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ON INSULTING

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to elucidate whether insulting is an illocutionary act so that, if this is the case, the conditions and rules for the act can be set up.

In order to clarify the kind of act insulting is, we shall review the concepts of performative utterance, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, the consequences and effects of such speech acts, and the notion of convention. Once this has been done, we shall try to put the pieces together to conclude that the actual status of insulting is neither that of an illocutionary act nor that of a perlocutionary one; that insulting fits neatly into neither of those categories.

## PREFACE

The aim of this paper is the elucidation of the status of insulting as a speech act<sup>1</sup> so that, if an illocutionary act, the conditions necessary and sufficient for the act can be set up.

To be able to give an analysis of the act following Searle (1965, 1969): by way of asking what are the conditions necessary and sufficient for the act of insulting to have been performed in the utterance of a given sentence<sup>2</sup>, we should both be sure of the fact that we are actually dealing with an illocutionary act and know what constitutes an insult -since the essential condition in such an analysis of how to insult will state that the utterance of T (the particular sentence or fragment) counts as an insult (or as its definition).

In such a situation, then, it is obvious that we must give plausible answers to these issues before turning -if that should be the case- to the necessary and sufficient conditions for insulting.

We shall begin with the question of what constitutes an insult.

1. AN INSULT, TO INSULT, AND INSULTING SOMEBODY

1.1. Some definitions

What is an insult? What does it consist of? When wondering about the meaning -use- of some particular concept, a common and generally useful thing to do is to look it up in a dictionary. Such a procedure, however, will not, in the case that concerns us here, help to answer any of the two above questions in a nonvague way. A mere glance at some of the available dictionary entries will show that we are sent back repeatedly to other concepts as vague, at least, as the one we are now trying to define. Consider, for instance, the following definitions:

AMERICAN HERITAGE

INSULT: (n) an offensive remark or act.

(v) to speak to or treat in a callous or contemptuous way.

OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

INSULT: (sb) 1. an act, or the action, of attacking or assailing; attack, assault.

2. an act or the action of insulting (in sense 1 or 2 of vb); injuriously contemptuous speech or behavior; scornful utterance or action intended to wound self-respect; an affront, indignity, outrage.

3. the act of leaping upon.

INSULT: (vb) 1. intr. to manifest arrogant or scornful delight by speech or behavior; to exult proudly or contemptuously; to boast, brag, vaunt, glory, triumph, esp. in an insolent or scornful way.

2. trans. to assail with offensively dishonoring or contemptuous speech or action; to treat with scornful abuse, or treatment that wounds self-respect.

INSULTINGLY: (adv.) in an insulting manner; so as to insult, with scornful abuse, or treatment that wounds self-respect.

OXFORD ADVANCED LEARNER'S

INSULT: (n) remark or action that insults.

(vt) speak or act in a way that hurts or is intended to hurt a person's feelings or dignity.

For what makes a remark offensive? What is a callous or contemptuous way? With respect to what? According to whom? What somebody considers callous somebody else may not consider so. What constitutes the norm from which callous and contemptuous depart? When are we to properly say that an utterance or some other sort of behavior is injuriously contemptuous and when are we to say that it is not? How do we decide? On which grounds?

Is it a necessary requirement that in order to insult somebody the person who does the insulting manifests arrogant or scornful delight by speech or behavior? What is scornful abuse? What is self-respect? What are a person's feelings? What is dignity about?

All these questions and probably some others must be given an answer if we are to make sense out of our dictionary entries in this particular case, and have more than a rough idea of what an insult and to insult are.

Although I have to agree with Searle that "most notions in ordinary language do not have absolutely strict rules"<sup>3</sup>, this must not keep us from trying to find a plausible -and, if possible, adequate- definition of insult, one that mirrors as

faithfully as possible the ordinary use of the word insult.

We need a definition that does not send us back "indefinitely" to other notions, and specially to concepts that are equally vague. In this search for such a definition, the entries above will not be much help but they nevertheless will guide our steps.

Thus, more or less explicit in those entries is that insult is an act<sup>4</sup>, and an act which is primarily verbal -though not necessarily so. That we are dealing with an intentional act. We are also told that the act of insulting somebody consists in acting -verbally or not- in a way that hurts or is intended<sup>5</sup> to hurt a person's feelings or dignity. What is left to determine, however, to have a clear picture of insult/to insult is what conforms one's feelings or dignity, what makes a remark offensive, what is a callous or contemptuous way of behaving, i.e., what made our dictionary definitions so vague.

In order to clear this out I shall now turn to Goffman's concept of face, which I think can illuminate our present inquiry in several important ways.

## 1.2. Goffman's concept of face

As we have just said, Goffman (1967) introduces a concept which may be of use for a plausible and adequate definition of insult<sup>6</sup>: the concept of face.

It is this very notion that we hope will enable us to make sense out of our vague dictionary entries.

Face is defined as "the positive<sup>7</sup> values a person effectively claims for himself by the line<sup>8</sup> others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delinested in terms of approved social attributes(...)." <sup>9</sup>

According to Goffman, in an encounter a person may be said to have, be in or maintain face or, on the other hand, to be in wrong face or out of face. A person is said to be in face "when the line he effectively takes presents an image of him that is internally consistent, i.e., supported by judgments and evidence conveyed by other participants, and that is confirmed by evidence conveyed by impersonal agencies in the situation."

A person is said to be in wrong face "when information is brought forth in some way about his social worth which cannot be integrated, even with effort, into the line that is being sustained for him."

A person is said to be out of face "when he participates in a contact with others without having ready a line of the kind participants in such situations are expected to take."

When a person realizes that he is in face -and he actually is-, he will typically respond with confidence and assurance. When he is in wrong face, and senses it, he is likely to feel ashamed or inferior because of what happened to the activity on his account and because of what may happen to his reputation as a participant.<sup>10</sup> "He may become embarrassed or chagrined, and even shamefaced."

According to Goffman, there are two aspects to face: self-respect and a standard of considerateness. That is, during an encounter any member of any group is expected

to conduct himself so as to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants.

Ordinarily, then, maintenance of face is a condition of interaction, not its objective. But usual objectives are typically pursued in a way such as to be consistent with the maintenance of face. If an incident occurs, i.e., if something threatens maintenance of face, then face-work is required -specially if the interaction is to go on<sup>11</sup>.



### 1.3. Toward a "new" definition

At the beginning of section 1.2. we said that Goffman's concept of face was the very one that we hoped would enable us to make sense of the above dictionary entries and allow for a plausible (and adequate?) definition of insult. We are now in the position of giving such a definition along face lines, and of seeing how face gives content to the definitions in the dictionary.

An insult will be defined as a threat to face<sup>12</sup> -an act verbal or nonverbal- that menaces the maintenance of face which, as pointed out already, is a condition of interaction. To insult somebody, then, will be the carrying out of the threat. And insulting somebody will be the set of steps taken in the carrying out of the threat.

Usually, an insult will be a verbal threat to face which is carried out by formally conventional means, but this -as we shall see- needs not be always the case.<sup>13</sup> For I can insult nonverbally and I can insult through formally nonconventional means.

But how does the concept of face give sense to our vague -and, hence of little use- dictionary entries? How does it make them nonvague any longer? In section 1.1. we complained about the fact that although our dictionary entries stated some (all?) the facts involved in an insult, they did it in a loose way. After stating some of the dictionary entries we may come across, we wondered about some of the statements made in them. Let us recall some:

"What makes a remark offensive? What is a callous or contemptuous way of behaving? With respect to what? According to whom? (...) What constitutes the norm from which callous and contemptuous depart? When are we to properly say that an utterance or some other sort of behavior is injuriously contemptuous and when are we to say that it is not? How do we decide? On which grounds?"

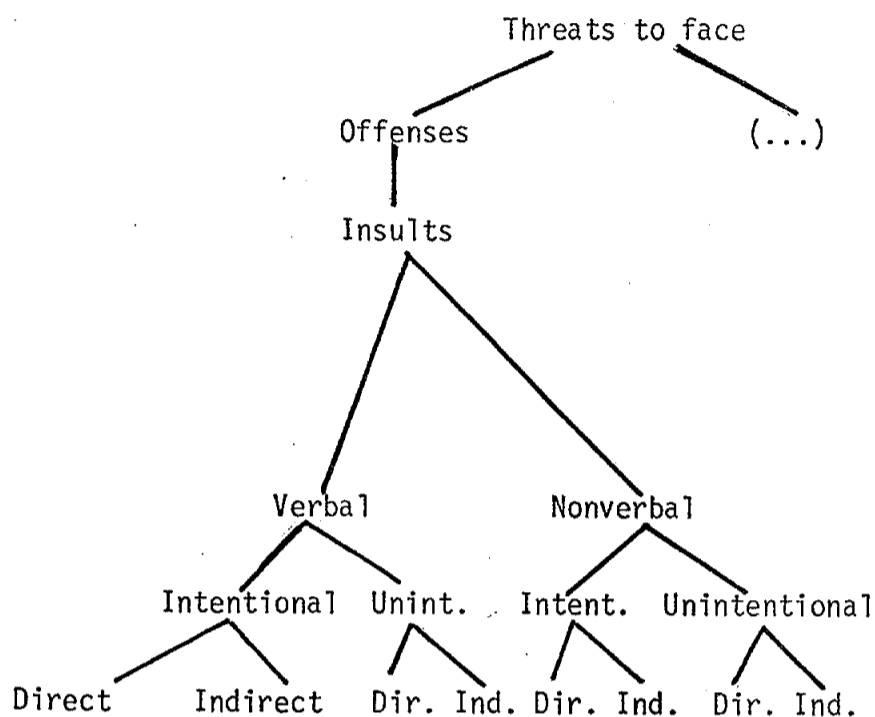
The answer to all these questions -and, thus, the answer we need in order to arrive

at an at least plausible definition of insult- comes to us through the notion of face.

