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CHAPTER 8

TOWARDS A MODAL GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH: A MATTER OF PROLONGED FIELDWORK

What I shall have to say here is neither difficult nor contentious; the only merit I should like to claim for it is that of being true, at least in parts. The phenomenon to be discussed is very widespread and obvious, and it cannot fail to have been already noticed, at least here and there, by others. Yet I have not found attention paid to it specifically. (Austin 1962: 1, emphasis added (or subtracted?).)

8.1. ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is the last in a series of chapters which analyse text and corpus material. It is placed at the end of the sequence, since it is different from the earlier chapters in two ways. Chapters 4 to 7 proceed from form to function: for example, they use concordance lines to help identify in texts lexical and syntactic patterns, whose meanings can then be discussed. Also chapters 4 to 7 present analyses of the distribution of patterns across individual texts or across corpora. In this chapter, this direction is reversed. First, I proceed from function to form. I start from an area of meaning (modality) and discuss the different ways in which it can be expressed in English. Second, I therefore cannot restrict my analysis to linguistic features which happen to occur in individual texts: I have to search for them where they occur, and therefore cite inevitably isolated examples from various corpus data. The main data analysed in this chapter are examples identified in the various corpora described in the Notes on Corpus Data Used. Linguistic features which express modality in English occur at different levels of language: individual lexical items, illocutionary forces, and propositions. I give detailed examples to show how such meanings are encoded in lexis, in noun and adjective morphology, in the verbal group, in modal verbs, and in logical and pragmatic connectors. The main findings concern the wide range of ways available in English for encoding point of view and stance. One purpose of the analysis is methodological: to show that a corpus is necessary for the analysis of such meanings. The second purpose is to show that the encoding of such meanings is a central organizing principle in language.

8.2. INTRODUCTORY EXAMPLE: PROPOSITIONAL INFORMATION

In previous chapters, I have illustrated in detail that there are always different ways of saying the same thing. Because one way is selected (often unconsciously), it follows that utterances always encode a point of view. I have given examples of how speakers and writers express their stance towards the information which they are conveying: for example, how much reliability or authority they mean it to have. I have analysed examples such as how different versions of truth are represented in a courtroom and how authoritative facts are conveyed in school textbooks. These analyses included examples of modality, such as modal verbs in a judge's summing-up and projecting clauses in a school textbook. A summary of these points is that utterances express two things: propositional information, and also the speaker/writer's attitude towards this information. This is a rather simplistic formulation, since one cannot always make a clear separation between these two components. However, it will do as a start, and this chapter will discuss some of the resources which English has for encoding such attitudes. Here is an example of how commitment and detachment to propositional information can be expressed. A BBC radio newsreader reported an explosion in a water-processing plant which had killed sixteen people:

1. *A spokesman from the Water Board refused to speculate on whether methane gas could have caused the explosion.* [A]

The status of examples in the book is indicated as follows:

- [A] attested, actual, authentic data: data which have occurred naturally in a real social context without the intervention of the analyst.
- [M] modified data: examples which are based on attested data, but which have been modified (e.g. abbreviated) to exclude features deemed irrelevant to the current analysis.
- [I] intuitive, introspective, invented data: data invented purely to illustrate a point in a linguistic argument.

In 1, the BBC are declining to commit themselves to the proposition, let's call it p1, that:

2. p1: "Methane gas caused the explosion."

The BBC mention this proposition but remain detached from it. First, p1 is modalized. *Methane gas could have caused the explosion*: "it is possible that" p1. The source of this view is not stated, though someone must have formulated it. It is presented as a rumour from an unidentified origin: someone has said that (it is possible that?) p1. The BBC do not comment directly on even this. They cite a spokesperson refusing to speculate, and saying, in effect: no comment. The logical structure is something like:

