, p. 377-388.

Grzankowski A., "Attitudes Towards Objects", in *Nous*, 50, 2016, p. 314-328.

Hanks P., *Propositional Content*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

Hare R. M., "Meaning and Speech Acts", in *Philosophical Review*, 79. 1970, p. 3-24.

Hare R. M., "Austin's Distinction between Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts", in *Practical Inferences*, London, Macmillan Press, 1971, p. 100-114.

Hornsby J., "Illocution and Its Significance", in S. Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory,* London, Routledge, 1994, p. 187-207.

Kaplan D., "Afterthoughts", in J. Almog, J. Perry, H. Wettstein (eds.), *Themes from Kaplan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 565-614.

Kissine M., *From Utterances to Speech Acts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Kriegel U., "Entertaining as a Propositional Attitude: A Non-Reductive Characterization", in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 50, 2013, p. 1-22.

Kasa M. & Larsson F., "Re: the rhetic", in *Synthese*, 202, 2023.

Recanati F., *Meaning and Force: The Pragmatics of Performative Utterances*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Recanati F., "Content, Mood, and Force", *Philosophy Compass*, 8, 2013, p. 622-632.

Recanati F., "Force Cancellation", in *Synthese*, 196, 2019, p. 1403-1424.

Reiland I., "Predication and the Frege-Geach Problem", in *Philosophical Studies*, 176, 2019, p. 141-159.

Reiland I., "Austin vs. Searle on Locutionary vs. Illocutionary Acts", forthcoming in *Inquiry,* 2024*.*

Sbisa M., "Uptake and Conventionality in Illocution", *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics*, 5, 2009, p. 33-52.

Sbisa M., "Locution, illocution, perlocution", in M. Sbisa, K. Turner (eds.), *Pragmatics of Speech Actions*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2013, p. 25-75.

Searle J., "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts", in *The Philosophical Review*, 77, 1968, p. 405-424.

Searle J., *Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

Searle J., "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts", in *Expression and Meaning*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979a, p. 1-29.

Searle J., "Indirect Speech Acts." *Expression and Meaning*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979b, p. 30-57.

Soames S., *Rethinking Language, Meaning, and Mind*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015.