"As sacred objects, men are subject to slights and profanation", says Goffman. The variable concept of face -the different selfs men want to present on different occasions- will be the one that determines the norm, the norm itself. Anything that "sins" against the face that one wants to present -or that in fact manages to present-, that menaces face, will be immediately classed by himself and by the other interactants -through whom face is sustained- under contemptuous or callous. We decide on the grounds of face. Any attempt -deliberate or not- against the face of one or more of the interactants in an encounter will be a deviation of the norm, and an attack to self-respect and/or considerateness: the two aspects of face.<sup>14</sup>

1.4. A preliminary typology

Now, taking into account some of the things we have said, let us posit the following typology:



Before paying it careful attention, and deciding whether it is plausible or not, let us explain the diagram.

The hierarchical structure above assumes that insults are a kind -to be specified in detail- of offenses which, in turn, are threats to face. Those insults are said to be of two kinds: verbal and nonverbal. The category verbal-nonverbal refers to the code -system of signs- employed to carry out the threat. Verbal means that words are used; nonverbal refers to other sorts of behavior in which words do not take part<sup>15</sup>.

Both verbal and nonverbal insults are said to be intentional or unintentional<sup>16</sup>. This category refers to the mental state with which the speaker -the insulter in this case- approaches the action he is about to carry out: deliberately or not.

Intentional and unintentional insults may<sup>17</sup> in turn, be direct or indirect, at least according to what has been stated in the diagram above!<sup>18</sup> This category is meant to refer to the procedures, to the way in which the insult is "drawn": by means of inferences or not.

Let us next consider some examples that will better show what we mean to illustrate in the taxonomy, and that shall help us to decide as to its plausibility.

DIRECT INTENDED VERBAL INSULTS

- (1)a. Son of a bitch (!)<sup>19</sup>
- b. Jerk (!)
- c. Motherfucker (!)
- d. Damn you, you lousy bastard (!)<sup>20</sup>
- e. You, fart (!)
- f. Asshole (!)
- g. Nigger (!) / Jew (!)

(2)" (...) To all the objections I have already urged, I have still another to add. I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying her, was a patched-up business, at the expence of your father and uncles. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is her husband, is the son of his late father's steward, to be his brother? Heaven and earth! -of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted? (The emphasis is Jane Austen's)

When speaking seriously<sup>21</sup> any of the above examples will constitute an instance of an insult. The examples in (1) are "obvious" -since they are formally conventional<sup>22</sup> and we do not need to draw inferences -or we are at least not conscious of

doing so) to understand them as insults-, but the one in (2) is as much obvious although it cannot be said to be conventional, at least not in the sense used for (1). Both are insults: the ones in (1) may be said to be blatantly rude, the one in (2) much more "polite" but equally, or even more, effective.

INDIRECT INTENDED VERBAL INSULTS

(3) (A and B are two friends who are talking of family and relatives. At one point during their interaction, the following utterances concerning B's mother-in-law occur)<sup>23</sup>

A: Do you call her mom?

B: No!, I have a great respect for my mother

I am saying that this is an instance of an indirect intended insult because I did the insulting (?) myself and I meant it. I had the intention of being nasty towards my mother-in-law -although that can be different from insulting<sup>24</sup>- and I wanted my interlocutor to draw a particular conversational implicature: "I don't have a great respect for my mother-in-law, and hence I don't think she deserves me calling her mom!"

(4) (C is a student at Penn. P is one of his professors this semester. Last semester, C took a course with a professor who recently died. P is supposed to have been a close acquaintance (friend?) of the now dead professor. A week after the professor's death, C and P and the following interaction takes place)

C: And how is she (the dead professor's wife) feeling?

P: Well, I can't say she's allright, but she'll probably overcome it

But you only took a course with him, isn't it?

C felt insulted for, in order to see the relevance of P's last remark, he had to assume that P meant approximately: "Since you only took a course with the dead professor, you are surely not in a position to ask about his wife's feelings."

Certainly, P's remark could have also been understood in two other ways: as a change in topic or as incoherent. But since P knew -and C knew that P knew-, when making it, that the dead professor was going to conduct C's dissertation and that they were close, the other two possible interpretations seem improbable.

I have classed the insult under intended insults, although we shall never know whether it was meant as such, whether it was deliberate or not. According to my friend C -he is not a touchy person and has plenty of resources to deal with life-, it was meant as such, it was deliberate.

#### DIRECT UNINTENDED VERBAL INSULTS

As already advanced in fn. 17, I do not think this subcategory possible at all. To me, whenever a direct insult occurs, the insult is intentional -or appears to be so- and there is no way of denying, of cancelling it: an insult has been performed and the insulter cannot go on and say "but I don't mean it" or whatever. The very form -linguistic form- in which it is wrapped -and specially if formally conventional- makes the insult noncancellable.<sup>25</sup>

If I say any of the utterances in (1) -and even the one in (2)- to any hearer, and I speak seriously and have the right intonation, any of those utterances will certainly be taken as insults.<sup>26/27</sup>

If I say them jokingly, they no longer constitute insults. Of course all this depends on our understanding of direct and conventional. But of this later.

#### INDIRECT UNINTENDED VERBAL INSULTS

(5) (Two men are sitting in a cafeteria. One of them is from Jordan.<sup>28</sup> They

are acquaintances on both religious -they are muslims- and professional grounds -they are in the same graduate program. A jewish female arrives and joins them. She is a good friend of the other man, but she is not on the same friendly terms with the arab guy since they had a big argument one year before this encounter and he insulted her on ethnic grounds. She recalls him saying "Oh, you fucking jews!" She never talked to him afterwards, but now she feels she must join them because of her friend. It is the day after Sadat's death. After she joins them, the following dialogue occurs)

A: woman's friend; J: man from Jordan; S: woman

S: Have you heard about Sadat's death?<sup>29</sup>

(This question was addressed to both men)

J: Yes, of course!

S: (Now, addressing J only) Are you pleased?

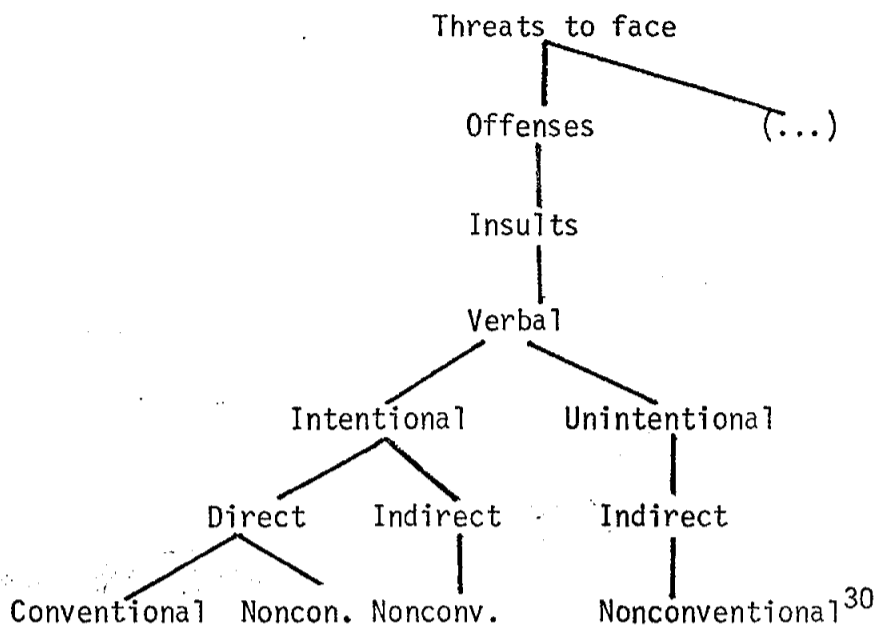
A: Why did you pose the question that way?

A made the question because he felt that S had insulted J. But not, or not only on ethnic grounds, but also on moral ones, since as he later explained "you are not supposed to be pleased by anybody's death!"

Since it was I who did the "insulting", I can properly say that it was unintended -I did not mean it, I did not do it deliberately, or at least I did not so consciously.

After going through these examples, it seems that concerning verbal insults all categories are adequate, except that set up for direct unintentional insults of which I shall speak in detail later on when dealing with convention.

The typology for verbal insults after the remarks made looks as follows:



I am not going to discuss here either nonverbal insults or their taxonomy. I feel uneasy about it, and although I would like for it to work as nicely as the one set up for verbal ones I do not think it possible. Moreover, it is very difficult -and would take very long- to describe verbally what is done nonverbally -especially what is done conventionally nonverbally, which, on the other hand, is the only category of nonverbal insults clear to me.

Insulting is an act done mainly with words, as Austin points out, but which kind of act? To this question I shall now turn.



## 2. INSULTING AS A SPEECH ACT

We said in the introduction that previous to the conditions and rules that allow for the act of insulting to have been performed in the utterance of a given sentence was the solving of the issue of the kind of act insulting is -since the setting up of the conditions necessary and sufficient for the act assumes that we are dealing with an illocutionary act, something we cannot at first sight be sure of.

We shall now, then, pay some attention to this issue.

### 2.1. Insulting and the so-called performative utterances

When dealing with the notion of a performative utterance -or of a performative verb for that matter-, Austin (1962) refers several times to insulting. In all these cases, insulting is used as an instance of a performative verb for which we do not have a conventional procedure<sup>31</sup> where conventional procedure here refers to the illocutionary force indicating device (cf. Austin (1962), pp. 30-1, 65-6, and 68-9).<sup>32</sup>

According to Austin, utterances used in insulting are performative utterances (or are instances of performative utterances) for:

- (i) when insulting somebody we do something in addition to saying something -which is the feature that lies at the bottom of the performative/constative dichotomy-, even though we do not have a performative verb to make our act explicit, and
- (ii) insulting is a conventional procedure,<sup>33</sup> and indeed a primarily verbal one.

But illuminating as this could have been in our search to find out what kind of act insulting is, it leads us not very far, for Austin replaces the original distinc-

tion between performative and constative utterances -utterances which are doings and utterances which are sayings- by a general theory of speech acts, once he realizes that the dichotomy, if pushed to the limit, collapses. As Searle (1968) puts it "what was originally thought to be a special kind of utterance (performatives) swallows the general case (constatives), which now turn out to be only certain kinds of speech acts among others."

Once the dichotomy vanishes, then, what is the relation of our old performatives to these new speech acts?