3. The BBC say that (a spokesperson says nothing about (the rumour that (it is possible that (p1))))).

This is a very guarded statement, although when the institutional source of a proposition is the BBC, then this can already give it some authority. We can infer that a BBC reporter thought p1 plausible enough to put it to the spokesperson. One of the most general interpretative principles is: no smoke without fire. That is, there is a general assumption that there is method even in apparent madness and that speakers expend the minimum effort: propositions are therefore not even mentioned (in the technical sense) without reason. Remarks in conversation are not understood as stating the obvious, but as drawing attention to some unusual feature of the situation: the features must be literally remarkable. And speakers do not make their contribution more informative than required: they do not say what is already familiar. (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970, Grice 1975.) The following day, the BBC news reported:

4. *According to a Water Board official, there had been a sizeable build-up of methane in the pipe.* [A]

The commitment to p1 is still far from total. The cause of the explosion is still not made explicit, but left to real-world knowledge or to an inference (that methane in enclosed spaces causes explosions) and the implication that this could have been the cause in this case. This view is attributed to an official: it is presented as an utterance report. Several months later, the BBC reported the outcome of the inquest on the incident, a verdict of accidental death:

5. *An engineering inspector told the inquest that the explosion was caused by methane, but that it had not been possible to discover what had ignited the gas.* [A]

Other statements were also introduced with prefaces which attributed propositions to various sources, named or not [all A]:

the court was told how ...
a Water Authority official told how ...
one expert told the inquest it could have been ...

In chapter 6.10 I gave examples of propositions being attributed to different sources, using projecting clauses such as

scientists have discovered that ...
the latest studies seem to indicate that ...

And I showed that two school textbooks differed significantly in whether they attributed propositions to identifiable sources. One discourse strategy used by the BBC is to attribute views to someone else. This does not in itself convey either commitment or detachment. It depends what credence is given to the source. We would probably interpret an example such as

the noted educationalist A H Halsey has claimed that "p" [A]

not as an utterance report, but as an indirect assertion. That is, we would interpret it not as objectively reporting an external event (Halsey's claim), but as subjectively expressing the speaker's belief. Some people's words are reported as such, and it can be news when some people say *No comment*. But some people are quoted in order to add credence and commitment to what the speaker says. Beliefs and commitments to propositions can be attributed to different sources. Torode (1976) gives these three examples [all A] from classroom discourse:

*shut up, Alan, you're a distracting member of the class, you know that, don't you?
somebody talking, you know what will happen, no five minute break*

Here, propositions are presented as shared knowledge, known to an individual child or to the class as a whole. The Gricean maxim of quantity is contravened, in order to generate an implicature. Alternatively a proposition may be presented as part of some enduring legitimate order:

right now, I think we know the order of events, you've got to get on by yourselves today, and I don't want to see anybody off their seats.

8.3. THE (LIMITED) RELEVANCE OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

Speech act theory would appear to be a good starting point for investigating speakers' expression of stance, because it has a lot to say both about explicit illocutionary verbs (such as *claim*, *speculate* and *tell* in the examples above) as markers of commitment, and also about indirect and inexplicit speech acts. However, despite its origins in ordinary language philosophy, speech act theory is very ambivalent in its attitude to attested data. (See chapter 2.5.) Austin (1962: 148) suggested that a main task was to collect a list of explicit performative verbs as a guide to illocutionary forces, and that this was a 'matter of prolonged fieldwork': hence the sub-title of my chapter. However, what he had in mind by fieldwork was looking through a dictionary: 'a concise one should do', he says. Austin had an odd view of fieldwork, but his theory is urbane and unrigid, based to some extent on observations of everyday language. Searle's (1969, 1979) systematization of Austin is much more rigid, and moves even further away from actual behaviour, leaving speech act theory in the odd position of demanding a study of language as social action within a theory of social institutions (see chapter 3.1), but studying almost nothing but invented data. [NOTE 8.1.] I propose to return to Austin's suggestion of prolonged fieldwork: but by studying attested instances of illocutionary verbs, not by looking for them in a dictionary; and also by studying them within a more general theory of commitment and detachment to words, propositions and illocutions. This will avoid two main problems with speech act theory: a lack of attested data, and the fact that illocutionary verbs are seen as a special category.