A first answer to this question could be the very same one Austin provides at the end of Lecture X:

"But what is the relation between performatives and these illocutionary acts? It seems as though when we have an explicit performative we also have an illocutionary act (...)."

But this, obviously, will not do in our case, since we do not have an explicit performative formula for insulting (the procedure so many times referred to). Eventually, however, we shall find a way out:

Austin (1962) will admit later on that illocutionary acts include our old constative and performative utterances, so that nothing is left of the original constative/performative distinction. From now on we shall have illocutionary acts instead. In the case of the constative utterances we abstract from the illocutionary aspects of the speech act: i.e., the meaning of the utterance. In the case of performative utterances, we attend as much as possible to the illocutionary force of the utterance, and abstract from the dimension of correspondence with facts.

Still, some questions remain. For what happens with those acts that do not have an explicit illocutionary force -an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)-, that lack a procedure to express it, as Austin puts it?<sup>34</sup>

Do we still concentrate in their illocutionary force when we are not sure of the illocutionary force we are dealing with?

In order to furnish an answer -not necessarily the best one- to these questions, I shall now turn to Searle (1968). In this paper, Searle rejects the locutionary/illocutionary act distinction set up by Austin by showing that no sentence is force neutral, that every sentence has some illocutionary force potential if only of a broad kind,<sup>35</sup> built into its meaning. That is, meaning determines illocutionary force. So that, now, all members of the class of locutionary acts (performed in the utterance of complete sentences, according to Searle<sup>36</sup>) are members of the class of illocutionary acts, because every locutionary act is an illocutionary act.

So Searle as distinct from Austin maintains that the illocutionary force of a sentence (or at least one of its possible illocutionary forces) is determined by its meaning. Austin, on the other hand, considered meaning and force separable<sup>37</sup> and distributed to the utterance through different kinds of acts: the locutionary act in the case of meaning, the illocutionary one in that of force.

After them, then, I shall assume with Austin that insulting is an illocutionary act -at least for the moment-, and with Searle that force is determined by the meaning of the sentence.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.2. Insulting: illocutionary or perlocutionary act?

Following Austin's insights we assumed that insulting is an illocutionary act. The decision, however, was made quite unreasonably: since Austin (1962) considers insulting a performative,<sup>39</sup> and all performatives and constatives are said to be illocutionary acts, we concluded that this was also the case. In order to deal with the problem that is not having -and not having the possibility of having- an IFID, we patched it up by means of Searle's (1968) position: by assuming that the illocutionary force is already determined by the meaning of the sentence. But is that so? Austin's general theory of speech acts includes perlocutionary acts as well. Will it not be better if we considered insulting such an act?

Let us consider the main characteristics of both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts before making up our minds as to what sort of act insulting is.

### Illocutionary

1. It is the performance of an act in saying something; the act of uttering utterances with a certain (conventional) force.
2. It is said to be a conventional act, in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula.
3. It is an act that involves conventions.

### Perlocutionary<sup>40</sup>

1. The performance of an act by saying something; the act we bring about or achieve by saying something.<sup>41</sup>
2. It is not conventional in the sense of being capable of being made explicit by the performative formula.
3. As opposed to the illocutionary act, it is an act that always includes some consequences, some of which may

"unintentional!"

4. The illocutionary act as distinct from the perlocutionary is connected with the production of effects in three ways:

(a) securing of uptake

Unless understanding is achieved, the act will not have been happily, successfully performed.

But this is not to say that the illocutionary act is the achievement of a certain effect<sup>42</sup>. The

effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution.

(b) the illocutionary act "takes effect" in certain ways.<sup>43</sup>

(c) many illocutionary acts invite by convention a response or sequel: an order invites the response of obedience, and a promise that of fulfilment. All these effects are distinct from the production of effects characteristic of the perlocutionary act.

5. We may achieve an illocutionary

4. The perlocutionary act consists in either the achievement of a perlocutionary object (convince, persuade) or the production of a perlocutionary sequel, e.g., the illocutionary act of warning may achieve its<sup>42</sup> perlocutionary object of alerting and also have the perlocutionary sequel of alarming.

The perlocutionary object of one illocution may be the perlocutionary sequel of another.

Some perlocutionary acts are always the producing of a sequel, namely those where is no illocutionary formula: thus I may surprise you, or upset you or humiliate you by a locution though there is no illocutionary formula. "I surprise you by...", "I upset you by..."; "I humiliate you by..."

5. Characteristic of perlocutionary acts

act by nonverbal means, but since the means employed for illocutionary acts must be conventional, whether verbal or nonverbal these means have to be conventional.<sup>44</sup>

is that the response or sequel achieved can be achieved additionally or entirely by nonlocutionary means, but these means whether verbal or nonverbal need not be conventional<sup>45</sup> or not for that purpose.

We are now in the position to decide: if insulting is an illocutionary act it will have the characteristics set up for illocutionary acts -assuming, of course, that these are correct- and none of those established for perlocutionary acts -unless it is both, an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act at the same time as fn. 41 seems to suggest for some speech acts. Is that the case?

A. Is insulting an act we achieve in saying something as opposed to an act achieved by saying something?

Austin (1962) does not regard this characterization as by any means a satisfactory test. Neither do I. To me,

"In saying "son of a bitch" I was insulting Albert (or I insulted  
you  
Albert)"

and

"By saying "son of a bitch" I insulted Albert (or I was insulting  
you  
Albert)"

amount to the same thing, they are equivalent.

Is insulting the act of uttering utterances with a certain (conventional) force?<sup>46</sup>  
I would say that this does apply to insulting. Utterances used usually or commonly in insulting somebody are conventional in that very ordinary sense of conventional: they are generally used in a particular way (as insults) and they are taken to be

so used.

B. Is insulting a conventional act in the sense of being capable of being made explicit by the performative formula?

Obviously not. As Austin pointed out, it is one of the cases in which we are inclined to say that the procedure does not exist.

Here, then, insulting joins the perlocutionary acts.

C. Is insulting an act that involves conventions as opposed to an act that involves consequences?

What is left to determine is in what way is it conventional and which are the consequences it involves. I shall leave those issues unanswered for the moment. I shall deal with them both in the next sections.

D. Does the successful or consummated performance of insulting bring in consequences or effects in any of the senses stated for illocutionary acts?

(a) Securing of uptake. It is clear that unless an insult is not understood as such it cannot be said to have been happily performed -at least this is clear with intended insults-, although we may say that it nevertheless has been performed,<sup>47</sup> unsuccessfully performed.

(c) Does insulting "take place" in a certain way? This question does not concern us here for, as I understand it, it affects only institutionalized acts: marrying, naming a ship, bringing a verdict in the courtroom, etc.<sup>48</sup>

(c) Does insulting invite by convention a response or sequel?

Does an insult invite a response in the same way that an order invites the response of obedience and a promise that of fulfilment?

I would say that this is the case: insulting invites/should invite the response of being hurt in the same way that an order invites the response of obedience and a promise that of fulfilment. That is, being hurt is the expected reaction, consequence

or effect of an insult, as much as the fulfilment of a promise or the obeisance of an order are the expected reactions, consequences or effects of a promise and an order respectively. Thus, for instance, if A insults B and B laughs and shows no sign of distress, of being hurt, he is likely to shock A or to puzzle him, for the very unexpectance of the response.

Does insulting consist in the achievement of a perlocutionary object or in the production of a perlocutionary sequel as stated for perlocutionary acts? Austin is not very clear at this point. He does not define the terms, and he does not state clearly the difference between these effects and those conventionally associated with some illocutionary acts. For instance, when setting an example for perlocutionary object and perlocutionary sequel he states:

"The illocutionary act of warning may achieve its<sup>49</sup> perlocutionary object of alerting and also have the perlocutionary sequel of alarming."

But, then, what is the real difference between conventionally associated effects and perlocutionary objects? Is not alerting-warning in the same kind of relationship than ordering-obeying?

Since I do not see the point in their difference, I shall leave the issue as it is.

E. If insulting is an illocutionary act, then the means employed have to be conventional; if a perlocutionary act, they do not have to be so.<sup>50</sup> What is the case for insulting?

I would like to say that insulting may be achieved by both conventional and non-conventional means. That would put our act with perlocution. However, as Strawson (1964) points out conventionality of means does not have to be a requirement even for illocutionary acts. Later on, I shall try to show that only when dealing with



some direct insults the means can be said to be conventional at all.

After going through these characteristics I would say that we have not got very far away. It is still unclear whether insulting is either an illocutionary act or a perlocutionary one, and I am afraid that will be so until we deal with the consequences of perlocutionary acts and with convention. To those issues I shall pay attention next.

2.3. Consequences and effects of insulting: face-saving practices as mechanisms of avoiding consequences

As pointed out above, both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are bound up with consequences and effects. According to Austin (1962), the consequences and effects of the two acts were said to be different, but we saw that the conventional responses of some illocutionary acts were no different from the perlocutionary objects of certain illocutionary and/or perlocutionary acts.

We shall now like to attend to the consequences and effects insulting has and see whether we can throw some light into the distinction between the consequences set up for illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

Let us consider the following literary excerpts:

- i. "But for a long time his words left an impression with me whenever I recalled them, a painful impression, a sort of strange, contemptuous pity for him which I did not want to feel at all. Even at the moment of the insult (I did feel I had insulted him, though I had no intention of doing so), even at such moment, this man could not become angry."<sup>51</sup>

F. Dostoievski, The idiot, p.416

- ii. "(...) and is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is her husband, the son of his late father's steward to be his brother? Heaven and earth! -of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?

"You can now have nothing further to say" she resentfully answered.

"You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house."<sup>51</sup>

J. Austen, Pride and Prejudice, p.367

iii. "But how does one go about creating a perfectly good enmity, one that will bud, and flower and last? A direct insult is effective on occasion, especially if the insult is housed in a witticism that the prospective enemy does not quite get. This affords two offenses at once. A demonstration of superiority will do even better, particularly when accompanied by one's earnest desire not to belittle one's opponent (the opponent will always be aware of this, and despise you more for the effort) Ingratitude, treachery, a difference of opinion or principle, these things make enemies too; but surprisingly they tend to wear away fairly soon, perhaps because they are blatant offenses and thus offer greater chance of amelioration by being discrete and defined." 52

R. Rosenblatt, "The making and keeping  
of enemies"

TIME, October 25, 1982

In all these passages we are told of some of the consequences and effects of insulting: in (i), an insult is assumed to make angry the insultee; in (ii), the insult causes resentment and puts an end to the interaction; in (iii), an insult is said to be a fine way of making enemies.