8.4. EVIDENTIALITY, FACTIVITY, MODALITY

Several overlapping terms are used for speakers' or writers' expression of attitude towards propositional information: evidentiality, factivity, modality. The term evidentiality emphasizes how speakers encode the kind of evidence they have for making a factual claim. The term factivity emphasizes how propositions are encoded: as fact or as mere opinion. The term modality (probably the most widely used) is most familiar via the term modal verbs (such as *must*, *might*, *would*), but has much wider applicability. Modal meanings are also encoded elsewhere in the language system. In many languages, it is obligatory for speakers to encode in the verb morphology the source of evidence for their statements. For example, in the Papuan language Fasu (Trask 1993: 95), a speaker must signal in the verb form for a sentence such as *It's coming*, the source of evidence for the proposition: "I see it", "I hear it", "I infer it", "somebody says so, but I don't know who", "somebody says so, and I know who", or "I suppose so". Palmer (1986) and Chafe and Nichols (eds 1986) give many other examples of languages which have obligatory encoding of meanings such as personal sensory experience, hearsay, circumstantial inference, expectation, confirmation and surprise. German encodes hearsay and other aspects of evidentiality in modal verbs and in the form of auxiliary verbs, as in these (invented) examples:

er hat es getan ("he has done it")
er habe es getan ("he is said to have done it")
sie ist sehr klug ("she is very clever")
sie soll sehr klug sein ("she is said to be very clever")
er ist zu Hause ("he is at home")
er wird (wohl) zu Hause sein ("he'll probably be at home")
sie hat ihn gesehen ("she has seen him")
sie will ihn gesehen haben ("she claims to have seen him").

For English, Lyons (1981) discusses cases where auxiliary verbs encode inference and degrees of certainty:

that will be the postman [I]
the postman must have come by now [I]

A characteristic of much of the invented data used in pragmatics and speech act theory is that it is grossly simplified. Pragmatics therefore has a tendency to overemphasise the inferences performed by hearers, and to underemphasise the surface indicators of modal meanings which are available to hearers. (And findable by computers, see Channell 1993.) In real data, several markers of evidentiality or modality often co-occur, underlined in this example:

evidently she must have talked to her mother about them you see because on one occasion ... [continues with reason for inference] [A]

I will use the term modality to mean the ways in which language is used to encode meanings such as degrees of certainty and commitment, or alternatively vagueness and lack of commitment, personal beliefs versus generally accepted or taken for granted knowledge. Such language functions to express group membership, as speakers adopt positions, express agreement and disagreement with others, make personal and social allegiances and contracts.

8.5. SUMMARY

In ordinary life, a certain laxness in procedures is admitted – otherwise no university business would ever get done. (Austin 1962: 37.)

Corpus evidence shows that such expressions of modality are pervasive in English. For example, Coates (1982) shows that epistemic modals are more frequent in a corpus of informal spoken and personal written language than in formal impersonal language. And Holmes (1983), using a small corpus of 50,000 words, has estimated that lexical items expressing degree of certainty make up on average 3.5 per cent of any text, but are twice as frequent in speech as in writing. Chafe and Nichols (eds 1986) and Hunston (1993a) also provide corpus studies: see chapter 6.10.2. When we speak or write, we are often vague, indirect, and unclear about just what we are committed to. This might appear, superficially, to be an inadequacy of human language: but only to those who hold a rather crude view of the purposes of communication. Vagueness and indirection have many uses. Politeness is one obvious reason for deviating from superficially clear or rational behaviour, and claiming precision is done appropriately only in certain situations. However, we often signal that our utterances are vague. So, whenever speakers or writers say anything, they encode their point of view towards it: whether they think it is a reasonable thing to say, or might be found to be obvious, questionable, tentative, provisional, controversial, contradictory, irrelevant, impolite, or whatever. The expression of such speakers' attitudes is pervasive in all uses of language. All utterances encode such a point of view, and the description of the markers of such points of view and their meanings is a central topic for linguistics.