Because of the fact that all these consequences are very diverse, we would not like to put them all in the same box. It is obvious that an insult can make the insultee angry at the insulter, make the insultee the insulter's enemy -for a short span or even for good-, and further terminate the interaction. That is, I do not think that all the consequences or effects mentioned above are at the same level.

I would like to say -and to be able to show- that insulting has a primary consequence or effect (the conventional response associated or invited by some illocutionary acts): that of hurting the insultee and causing distress or embarrassment

in him, and several secondary consequences which are similar -or I consider similar- to the perlocutionary sequels of perlocutionary acts.

In order to explain it we shall return to Goffman, and specifically to what he refers to as "face-saving practices".

We said that Goffman (1967) considers maintenance of face a condition -not an objective- of interaction. Hence, no interaction -verbal or nonverbal- can go on if a threat to face -of one or more of the participants (see fn.11) in a particular encounter- has been committed. We also added that an insult is a threat to face, whether blatant or not. If a threat to face has been done, the interaction may proceed in only two different ways: we may terminate the interaction or we may do repair work in order to allow for the interaction to go on.

To do repair work is what Goffman refers to as face-saving practices or face-work, and what Rosenblatt referred to as amelioration. These face-saving practices are thought of as mechanisms of avoiding consequences, but not any consequence as we shall try to show, only those that can be compared to the perlocutionary sequels: the making and keeping of enemies, a duel -in old times-, a fight -physical or verbal-, resentment, etc. The aim of these face-saving practices is to save face and their effect is to save the interaction.

Although Goffman refers to all these face-saving practices by face-work, I would like to distinguish the kind of face-saving practices done to prevent defacement from those that put remedy whenever a threat to face occurs. I shall call face-work the former and remedial work the latter. Here, however, I shall only be concerned with remedial work since the threat to face has occurred.

#### Repair or remedial work

There are several ways of repairing face when an incident has been impossible to prevent:

- (a) The insultee acts as if the threat had not occurred -as if the event that contains the threatening expression did not occur.
- (b) The insultee acknowledges the incident but it does not take it as an event that contains a threatening expression. "His blindness will have to be supported by his forbearance" Goffman will say.

(a) and (b) are possible whenever the incident is easily overlooked. That is why these are avoidance practices. However, when an incident cannot be easily ignored, the participants are likely to give it accredited status as such (a threat) and proceed to try to correct for its effects so as to preserve the ritual order that sustains face.

This practice is called the corrective process. It has four phases: the challenge -where participants take on the responsibility of calling attention to the misconduct; the offering -where the offender is given the chance to correct for the offense and reestablish the ritual order; the acceptance -the persons to whom the offering is made can accept it as a satisfactory means of reestablishing the expressive or ritual order and the faces supported by it; and the thanks -where the forgiven person conveys a sign of gratitude to those who have given him the indulgence of forgiveness.

Remedial work and its practices are all meant to prevent consequences of the general kind -i.e., the ones that can be correlated to perlocutionary sequels: a duel, a fight, the creation of an enmity, anger, resent, etc.

The face-saving practices that I called face-work would be the only ones able to prevent the conventional effects associated with some illocutionary acts -of those in which a threat to face has been committed-, and with insulting in this particular case. Remedial work would be the only kind of repair work that could avoid the consequences or effects which are not conventional and are nevertheless associated with insulting somebody. They are preventive actions to avoid consequences that

menace the interaction. In the cases in which remedial work is needed, a threat to face would have occurred and also the hurting or embarrassment typically associated with it, but the consequences that could have terminated the interaction would have been avoided.

### 3. INSULTING AND CONVENTION

Following Austin, we have assumed that insulting is a conventional act.<sup>53/54</sup> We have also taken for granted what was meant by conventional. It is now time to give convention some detailed attention. In this section we shall try to see in what sense is insulting a conventional act, if conventional at all.

To Austin (1962), an illocutionary act is a conventional act, an act done according to a convention; an act to be sharply distinguished from the nonconventional perlocutionary act which is the producing of effects, intended or not, by means of an utterance.

But what is it that is meant by conventional or done according to a convention? To Austin it seems to mean one of two things:

1. Forming part of an established and accepted practice, e.g. marrying, naming a ship, bringing in a sentence in a courtroom, etc.
- or 2. Being capable of being made explicit by means of a conventional procedure: the explicit performative formula, e.g., I PROMISE YOU THAT X, etc.

However, if that is all that is meant by conventional -or by a conventional act- can we still say that insulting is some such act?

At first sight, it seems obvious that we can neither say that it belongs to an accepted and established practice -of an institutionalized kind- nor that it can be made explicit by means of the performative formula: the conventional procedure.

Do we, then, have to change its status as a conventional act -the kind of act Austin says it is and our intuition somehow dictates us- or can it be saved?

Although I do think that it can be saved, the possibilities are not varied as long as we want to remain in Austin's understanding of conventional. We can either look at it as a conventional practice or as a conventional procedure of some sort other than the explicit performative formula. Let us look at these two sorts of pos-

sibilities:

We have a conventional practice when the word <sup>55</sup> "guilty" -or "not guilty"- is pronounced by the foreman of the jury in court at the proper moment. This practice constitutes the illocutionary act of bringing in the verdict. We may say, then, that in the same way the utterance of "son of a bitch" constitutes an insult when uttered with the right intonation. However, while in the case of guilty there exist statable conventions -rules- concerning the circumstances of the utterance, this does not seem to be the case in that of son of a bitch. "Son of a bitch", if speaking seriously and with the appropriate intonation, would seem to constitute an insult no matter the circumstances: its meaning, the speaker, the hearer or the context. By saying "son of a bitch" and addressing it to some human -that seems to be the only condition to be fulfilled- we have insulted that person.<sup>56</sup>

If that is the case, then, the only other possible way out -if, of course, remaining with Austin- is that of widening the content of conventional procedure so as to include both utterances that can be used with an explicit performative formula and utterances which have a particular permanent form and are used to perform a particular kind of act.

This way out -to me more acceptable- has nevertheless its inconveniencies. That is, if we allow conventional procedure to have the above meaning, we would have put under the same rubric things as different as the following:

1. Direct and formally conventionalized insults.
2. Speech acts which, although having the ability of being made explicit by means of the performative formula, may in some cases take a particular formally conventionalized formula which lacks the performative procedure. e.g., warning<sup>57</sup>: "Be careful", "Watch out", "Look out" are all instances of formally conventionalized warnings.



3. Speech acts that although at some point in time could have been made explicit through a performative procedure, they are not longer able of having such a form.
4. Indirect speech acts -in Searle's sense- of the conventionalized type.

As I have put it, they would include:

(1)a. Son of a bitch

b. You're a fart

c. Motherfucker

d. Asshole

(2)a. Be careful

b. Watch out

c. Look out

(3)a. How do you do?

b. See you later

c. Talk to you later

(4)a. Can you pass the salt?

b. Could you help me?

c. Would you mind if I close the window?

which are different in several ways.

Thus, while all share a particular permanent form (the part underlined) and they are all used to do something , they cannot be put in the same box:

The examples in (4) are instances of cases in which the speaker may utter a senten-

ce and mean what he says and also mean another illocution with another propositional content -in Searle's terms. (4a-c) have the primary illocutionary force of requests and the secondary illocutionary force of questions concerning the speaker's ability to do something.

The instances in (3) can only be explained in part like those in (4). (3a) is a greeting used when being introduced for instance and not a question, but in this case the utterance has only one illocutionary force: that of a greeting. The ones in (4) could be answered in two different ways -or at least those in (4a-b): passing the salt or helping, and with a yes/no answer concerning the hearer's abilities. "How do you do?", on the other hand, cannot be viewed that way, for it has only one illocutionary force, and admits only one kind of response, also, normally, of a permanent, fixed form.

As Searle points out, somebody who takes the sentence as meaning "In what manner or condition do you perform?" has not understood its meaning (again in Searle's sense: meaning as determining illocutionary force).

(3b) and (3c) seem more like the examples in (4). Although they have the form and the secondary illocutionary force of statements they are -have the primary illocutionary force of- farewells. If you are told any of them -on the phone, for instance- and you give them a literal reading, you might be waiting for something to happen -the seeing or the talking- from the very moment you are so told till the end of the world or at some point in between and, hence, you will not have understood its meaning.

The instances in (2) allow for their explicitation through the performative formula. Thus, we may have:

(2)a! I warn you to be careful

b! I warn you to watch out

c! I warn you to look out

They do not have two different illocutionary forces. With or lacking the performative procedure they are considered unambiguously as warnings.

The examples in (1) -as the ones in (2), but in a different way- do not seem to have this double-way interpretation of illocutionary force, at least not in the way they are stated in our examples. If we had

(1)b! Fart

e! Pig

written, not spoken, they could have both interpretations (literal and nonliteral) -although that in context is hardly possible.

There is no chance of making these instances explicit through the performative formula -because it does not exist and because the instances turn out to be really bad.

A further problem with that way out for insults is that with it we only save the status of those direct and formally conventionalized insults, and we have to either assume that direct nonformally conventionalized insults (J.Austen's example) and indirect insults -which are never conventionalized- are not conventional acts, or that they require a different treatment. That is the impasse and I do not know of any other way out.

I would like to conclude with Searle (1975) that the difference -or the main difference- between indirect insults -those conveyed through a conversational implicature- and direct conventionalized ones is that "the latter all have a generality of FORM that the other lack!" In the case of indirect insults the speaker communicates the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying in their mutually shared background information -linguistic and nonlinguistic- together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer. In the case of direct conventionalized insults -as in that of the indirect speech acts which

are conventional-, convention overrides all this.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

We have left numerous loose ends and it is now time to put them together. When considering about the conditions and rules necessary and sufficient for the speech act of insulting to have taken place in the utterance of a single sentence, we saw the need of both a definition of insult and of a decision as to its status as a speech act.

We arrived at a plausible -though not restricted enough- definition of insult through Goffman's concept of face and explained the fact that insults vary because the concept of face that a person wants to present may also vary with the occasion.

We had more problems when trying to decide the type of speech act insulting is, for we saw that we could attribute it both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts characteristics. Convention that was assumed to clear and help a decision did not work, for an act will be conventional or not depending on how we want to define convention/conventional.

After considering some of Austin's remarks on conventionality, we said that insulting could only properly be said to be conventional when formally so.

The conclusion at we seemed to arrive was that insulting is a speech act, independently of the fact that some may consider it illocutionary or perlocutionary, something which is still unclear to us. If in order to arrive at such a decision we must follow Austin, the only possible thing to be said is that it does not fit accurately into neither of them; that it can be said to share what Austin (1962) states in pp. 104-5:

"Furthermore, there may be some things we 'do' in connection with saying something which do not seem to fall, intuitively at least, exactly into any of these roughly defined classes, or else seem to fall vaguely into

more than one; but any way we do not at the outset feel so clear that they are as remote from our three acts as would be joking or writing poetry. For example, insinuating, as when we insinuate something in or by issuing some utterance, seems to involve some convention, as in the illocutionary act, but we cannot say "I insinuate...", and it seems like implying to be a clever effect rather than a mere act. A further example is evincing emotion. We may evince emotion in or by issuing an utterance, as when we swear, but once again we have no use here for performative formulas and the other devices of illocutionary acts. We might say that we use swearing\* for relieving our feeling. We must notice that the illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention."

\* The following note is Austin's

'Swearing' is ambiguous: 'I swear by Our Lady' is to swear by Our Lady, but

'Bloody' is not to swear by Our Lady.

## NOTES

1. Henceforth, speech act is not used as a synonym of illocutionary act. As in Austin (1962), the label is meant to refer to locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts as a class.
2. I shall assume that the common grammatical distinction between sentences and fragments is a fallacy.
3. In Searle (1965), when referring to the notion of a promise: "There are all sorts of odd, deviant, and borderline promises, and counterexamples more or less bizarre (...)"
4. Although act and remark, and speech and action are seen as two separate things. As Austin (1962) points out, the above definitions reflect that the notion of an act/action is unclear, that we still have the idea of an 'act' as a fixed physical thing we do, as distinguished from conventions and as distinguished from consequences: we do not see speech as an act, or a remark as an act. See Austin (1962), p.107.
5. Here we do not distinguish between attempt and achievement. It is left to determine whether the achievement of a particular state in the (mind of the) insultee is a requisite in order to insult somebody.
6. And in turn of to insult and insulting.
7. Socially accepted and expected.
8. Line is "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which a person expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself."
9. "(...) societies everywhere, if they are to be societies, must mobilize their members as self-regulating participants in social encounters. One way of mobilizing the individual for this purpose is through ritual; he is taught to be perceptive, to have feelings attached to self and a self expressed through face, to

have pride, honor and dignity, to have considerateness, to have tact and a certain amount of poise." (cf. Goffman (1967), p.44)

10. For instance, in a classical music concert a person not knowing well the work (assuming that s/he has a program but it is the last movement of the whole concert) being played applauds before it ends. A large amount of people in the audience follow him/her putting in evidence their not knowing the work. In such a situation, the first person -the one to begin the applauding- is very likely to feel embarrassed and/or ashamed -if he is not shameless- for what has happened to the concert on his/her account and to his/her reputation after the incident -especially if somebody s/he knows has seen him/her doing the applauding. S/he is in wrong face or has lost face.
11. "(...) only a certain amount of insult from a ratified participant can be ignored without this avoidance practice causing loss of face to the insulted persons; after a point -he must challenge the offender and demand redress. However, in many societies apparently, many kinds of verbal abuse from unrated participants can be ignored, without this failure to challenge constituting a loss of face." Goffman (1967), p.34, fn.24.
12. A threat to the face of one or more of the participants in a face-to-face encounter. However I do not think any threat will constitute an insult, although all threats to face will be said to ridicule the face a particular interactant wants to present or presents. For a threat that does not constitute an insult see the instance described in fn.10. All threats to face will be offenses -since the interactant (his self, and its presentation through face) is an object of sacred value- against the self of the interactant/s involved.

I do not really know how to deal with this problem. We have mild offenses and strong ones, and all sorts of them. If offenses form a continuum of threats to face, insults will be at one of the extremes in the continuum: they will be the strongest kind of offenses one can make and/or receive.



13. However, when nonverbal, we are not as ready and willing to accord it this status -that of insult- as we do when verbal. When nonverbal, we refer to it as an offense, mild or strong it does not matter.
  14. See how this captures the relativity of insults. They will be insults or not according to the claims being made by a particular person in a particular occasion through the concept of face. At the same time this solves part of the problem stated in fn.12.
  15. There are probably insults in which both words and other means of nonverbal behavior occur, but we shall leave them aside.
  16. "Since our acts are actions, we must always remember the distinction between the producing effects and consequences which are intended or unintended, and (i) when the speaker intends to produce an effect it may nevertheless not occur, and (ii) when he does not intend to produce it it may nevertheless occur. To cope with complication (i) we invoke (...) the distinction between attempt and achievement; to cope with complication (ii) we invoke normal linguistic devices of disclaiming (adverbs like 'unintentionally' and so on) (...)"  
In Austin (1962), Lecture VIII, p.106.
  17. That, however, will not do, as we shall see later on. Formally conventional insults, by the very form in which they are wrapped, are not cancellable and hence they cannot possibly be said to be unintended.
  18. Some other labels for this category would be mitigated/nonmitigated; implicit/explicit, etc. The reason for the one in the text is that Searle has already used it in the literature.
  19. (!) means "uttered with the right intonation".
  20. I am unsure about this instance. Is it an example of an insult or that of a curse? Particularly since we have the 'damn you' part. That leads one to wonder which is the relationship between an insult and a curse, and to ask what is the relation
-

of them both to swearing and to sarcasm, as we shall better see in another instance later on.

21. And with the right intonation in the examples in (1) and in the words underlined in (2).
22. Formally conventional, but not conventional in the sense that words in human language are conventional. Formally conventional because they are used -and known to be used- with a rather permanent, fixed linguistic form.
23. I am unsure about the actual status of this example. It can be considered an insult or only a nasty remark. What makes me unsure is the fact that it was meant for somebody who was not present in the interaction and thousands of miles away. I do not think I would doubt as much as to its status if the person had been present. In that case, she would have been able to take it as an insult or as a nasty remark, or both. But does that matter? Does it? Do we need -in order to have insulted somebody/ to insult somebody- to create a certain type of effect -mental or otherwise- in the insultee, or do we only need to do so when happily insulting somebody?

This instance is not an example of face-to-face interaction (between insulter and insultee, I mean). And since this is the case, no defacement occurred -at least no defacement that by threatening face threatened the interaction- and no attempt to reinstante the ritual order through face-work was needed.

24. What is here the difference being sarcastic or nasty and insulting somebody?
25. Compare that to Grice's conversational implicatures.
26. Although in (2) it would also depend upon the history period. Some insults will no longer be considered such if social changes have occurred that made what was unacceptable acceptable and expected behavior. Whereas 'son of a bitch' will remain -if it does not become fossilized- an insult (for mothers still have value and their reputation is considered important), the Austen's example in the text

would insult nobody -at least nobody in my social circle.

27. The gradation in offenses (mild vs. strong) can be explained, as already pointed out, through the concept of face: the claims that a particular person makes on a particular occasion. Life is relative and so are insults, and that is due to the fact that face varies all the time -although some of the claims will hold on most occasions. Although face varies, a person is neither supposed to be heartless nor touchy. That's the point.
28. I would have liked to have been able to avoid mentioning the country, but any arab guy would not do in this particular example: Jordan has more reasons to be against any pact between arab countries and Israel than any other arab state.
29. A rhetorical question, for everybody knew of Sadat's death by now, to keep verbal interaction on. You know what happens in an interaction where people feel not confident about each other, do not know each other much or when dealing with people you do not like: conversation decays.
30. I shall refer to this new established category in the section dealing with convention.
31. The stress is mine.
32. And quite reasonably so for, although we do not have an illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) 'I insult you that...' formally conventional utterances used in insulting somebody are equivalent to utterances with an IFID with a different verb that preserves their original illocutionary force -the verbs are illocutionary verbs according to Austin's list in Lecture XII:

Son of a bitch!  $\equiv$  I call you (a) son of a bitch  
consider you  
regard you as  
declare you

33. The emphasis is my own. See the paradox of insulting being a conventional procedure for which we do not have a conventional procedure. Austin pp.30-1
34. That will affect sentences which could have a procedure -or better put, an IFID-: 'Don't go' I order you not to go, I warn you not to go, I request you not to go, I entreat you not to go, and those which could not possibly have it for it does not exist: insult, for instance.
35. For instance, of the broad kind we find in such a sentence as 'Don't go', which can be taken to have the illocutionary force potential of either the continuum: order-request-entreaty, or that of a different illocutionary force: a warning.
36. We already mentioned that we would ignore the grammatical distinction between sentences and fragments.
37. Although he admits that "we can use 'meaning' also with reference to illocutionary force (...)." Cf. Austin (1962), p.100.
38. At least in the case of formally conventional insults. In other cases, context (whether of the speech act situation or background knowledge (shared) will help also in the elucidation of how a sentence/fragment are to be taken.
39. Or better put, to insult a performative verb, although lacking the possibility of being made explicit by means of the performative formula (IFID).
40. The characteristics adduced here are to be found in Austin (1962), Lectures VIII-X.
41. "To perform a locutionary act, and therein an illocutionary act may also be to perform an act of another kind. Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons." (Austin (1962), p.101)
42. The stress is mine.
43. It is quite unclear to me what he means by that, but as for the example he gives in p.117 he is probably referring to the use of a conventional practice to bring the act about.