8.6. LEXICAL, PROPOSITIONAL AND ILLOCUTIONARY COMMITMENT

The BBC example in 8.2 concerned the guarded expression of a proposition. In general, it is possible to modalize just three kinds of linguistic unit: individual lexical items (words or phrases), illocutionary forces, and propositions. This is most visible for illustrative purposes, in utterances where speakers shift in their commitment. For example, in these examples, speakers commit themselves to a lexical item, an illocutionary force, and a proposition, but then partially withdraw the commitment:

*consumer durables – as the Economist calls them, whatever that means [A]
we'll be offering the course – subject to the availability of staff and facilities [A]*

we move in on Thursday – all being well. [A, from a telephone conversation about moving house]

Such examples motivate two layers of meaning: the content of an utterance and the speaker's attitude to this content. Charles M. Schultz points to this commitment and withdrawal pattern in a Snoopy cartoon. Snoopy is writing a story: 'Our love will last forever,' he said. 'Oh, yes, yes, yes!' she cried. 'Forever being a relative term, however,' he said. She hit him with a ski pole.'

8.7. DEGREE AND MANNER OF COMMITMENT

We need more precise definitions of commitment and detachment. There is a continuum of commitment, whose end points are complete commitment and complete detachment. In the case of propositional information, full commitment can be made by a categorical assertion that "p" is the case. By complete detachment from "p", I do not mean a categorical assertion that "not-p": this would involve full commitment to "not-p". Complete detachment involves, rather, some kinds of quotation or mention, as in

suppose, just for the sake of argument that ... [A]

It is not possible to specify the number of points on the degree scale, since many utterances are indeterminate and could not be placed at a definite point on the scale. In addition, it may be possible, in principle, just to mention a proposition, for the sake of argument. But in practice, a general interpretative principle will search for the reason for the mention: see the BBC example above. The extreme end point of the detachment scale is elusive. Utterances such as *It could be that p* are ambiguous. But they are likely to leave the speaker partially committed to "p", rather than fully committed to "possibly p". This is the difference between subjective and objective epistemic modality (Lyons 1977, 1981). In natural language use, subjective modality is much commoner. Degree of commitment is distinct from manner of commitment. For example, a speaker is committed to the same degree to a proposition "p", whether "p" is asserted or presupposed:

(I assert that) p
I realize that p

Both convey full commitment to "p": the test is that the speaker could not, without logical contradiction, deny "p". But "p" can be presented within the illocutionary act of assertion, or presupposed by being embedded under a factive verb (such as *realize*). Other manners of commitment include the many different lexical or syntactic markers illustrated below, and assertions versus implicatures (that is, propositions which are not asserted, but inferred and therefore deniable: Grice 1975). Some manners of commitment are always deniable and therefore less than full. A great deal of work in pragmatics has been concerned with establishing the difference between propositions which are logically entailed by what is said, versus those which are defeasible in context. (Levinson 1983 gives a thorough

review.) It might be objected that just asserting "p" does not involve full commitment, since a speaker might say:

I'm absolutely sure it's just around that corner [A]

I honestly believe he loved her but was afraid to show it [A]

However, such forms cannot increase commitment beyond a logical maximum. What they do is perform the discourse function of responding to another speaker's uncertainties. So, commitment concerns whether a proposition is presented as true, false, self-evident, a matter of objective fact or of subjective opinion, shared knowledge, taken for granted or debatable, controversial, precise or vague, contradictory to what others have said, and so on. This is what Lyons (1981: 240) refers to as self-expression, in the literal sense of the speaker's expression of him or herself: the subjectivity of utterances – how speakers report their own beliefs, attitudes, and so on. Lyons claims that relatively few utterances make unqualified assertions (certainly this one does not). And, as we have seen above, in some languages it is not even possible to do so. But to discover just how many utterances are qualified, and to what degree and in what manner in different contexts, is a matter of prolonged fieldwork. The above points apply *pari passu* to illocutionary commitment. For example, if an illocutionary force is indirect or off the record to some degree, it will be possible to claim, if challenged, that it was never issued. And similarly with lexical commitment. The concepts of commitment and explicitness are closely related. Explicitness implies commitment, since if you state something explicitly, you go on record; whereas implicit statements remain vague and therefore deniable. There have been two related themes in speech act theory: the indirection argument, that the surface lexical, syntactic form of an utterance often does not make explicit the illocutionary intent of the speaker; and the expressibility principle, that the illocutionary force of an utterance can always be made explicit. Thus, a common starting point in speech act theory is the formula $F(p)$, where F is the illocutionary force which may be marked by an illocutionary force indicating device, (for example, an explicit illocutionary preface), and p is a proposition. Austin (1962: 61-2) talks of a performative being expanded into a form with a first-person singular present-tense verb, and of such expansions making explicit both that an utterance is performative and also which act is being performed; see 1962: 103. And Searle (1969: 68; 1979: ix.) argues that 'wherever the illocutionary force of an utterance is not explicit it can always be made explicit ... Whatever can be meant can be said.' However, first, not all speech acts can be made explicit: for example, there cannot be explicit hints. In general, explicit utterances are not deniable. Second, explicitness is not a mere stylistic preference, but something which is done in only some social settings: for example, it is more characteristic of written than spoken English. Third, it is impossible ever to say in so many words exactly what is meant (Garfinkel 1967). I do not mean to adopt a mystical position that there are things of which one cannot speak, but only to point out that being explicit changes the meaning. Explicitness does not mean saying all that can be said (which is impossible), but finding the right balance between what is said and what can be assumed, and therefore not giving more information than is

needed or wanted (see Grice 1975 on the maxim of quantity). The distinction between what has to be made explicit and what can be assumed therefore has implications for what is conveyed about group membership. It follows that explicitness, clarity and ambiguity are not inherent properties of texts, but are a function of texts in contexts. And some contexts (for example, academic textbooks, the law) are less tolerant of ambiguity than others.

8.8. MODALITY AND LEXIS

I will now look in more detail at examples of lexical, illocutionary and propositional commitment and detachment.

8.8.1. Morphology and pragmatic information

It is widely recognized that many languages encode modality, especially in their verb morphology. It is less commonly noted that English can also encode interpersonal, pragmatic meanings in noun morphology. Levinson (1983: 8-9) points to pairs such as *rabbit* and *bunny*, where information about speakers and hearers is encoded in the lexical distinction. Both words have the same logical meaning of "furry animal which eats lettuce, gets kept as a pet, gets put in stews", and so on. But *bunny* has additional connotations of childishness and cuteness. This meaning is lexicalized and does not depend on context. More generally, the morphological ending -y (or -ie) often encodes a range of related pragmatic meanings. The clearest cases involve pairs of words, such as

aunt, auntie; cat, pussy; child, kiddy; comfortable, comfy; dog, doggie; pup, puppy; nightgown, nightie; sweets, sweeties; stomach, tummy; underwear, undies

Charles, Charlie; Deborah, Debbie; Fred, Freddy; Jennifer, Jenny.

The -y variant encodes meanings such as informality, intimacy, childishness and femininity. (The sexist implications of the intimate-childish-feminine relation, and of phrases such as *bunny girl*, are obvious.) There are many other examples:

baby, cookies, nanny, nappies, teddy (as baby talk)
buddy, dearie, duckie (as informal terms of address)
barmy, dotty, loopy, loony, potty (in the sense of "mad")
argy-bargy, itsy-bitsy, shilly-shally, teeny-weeny.

There is a tendency for -y forms to refer to males, and for -ie forms to refer to females. For example, *Bobby* (male), *Bobbie* (female), or *Fergie* (as in the name used in British tabloids for Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York), *Georgie* (from *Georgina*: as in the film *Georgie Girl*), versus *Harry* (from *Harold*). But this is only a tendency: cf. *Jenny, Sally*. There is also a tendency for the -y member of a formal-informal pair to use the basic spelling system: contrast *crumb, crummy*,

dumb, dummy, lunatic, loony. (Carney 1994: 96, 140, 245, 431, 456.) Such formations are productive, and occur in language addressed to children [both A]:

did you have a nice sleepy last night?
hey what you chewing those fisties for?

But they also occur much more widely. The following examples are from adult usage, mainly spoken [all A]:

we're Labour and lefty
sort of research studenty kind of people
English is a very teachy subject.