44. Although Austin himself agrees that it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end.
45. The emphasis is mine.
46. We shall later on deal with convention at length. Meanwhile, we shall assume that we know what we mean.
47. Since both intention and convention (See Searle (1965) and Strawson (1964)) play a role in illocutionary force, and securing of uptake consists in bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of an utterance, it is necessary to take into account the intention with which an act was planned to be taken. When the speaker intends to produce an effect it may nevertheless not occur; when he does not intend to produce it, it may nevertheless occur. That is clearly related to the distinction between attempt and achievement which, according to Austin is "most prominent with perlocution" (p.106, fn.1)
48. I shall speak of it later on. It could also be meant to refer to conditions necessary and sufficient (?) for the happy performance of the act (Austin's felicity conditions set up for performative utterances), but I am unclear about it.
49. The emphasis is mine.
50. "Perlocutionary acts are not conventional -Austin says-, though conventional acts may be made use of in order to bring off the perlocutionary act." (p.122)  
It is only in this sense that means for perlocutionary acts can be conventional. They are conventional because they belong to a conventional act (an illocutionary act) and they also serve to bring off a perlocutionary one. It is in this very same way that the following remark seems to have to be understood:  
"Certainly we can achieve the same perlocutionary sequels by non-conventional means (...), means that are not conventional or not for that purpose." (p.119)
51. The emphasis is mine.

52. The emphasis is mine.
53. When talking about procedures for performative utterances, Austin points out the case of insulting as one in which we are more likely to state that the procedure does not exist than that we do not accept it. He says:  
"(...) for while insulting is a conventional procedure and indeed a primarily verbal one" [we do not have such a procedure: the explicit performative formula "I insult you" or the possibility of having it]"  
So that we are confronted with a paradox. We must understand "conventional procedure" above in some other way. If we assume it to mean act, then it makes good sense. I do not think such an assumption is distorting at all. That insulting is an ACT to Austin can be seen in p.68 (Lecture VI).
54. Managing somehow to remain undecided as to the status accorded to insulting: illocutionary or perlocutionary. For we said that only illocutionary acts could be properly called conventional acts.
55. Its utterance.
56. It does not seem to be necessary for the insultee to be present. If in talking to B, A says "C is a son of a bitch", A has insulted C. The uncertainty as to the effectiveness of the insult remains, as it would have remained if the insultee had been present. However, this situation does not belong to face-to-face interaction, the hallmark in which we established our definition of insult. The effectiveness of an insult can only be ascertained when remedial work is required.
57. Which Austin (1962) considered an illocutionary force. See Austin, p.156.

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28.3-83

A+

- Very, very nice paper!
- Clear and coherent (in the nontechnical sense) account of three different approaches
- fascinating application

Bravo!

COHERENCE: AN APPROACH\*

Susanna Foch  
Linguistics 590  
Spring 1982

P.S. Do you still consider written language not to be language?



FOREWORD

When I began the research for this paper, I had a clear aim in mind, that of stating what I thought was a "common-sense" approach to coherence. Had I had the possibility of doing some of the readings made available to me before, I sure should have not decided to work on that project. I was bound to find a very similar approach to the one I was thinking of in papers by Wilson and Sperber. After such a discovery, thus, my goal and myself were stranded: I could not write what I was thinking of writing because something similar was already there. What to do? In the first place I thought of not writing at all, but after giving it some thought, I realized that I did not want to leave my work of over a month stranded too. I have to write a paper and I will, but this is surely not the paper I dreamt of.

INTRODUCTION

A working definition of coherence should both be compatible with the intuitive understanding we have of the term and give a systematic account of:

- \* the type of notion coherence is  
(i.e., Is coherence a relational notion? Yes/No, Why?)
- \* the applicability of the notion  
(that is, Is it something that applies to utterances, to discourse (spoken/written), to both? Yes/No, Why?)
- \* the "strict characterization" of coherence  
(i.e., What kind of "stuff" is coherence made of?; Is coherence a matter of degree? Yes/No, Why?)

*Don't use \*,  
please. (It  
means too many  
other things in  
linguistics.)*

To provide such a definition, however, involves a careful study of the factors that intuitively -to me at least- appear to be related to coherence in a way or another. Some<sup>1</sup> of these factors are the following: understanding/interpretation<sup>2</sup>, form, content, goal, appropriateness, givenness, knowledge, the maxims that govern communication, and well-known logical "objects" such as implication, entailment-consequence, presupposition and conversational implicatures (both generalized and particularized)

I will certainly not deal with all these factors; that would be highly unrealistic. I will restrict myself to presenting some of the approaches to coherence already in the market and I shall try to see what is the role of inferencing in them.

Later on, I shall deal with the connections between inferencing and coherence. Finally, address the problems that knowlegde causes us.

All, I hope, will help to clarify.

## 1. SOME APPROACHES TO COHERENCE

I shall now take into consideration three current approaches to coherence: Halliday and Hasan (1976), Hobbs (1978 & 1979), and Wilson and Sperber (1980 & forthcoming<sup>3</sup>).

### 1.1. Cohesion: Halliday and Hasan (1976)

Halliday and Hasan do not use the term coherence; instead, they speak of texture -"the property of 'being a text'<sup>4</sup>". In theory, according to them, two requirements must be met in order to have texture: cohesion, on the one hand, and consistency of register on the other. In practice, however, texture and cohesion are identified as one and the same thing. That being so, I shall now summarize their characterization of cohesion, which, after all, amounts to that of coherence.

Cohesion can be characterized as follows:

- \* It is a semantic concept that refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as a text.
- \* It is a relational concept, a semantic relation between two elements in a text one of which is crucial to the interpretation of the other
- \* It is a semantic relation that is realized through the grammar and the lexicon (grammatical cohesion vs. lexical cohesion).
- \* It is not a structural relationship. That allows it to be found both within a sentence and across sentence boundaries.
- \* Cohesion is a general text-forming relation or set of such relations,<sup>5</sup>

and it refers to the range of possibilities for linking something with what has gone before. The linking is achieved through relations in meaning, therefore, in practice, cohesion is the set of semantic resources for linking a sentence with what has gone before.

\* Texture<sup>6</sup> is a matter of degree.

#### Comments

As I have already said, Halliday and Hasan are highly inconsistent in their usage of terms. The reference made above concerning cohesion and texture is only one example. Their characterizations are inconsistent as well: cohesion may mean both form and content, register refers to content and situational adequacy. A mess!

1.2. Coherence: Hobbs (1978 & 1979)

Hobbs speaks of coherence<sup>7</sup>, and he characterizes it as a set of "coherence relations", which correspond to the "kind of work that needs to get done in communication"; The scheme is as follows:

Requirements for successful communication

Types of coherence relations between segments of discourse

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (1) The message must be conveyed .....   | Strong temporal relations: Occasion, Enablement and Cause.   |
| (2) The message must be related to the goals of the discourse .....  | Evaluation   |
| (3) What is new and unpredictable in the message must be related.....<br>to what the listener already knows.       | Linkage relations: Background and Explanation.   |
| (4) The speaker must guide the listener's inference processes toward the full intended meaning of the message..... | Expansion relations: Positive and Negative.<br><br>Positive: Generalization, Exemplification and Parallel (Elaboration)<br><br>Negative: Contrast (Violated Expectation) |

Each class of coherence relation helps the speaker to fulfill the requirements for successful communication. The coherence relations are definable in terms of the operations of an inference system and they all serve some communicative function.

Some of his claims about coherence/coherent are the following:

- \* Coherence plays a role beyond sentence boundaries analogous to the one of grammaticality within sentences.
- \* Coherence is the "stuff" with which extended discourse is constructed<sup>8</sup>.
- \* Coherence is a matter of degree because the relation "follows-from" is matter of degree and coherence is defined in terms of that relation.

1.3. Relevance: Sperber and Wilson (1980)-Wilson and Sperber (forthcoming)

~~S+W~~ S+W

Following Grice (1975), ~~both they~~ speak of relevance and they view it as something the speaker tries to make when producing an utterance and something he is expected to try by the hearer. Departing from Grice, however, they will state that the principle of relevance is the single principle governing every aspect of comprehension.

They characterize relevance in terms of contextual implications and amount of processing. Both requirements are supposed to allow the hearer to arrive at a single interpretation.

Relevance is assumed to be a matter of degree and speakers and hearers are assumed to operate by a standard of maximal relevance. Degrees of relevance depend on two factors: the number of contextual implications and the amount of processing needed to draw those contextual implications.

Indirectly relevance is defined in terms of context, for contextual implications are those implications we are able to draw from the proposition expressed by the utterance under analysis together with the context.

The context is constituted by the interpretation of the immediately previous utterance, but if considered insufficient it may be expanded in three different directions:

- \* The hearer can add what he remembers of previous utterances in the conversation or text.
- \* He can add encyclopaedic knowledge to concepts present in the utterance or in the context.
- \* He can add contextual information about whatever he is attending to at the same time as the conversation is taking place.



## 2. Coherence, inferencing and understanding

In two of the approaches presented above it is said or assumed that inferencing has an outstanding role in understanding. What is this role? Are all inferences of the same type? Which kind of inferences play which kind of role? I shall consider now what Hobbs and Wilson and Sperber seem to think about it and, in addition, the view of Bellert (1970).

### 2.1. Bellert (1970)

What is the role of inferencing in interpretation?

For her, the semantic interpretation of an utterance is the set of conclusions or consequences that can be drawn from it.<sup>9</sup> If the utterance occurs in a discourse, then an adequate interpretation of the utterance requires the knowledge of the preceding context, i.e., knowledge of that preceding context is necessary to draw the consequences

For her, then, interpretation seems to be the output of the inferencing process.

Are all inferences of the same kind?

We get to our conclusions, she says, through rules of inference and these are of two types:

- (a) The ones that may be included in the description of language in which the conclusions are obtainable by deductive reasoning alone.
- (b) Those that would not be included in the description of language

and which are based on knowledge of the world and inductive reasoning by which certain implicational laws are established.

Those two rules give rise to two different kinds of inferences:

- A. The ones that depend on the knowledge of the language.
- B. The ones that depend both on the knowledge of the language and on the hearer's knowledge of the world.