Another Charles M. Schultz cartoon has Snoopy say: 'If she's a creepy-crawly icky-fuzzy worm I'll probably scream.' Often, two or more y-forms co-occur [all A]:

the print's all weeny and scribbly
it's a very big hustly bustly city
if you were a trendy lefty Islingtonite
veggie cafes in the studenty North Laine market area
this marshy laky landspitty sort of area
snotty and cliquey
you can have ginny things or martini type things or squashy type things
Frannie giggled, feeling sort of comfy-groggy; this is such a sleepy town
chosen life styles, comfy not snazzy
in patched trousers and comfy woolly he stood in front of his two bar electric heater.

In these example, the form encodes informality and vagueness, and therefore less than full commitment. Several are mildly insulting, e.g. *trendy lefty*, *loony lefty*, *tedious lefty* [A]: see chapter 7.3. Such productive uses could, by definition, be documented only from attested corpus data.

8.8.2. Lexical commitment

Speakers and writers do not always identify with the words and phrases which they use. G. Lakoff (1972: 197ff; 1987: 122ff) discusses expressions which can suspend part of the meaning of words. For example, *strictly speaking* points to meanings which are inherent in the word. And *technically* points to meanings which are stipulated by experts: that is, meanings of words can be related to expert institutionalized knowledge held by groups such as lawyers and scientists.

Paul's a friend of mine, well strictly speaking my sister's friend [A]
he was technically in breach of contract [A]

Fairclough (1992: 30ff, 120ff) takes an intertextual view of such examples. For example, if someone talks of *a so-called democracy*, they are assuming that a country has been referred to in this way in other discourse, which is possibly very nebulously conceived as general opinion. Pre-constructed phrases and fixed collocations circulate in discourse, in the more general sense of discourse as the way in which people regularly talk about things. (See chapter 7.2.) Items such as *so called*, *as I would call it*, *so to speak*, and *quote unquote* provide examples of surface markers of detachment. Consider examples [all A] such as:

one of the so-called binary star systems
this so-called improvement in the standard of living
hospital of tropical diseases or whatever it's called
the old idea of a certain code of behaviour, what I would call being a gentleman
what they call musicology
I was prepared to push the others under the carpet so to speak in order to make
 the marriage work
we came to Minsk and there we dug in so to speak for the winter
not the person who needs to be quotes treated
people who were in inverted commas distress

These various cases are related. Such markers of detachment signal that: a lexical item is being mentioned as well as used, and that the meaning of a word or phrase is problematic: its meaning lacks general acceptance, or is technical, or is unknown to the hearer, or differs amongst different speakers. The speaker may be disassociating him or herself from some group, or not assuming that the hearer is a member of some group. Such items are among the innumerable ways of conveying in-group membership. Forms such as

loosely called, often called, so-called, traditionally called; what might be called;
 as x calls them

and similar phrases with *describe*, *refer*, etc. are very common in both the Lund and LOB corpora, relative to the frequency of lexical items in corpora of this size. Such phrases are by far the most common use (well over 90 per cent) of the lemma CALL in LOB. Speakers have many ways of referring to the same referent, and can therefore achieve reference without being committed to the truth of the referring expression. It follows that different forms can be used to convey other information, for example, to pick out some feature of the referent, to convey an attitude towards it, to convey group membership by choosing a description that the hearer does not know, and so on. Since reference is utterance-dependent, the referring expressions which speakers use can be studied only by textual and corpus analysis and by ethnographic observation (Schegloff 1972). Consider the following more complex examples (from Andrew Gilling, personal communication):

today's so-called teachers are themselves frequently uneducated [A]
the anti-social behaviour of these so-called women [A]

The words *teachers* and *women* are not being used purely descriptively. The referents are teachers and women. But some of the normal commitments to these words are suspended, in order to convey a moral point of view. The strategy has been called the 'no-true-Scotsman move' (Flew 1975: 47). Imagine a Scot who reads in his newspaper about the dastardly exploits of a fiendish English criminal. He might say to himself: 'No Scotsman would ever do such a thing'. But then suppose he reads, the next week, of Angus McSporran, who has committed even more dastardly deeds in Aberdeen. He might then argue: 'No true Scotsman would ever do such a thing' – thus converting his initial statement to one which is irrefutable, since it is now true by arbitrary definition.

8.8.3. Vague lexis

Other cases of extreme denotational vagueness are provided by these examples [all A]:

*I'm going to be in and out of libraries and things today
don't get yourself worked up into a state and run into lampposts and things
discussions of world food problems and things like that
a great horsehair sofa and that kind of thing
the boys aren't left to do the washing up and that kind of thing*

Channell (1980, 1994) discusses what would be a suitable semantics for vague expressions. She points out that such examples pose problems for truth conditional semantics, since it is impossible to specify when such utterances cease to be true. The vagueness does not disappear even in context: it is an inherent property of language. Since the denotational range of all lexical items is inherently vague, the same point could be made of all utterances: it is simply more striking in cases containing markers of lexical detachment (vague category identifiers, in Channell's term). Channell's observations are also based on a prototype theory of lexical meaning in which category membership is a matter of degree from typical to marginal (see G. Lakoff 1972, Rosch 1975). Austin (1958: 12) pointed out that truth depends on the use and purpose of utterances. For example

Italy is shaped like a boot and France is hexagonal [I]

is accurate enough as a mnemonic for school children, but not for geographers and tour operators. Channell also points out that the interpretation of vague utterances depends on the discourse context: an informal discourse context is likely to demand less absolute accuracy in denotation, although a discussion of, say, the performance of motorcycles may demand precision even in informal contexts. That is, sociolinguistic conventions affect semantic representations. (Channell 1994 provides detailed discussion and many examples from the Cobuild corpus.) Such examples appear to argue for degrees of truth, and therefore a many-valued logic, which is dependent on different sociolinguistic conventions. But speakers

can themselves specify the standards against which they wish the truth of their utterances to be judged. Markers of commitment and detachment are instructions to interpret utterances in more or less rigorous ways.

8.9. MODALITY AND ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE

Illocutionary forces can also be modalized.

8.9.1. Explicit illocutionary prefaces

Explicit performative verbs are much more common in some contexts than others. I have studied a small corpus of business correspondence, which is one context which produces a large number of explicit illocutionary prefaces. These include forms [all A] such as:

further to my letter of ..., I would advise you that ...
with reference to my letter of ..., I am authorized to inform you that ...
I was merely seeking to point out that ...
I would however draw your attention now to the following regulation
may I wish you a successful and interesting conference
I emphasize that ...
let me say again how sorry I was that ...
X, I'm sorry to say, died several months ago
a quick note to tell you that ...
I would suggest that ...
you have my consent for ...

The invented data in the speech act literature consist mainly of examples which combine first-person singular with a simple present tense form (e.g. *I promise, I warn*). But a striking feature of real data is that such forms are rare, and are restricted to certain verbs and/or to very formal contexts. *I apologize* is the only such form which is common. *I thank you* co-occurs with *Dear Sir* in a letter from a bureaucracy. *I hereby certify* occurs on a legal form. *We announce formally* (not singular, of course) occurs in a letter about a company merger. Such first person simple verb forms therefore have stylistic implications. They are not a 'paradigm device' as Searle (1969) calls them. In my corpus data, the commonest surface form is modal plus lexical illocutionary verb, often referred to as a hedged performative:

I would advise you that p
I think we should decline your offer
X and I would like to extend to you our thanks.

But there are very many others, and another striking feature of the data is the surface variation, what Brown and Levinson (1978) call a 'baroque ensemble' of forms for performing indirect speech acts. This also makes the use of intuitive data very dubious, since intuitions about linguistic variation are notoriously

unreliable. This variation involves not only illocutionary verbs, but also illocutionary nouns and other parts of speech. All [A]:

this is our suggestion ...

I'm only putting it forward as a suggestion

well, look, honestly Mrs X, my suggestion to you would be that if ...

in answer to your second question ...

congratulations!

In many such cases, the use of modal verbs and other surface forms is almost entirely conventionalized. It is difficult to see much difference in meaning at all between *I wish you* and *May I wish you*. However, speakers also explicitly distinguish between different degrees and sources of commitment:

*I would like to thank you, officially for the Association and personally for me
this is very much a preliminary letter ...*

And they speak and write on behalf of other people:

I am writing at the request of the Board to invite you to ...