To draw conclusions and arrive at the semantic interpretation, however, we need, in addition, a further requirement: the requirement of appropriateness. That is, the assumption that the speaker has appropriately used the utterance, that he believes or pretends to believe what he says (asserts, questions, etc...)

Which kind of inferences play which kind of role?

The conclusions in A play an essential role in the interpretation of the message conveyed by the speaker. They can be identified with the speaker's beliefs or pretended beliefs.

Those stated in B, depending additionally on knowledge of the world, may be drawn by the hearer even if not intended by the speaker. They may not be identified with the speaker's beliefs. The hearer has only the certainty that they have been intended when they play the role of intermediary links and are required as necessary premises for the coherence of a text<sup>10</sup>

The former (A) constitute the semantic interpretation of the utterance independently of the context and they should be accounted for by the logico-semantic structure of the utterance.

The latter belong to the semantic interpretation in the sense of strong semantics, in the sense of entire knowledge of the world.

2.2. Hobbs (1978 & 1979)

What is the role of inferencing in interpretation?

For Hobbs, drawing the right inferences is equivalent to arriving at the right interpretation. The right interpretation is, of course, the speaker's meaning.

Are all inferences of the same kind?

If my understanding of his approach is correct<sup>11</sup>, there is only one type of rule of inference, the relation "follows-from". But because of the assumption that some measure of salience is associated with axioms<sup>12</sup>, "follows-from" is a matter of degree, and the inferences we make are of two kinds: petty conversational implicatures and conversational implicatures (i.e., Grice's ones). The former we draw all the time in everyday life, the latter are rare and intended.

2.3. Sperber and Wilson (1980)-Wilson and Sperber (forthcoming)

What is the role of inferencing in interpretation?

For them, understanding an utterance involves the determining of the proposition expressed by the utterance and its processing in a context, which consists also of a set of propositions. Inferences play the role par excellence in the processing.

Are all inferences of the same type?

They describe two types of inference process that result into two types of inferences:

1. Logical implications: inferences drawn from the proposition (the one expressed by the utterance under consideration) taken alone as premise. These are invariant from context to context.

*Aren't both logical?*

2. Contextual implications: inferences drawn from the proposition taken as premise together with the context. These are context dependent.

Which kind of inferences play which kind of role?

They seem to imply that logical implications have their role in the semantic component of the grammar, i.e., they would be the ones that allow us to determine what was said (literally said).

Contextual implications, on the other hand, would have their role somewhere else:  
in the pragmatic component of the grammar.

### 3. The relationship coherence-inferencing-understanding

Once we have seen the role of inferencing and the kinds of inferences that, according to these authors, goes on in interpretation, it would now be appropriate to look at the relation they establish among coherence-inference and understanding.

#### 3.1. Bellert (1970)

How is coherence related to inferencing and, hence, to understanding?

In Bellert, inferencing allows for the conclusions or consequences that give us the semantic interpretation of an utterance. In her account, coherence is identified with adequate interpretation -whatever that means.

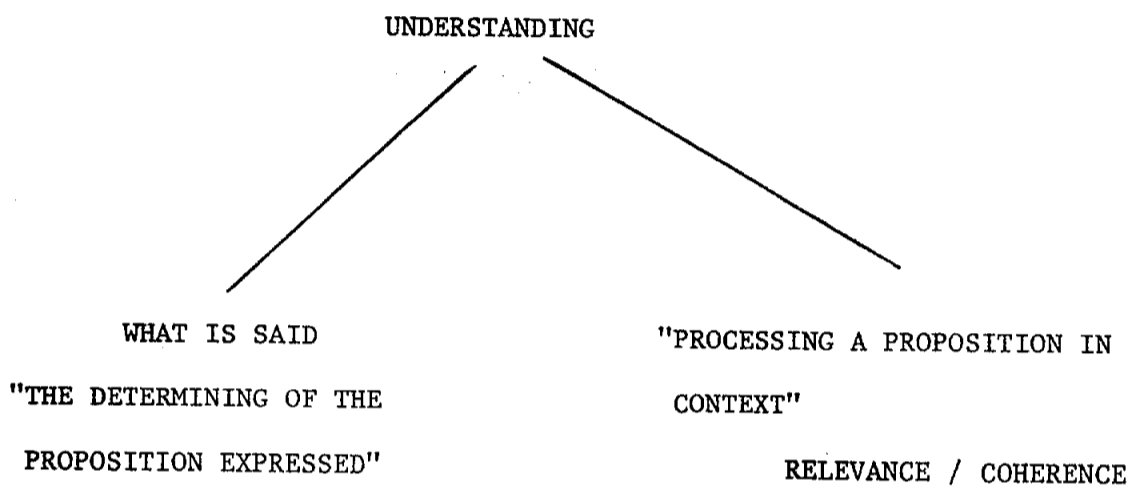
#### 3.2. Hobbs (1978 and 1979)

In Hobbs, coherence is characterized in terms of "coherence relations" between segments of a discourse (binary relations). These relations are definable in terms of the chains of inference that can be constructed from the propositional content of the utterances. Understanding is drawing inferences and arriving at the right interpretation of what the speaker says. Coherence (understood and characterized as coherence relations) helps the speaker to ease the processing of the hearer by structuring the message in a way as to enable him to find the right inferences. Coherence is more a matter of construction, but has obvious consequences in understanding.

3.3. Sperber and Wilson (1980)-Wilson and Sperber (forthcoming)

7

In their approach, relevance the very second part of understanding, for it is the purpose of processing: \_\_\_\_\_





#### 4. Understanding, Knowledge and Context

Let us look at the following text<sup>13</sup>;

"Our books are ourselves, our characters, our insulation against those very people who would take away our books. There, on the wall, Ahab storms. Hamlet mulls. Molly Bloom says yes yes yes. Keats looks into Chapman, who looks at Homer, who looks at Keats. All this happens on a bookshelf continually -while you are out walking the dog, or pouting or asleep. The Punic Wars rage, Emma Bovary pines: Bacon exhorts others to behave the way he never could. Here French is spoken. There Freud. So go war and peace, pride and prejudice, decline and fall, perpetually in motions as sweeping as Milton's or as slight as Emily Dickinson considering the grass. Every evening Gatsby looks at Daisy's green light which is green forever. Every morning Gregor Samsa discovers that he has been transformed into a giant insect."

It is obvious and widely accepted that in order to understand the utterances underlined above, a reader must bring to bear background information that is not specified in the utterances, that is, context. So far, so good. What is not widely accepted, however, is the size of context involved in comprehension, Context has been identified with memory, with mutual knowledge and with what no. Sperber and Wilson (1980) take for themselves the task of working out a solution which, to me, seems very plausible. Here I shall try to show, through the analysis of a naturally-occurring real-life text<sup>14</sup>, that their claims are basically correct. Before, however, I shall briefly summarize those claims.

The paper is addressed against the identification of context with mutual knowledge. Their basic claim are the following:

\* Actual context used in comprehension is much smaller than the common ground. Common ground is only necessary for an absolute, perfect identification, but not for the reasonable identification that goes on in daily life.

\* There is a single principle governing comprehension: the principle of relevance. This principle states that the speaker has expressed the most relevant proposition to the hearer -by means of the assumptions he has made concerning the hearer's knowledge. The hearer assumes that he has tried and succeed in expressing it.

\* The determination of context is not a prerequisite to the comprehension process but a part of it.

We start the process with an immediate context, but this context may be expanded in three directions: linguistically, encyclopaedically and situationally<sup>15</sup> (see section 1.3. in p.8). Context, however, is likely to be expanded only if strictly necessary for, although each expansion allows for more contextual implications, it increases the amount of processing, diminishing relevance. This expansion of context is likely to take place when intended reference<sup>16</sup> and/or intended inference are involved, since in such cases the speaker assumes that a specific piece of information will be included in the hearer's context.

Before looking at the text, and seeing whether these claims -and the assumptions underlying them- hold or not, some previous remarks concerning the "nature" of the text are, indeed, needed:

1. Since we are dealing with a written text, asking for repair is not available.

2. Since it is written, the context in which its interpretation is going to take place cannot be expanded situationally (see fn.15), and, although it could have been expanded linguistically, I have prevented that possibility by giving you a part of it.<sup>17</sup>
  
3. The underlined utterances we are going to deal with involve one of the two cases in which the speaker/author must assume that a specific piece of information will be included in the hearer/reader's context: intended reference.<sup>18</sup>

Let us assume first that in order to assign the reference to the definite<sup>19</sup> expressions in the utterances underlined below we need to expand the context. That assumption is quite plausible since the interpretation of the immediate preceding utterance only let us know that it concerns books. That expansion must -the only possibility- take the form of encyclopaedic knowledge and, within it, of knowledge about books.

If a reader confronts the passage above and has access to the body of literary (bookish) knowledge<sup>20</sup> stated in Table I (pp. 20-23) and only to this body of knowledge, then, he will understand the text. The knowledge on the Table allows him to first assign the references and arrive at comprehension.<sup>21</sup>

Let us assume, now, that the reader does not have access to the knowledge in Table I, either because he does not have any literary knowledge or because he does not have this particular one. If such is the case, he will find it incoherent.

Let us assume, finally, that the hearer has access to some -more/less- of the knowledge in Table I, then, if that is so, the following is likely to happen:

- \* The reader is likely to comprehend the utterance (to arrive at the understanding, i.e., the speaker's meaning)

TABLE I

AHAB --- captain --- Moby Dick --- Melville  
          |                  |                  |  
          stormy          literary          Herman  
          |                  |                  |  
          character      work              American  
                          |                  |  
                          novel              writer

HAMLET --- literary work --- Shakespeare  
          |                  |                  |  
          theater          William  
                          |                  |  
                          British  
                          |                  |  
                          writer  
  
          |  
          --- prince of Denmark  
              |  
              Kronborg castle

MOLLY BLOOM --- literary character --- Ulysses --- Joyce  
                  |                  |                  |  
                  monologue          literary          Irish  
                                      |                  |  
                                      work              Trieste ?  
                                      |                  |  
                                      novel

KEATS --- poet --- Chapman's Homer  
          |  
          John  
          |  
          British

CHAPMAN  
|  
British  
|  
writer --- translator --- Homer's works

HOMER  
|  
Greek  
|  
writer  
|  
poet --- The Iliad  
|  
--- The Odyssey

PUNIC WARS  
|  
Carthage vs. Rome

EMMA BOVARY --- literary character --- Madame Bovary --- Flaubert  
|  
literary work  
|  
novel  
|  
Gustave  
|  
French  
|  
writer

BACON  
|  
Francis  
|  
British  
|  
philosopher --- essayist --- statesman

FREUD  
|  
Sigmund  
|  
Austrian --- Vienna --- Ringstrasse  
|  
Medical doctor --- psychiatrist --- psychoanalysis

WAR AND PEACE --- literary work --- Tolstoi  
|  
novel  
|  
Leon  
|  
Russian  
|  
writer --- Anna Karenina  
|  
Resurrection

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE --- literary work --- Austen  
|  
novel  
|  
Jane  
|  
British  
|  
writer --- Emma  
|  
Mansfield Park

DECLINE AND FALL --- literary work --- Waugh  
|  
novel  
|  
Evelyn  
|  
writer --- Helena

MIITON  
|  
John  
|  
British  
|  
writer --- poet --- Paradise Lost

EMILY DICKINSON

American---Boston---Amherst

Poet

GATSBY---literary character---The Great Gatsby---Scott Fitzgerald

literary work

novel

Francis

American

writer---This side of Paradise

---The Last Tycoon

---Tender is the night

DAISY---literary character---The Great Gatsby

GREGOR SAMSA---literary character---The Metamorphosis---Kafka

literary work

novel

czech

writer---The process

---The castle

(follows from p.19)

or \* The hearer may arrive at an understanding (something different from the speaker's meaning)

If, in the case of "There, on the wall, Ahab storms", literary knowledge is needed to assign reference and arrive at comprehension -as I have already assumed-, and I have that stated in Table I, then I undoubtedly assign the reference, make the identification, and arrive at comprehension. If, instead of the specifications for Ahab in Table I, I have the one that states that Ahab is an idolater king of Israel that gets mentioned in the Bible and within it in the Nevi'im and within it in 1Kings, then I surely will be able to assign a reference and arrive at comprehension. If, on the other hand, I have both different specifications in my knowledge, I will choose the most relevant in the utterance, in this case the one that appears in the Table. The specifications of the entries will probably be more important in those cases in which, at first sight, there may be ambiguity. If I did not have the specification "stormy character" in Melville's Ahab and I did not know what Moby Dick is about, but I still had the knowledge that Ahab is a literary character in Moby Dick which is a novel by Melville, then either reference would be equally relevant. That is obvious when the specification idolater in Ahab king of Israel is missing, but it could also be true in the case that such specification was there, since I may not know it and since idolater and storms do not contradict each other. In such case we arrive at ambiguity. We may try to solve it by getting some outside information or not, depending on how vital is such single identification. In those cases we surely arrive at comprehension: two possible and different ones. Something similar would happen in the case of Bacon in Table I. If in addition we had a Roger Bacon who was both a philosopher and a scientist, we may feel uncomfortable by assigning refe-

will ✓



rence to one of them -given the poor specifications-: in such case, however, since exhortations is more the "thing" of a statesman or an essayist than that of a philosopher or a scientist, we assume that is Francis Bacon and we assign that reference.

Let us now look at "decline and fall". We are only likely to search for a reference in this case -like in war and peace and pride and prejudice- if we already now that there is a book with such title, since the author does not use capital letters (like in speech, we would miss the clue that give capital letters). If in addition to the entry in Table I, I know of a book by E. Gibbon called Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, it is likely that I do not doubt, although that possibility cannot be disregarded: we may think that he has skipped the genitive in order to keep the symmetry with what has gone before *or* *and* because it is a very well-known book and the genitive is no necessary any longer. If I do not doubt I assign the reference in Table I. If I do, I am faced with ambiguity.

Assume now that I only have Gibbon's book in my knowledge, then I assign that reference through the assumptions stated above (*symmetry, well-knownness or others*). And so on and so forth... *It did! and it didn't fit.*

I have tried to show that comprehension of utterances or texts containing definite references depends crucially upon the availability of knowledge -and of knowledge of the topic at hand-, i.e., upon the actual existence of such knowledge, and of the knowledge that speaker and hearer have of each other's knowledge of the topic at hand.

If knowledge of the topic at hand is available, then the hearer arrives at INTERPRETATION.

That INTERPRETATION is UNDERSTANDING (THE UNDERSTANDING) if it happens to be the case that the knowledge available to the hearer is EQUAL to the one available to the

hearer. Its being completely mutual allows and grants the hearer the recovery of the speaker's meaning: THE UNDERSTANDING.

On the other hand, that INTERPRETATION is AN UNDERSTANDING if knowledge of the topic is assumed to be available and, in fact, there is some knowledge of it. In this case, the speaker makes assumptions concerning the state (size) of the hearer's knowledge and, in accordance with these assumptions, he makes what s/he believes to be the most relevant proposition to the hearer. The hearer assumes that s/he has tried to be relevant and that he, indeed, has succeeded, and he, then, arrives at AN UNDERSTANDING. If that ~~AN UNDERSTANDING~~ matches, in fact, the speaker's meaning, the hearer has arrived at THE UNDERSTANDING. If it does not, s/he has arrived at A MISUNDERSTANDING in relation to the speaker's meaning (i.e., an understanding which is different from the one intended by the hearer but compatible with his words)

Finally, when knowledge of the topic is not available but ~~it~~ is assumed to be by the speaker, the hearer is bound to arrive at NO INTERPRETATION at all. In such a case, the hearer will find himself stuck, unable to see the coherence or relevance of it because s/he was unable to process the utterance -or part of the utterance. S/he may follow the processing of the utterances that follow, disregarding the incoherence by, therefore losing information -more or less relevant, but relevant. If he does not disregard the incoherence encountered and <sup>if</sup> asking for repair is physically possible, he may ask for repair and then get to an understanding, the understanding, or to a no interpretation again. If he cares enough but asking for repair is not available, he is likely to look for outside knowledge (other people, books, etc.) and get to an <sup>mis-</sup>understanding, the understanding or a no interpretation.

The speaker does not know the availability of the speaker knowledge -that is particularly obvious in the case of writers-; that very reason forces him to make assump-

tions concerning both its availability and size. If those assumptions are right -and they are much more likely to be accurate in spoken than in written discourse<sup>22</sup>-, the hearer arrives at THE UNDERSTANDING; if they are "wrong" (if he assumes too much or too little or if he assumes that there is knowledge when in fact, there is no such knowledge) then the hearer arrives at either a "wrong" interpretation (a misunderstanding) or finds himself/herself stuck.

The framework of Sperber and Wilson, seems, then, to be basically correct.

\* A much more appropriate title for the paper, now, would be "On Coherence".

1. The list does not pretend to be exhaustive.
2. The dichotomy is meant to account for the different meanings that those terms seem to have. Understanding and comprehension both seem to refer to the recovery of the speaker's meaning. Interpretation, on the other hand, does not seem to have those connotations. It only seems to refer to a possible understanding that "makes sense". I will not bother about the distinction till the very end. The use of understanding/comprehension/interpretation throughout most of the text will be inconsistent with the definitions given here, but so are linguists.
3. I apologize for the nature of this reference, but it was the shortest available.
4. We already find a "puzzle" with that since at the beginning of their book they say the following:

"If a speaker of English hears or reads a passage of the language which is more than one sentence in length, he can normally decide without difficulty whether it forms a unified whole or is just a collection of unrelated sentences. This book is about what makes the difference between the two" (the emphasis is mine)

According to that, then, the book should be about texture since "texture is what distinguishes it (a text) from something that is not a text" (p.2), but it happens to be the case that the book is about cohesion, and then is cohesion what makes the difference between something that is a text and something that is not.

We may reconcile this but only by identifying texture and cohesion. That is what they, in fact, do.

5. We have different kinds of cohesive relations (or ties, to be exact): reference,

substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion.

6. Assuming what we already have done, that is, that texture=cohesion in practice.
7. He finds the term more adequate than relevance in order to speak of coherence of utterances with respect to a context and of a coherent text.
8. The emphasis is mine.
9. In a note, however, she polishes it: "Strictly speaking is not on the basis of an utterance that we may obtain a set of conclusions but on the basis of its LS description and some relevant quasi-implications (those which concern the structure and the lexical items occurring in that utterance).
10. That is, when they are conversational implicatures in Grice's terminology.
11. The inference component is not explained in detail and I am not sure.
12. Axioms are the rules by means of which knowledge is stored.
13. From "Would You Mind If I Borrowed This Book?", by Roger Rosenblatt, appeared in TIME magazine in April 5, 1982.
14. In case of skepticals
15. It seems to me that we should specify the applicability of each of the expansions. Linguistically and encyclopaedically apply to both conversations and texts. Situationally, to conversations only. In texts it is reduced to linguistically. In addition we should probably state stronger constraints for the expansion of context than the one of increasing the processing and diminishing the relevance
16. Often the referring expression gives a clue concerning the direction of the expansion: ANAPHORA, going back in discourse; PROPER NAMES, a look at the encyclopaedia; DEICTICS, a look around.
17. The reader must trust me when I say that no linguistic information (previous other utterances than the immediate one) that could have had been helpful by

expanding linguistically the context has been lost with this cut.

18. This has been chosen because, to me, it is the clearest case in which mutual knowledge could have been invoked as the only way of fully understanding the text.
19. "war and peace, pride and prejudice, decline and fall" create a problem since they must assumed to be definite.
20. I assume that knowledge is in the mind -if there is such thing.
21. The knowledge may be true or not.
22. In written discourse, the writer has little or no clues at all concerning the knowledge of the reader. The writer does not the personality of the reader. The speaker may have more accurate assumptions about such knowledge because he may belong to the same ethnic group of the speaker, he might have known him trough previous interactions, he might know about the hearer through gossip, etc. All these would serve as clues for the assumptions he would make.

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