I am writing on behalf of X to thank you very much for ...

And illocutionary forces do not have to be conveyed directly to the addressee. They can be passed around. The following examples are from spoken business settings:

perhaps you would pass on my apologies

*could you give Professor X's apologies for the mathematical society meeting on
Friday.*

That is, A asks B to pass C's apologies to D. When exactly do such illocutionary forces come into operation? Perhaps not till months later, when they appear in writing in the formal minutes. The question of who is committed to what is also unclear, because of different degrees of commitment. One might get the impression from reading Searle that a promise is a promise is a promise. However, illocutionary forces are not categorical, but scalar and often indeterminate (Leech 1983 discusses this in detail). For example, it is possible to refer to less than fully committed acts, such as half-promises:

having more or less promised [A]

he'd sort of had half promises [A]

A tentative promise might be made by uttering:

so is it possible to say provisionally yes and that I will confirm as soon as I can ...

I'll ring again to definitely confirm it [A]

Are the following utterances offers or not?

*I would be interested to offer a course of lectures next session [A]
the cheapest I can offer you at the moment is [product name], which is priced at
forty-nine fifty [A]*

Are the following invitations?

*if you are ever in this part of the world, I'd be delighted to invite you to give a
lecture [A]
I hope you will be able to attend this weekend, for which you will be receiving an
official invitation soon [A]*

I do not think that these questions are answerable, since the meaning of many utterances is negotiable, deniable, indeterminate. Speech act theory has ignored such examples, due to its reliance on introspective data which do not reflect such indeterminacy. The practical importance of such matters is evident in courses in business English (possibly in EFL), and in campaigns for plain English. Gowers' (1954) influential book *The Complete Plain Words* contains what is in effect an analysis of hedged performatives. He criticizes such forms as *I would inform you that* or *I have to inform you that* as being 'crushingly stiff', and (central to my topic here) as obscuring the source of the commitment, and giving the impression of a remote bureaucracy staffed by robots. Gowers recognizes that illocutionary verbs occur in particular settings, that they can be used both to put things on record and to obscure commitment.

8.9.2. Two types of speech act

However, it is not possible to prevaricate or give less than full commitment to all types of speech acts. Consider these examples [all I]:

1. *He almost excommunicated me.*
2. *He almost promised to come.*
3. *He did sort of christen the child.*
4. *He did sort of promise to come.*

Example 1 means that he did not excommunicate me: perhaps he changed his mind at the last minute. 2 is ambiguous: perhaps he changed his mind at the last minute, or perhaps he entered into some kind of commitment. 3 seems to imply an unconventional ceremony. 4 again could mean that he entered into some commitment. These (invented) examples motivate a distinction between two types of act. Type 1 acts can be performed by anyone whose English is good enough to convey their intention: anyone can make promises, requests or complaints. But type 2 acts are institutional and conventional, and therefore not illocutionary at all: because they cannot not be performed by any speaker of the language, but only by someone by virtue of occupying some social role. For example, one must be specially authorized in order to christen or excommunicate people, appoint

them to or fire them from jobs, name ships, sentence offenders, declare war, and so on. These are all declarations in Searle's (1976) sense, in which saying really does make it so. They bring about a correspondence between words and the world, due to consciously formulated (and therefore not linguistic) conventions. Although Searle (1969: 71) claims to be setting up an institutional theory of communication, and distinguishes between brute and institutional facts (see chapter 3.1), he does not make this distinction between two types of act (and therefore misclassifies declarations as a type of illocutionary act).

8.10. MODALITY AND THE TRUTH VALUE OF PROPOSITIONS

So, all utterances express both content and also the speaker's attitude towards that content. This claim may seem so general that it is self-evident or true by definition. So far, I have shown only in a very general way that commitment and detachment are expressed in various ways in syntactic and morphological form. A stronger type of argument would, in addition, provide a pragmatic or functional motivation for many otherwise disparate features of surface syntax. I would then be able to provide an explanation for previously unexplained syntactic phenomena.

8.10.1. Simple versus *ing*-forms of verbs

The following is a case where matters of truth and certainty interact with syntactic and morphological form. Probably the most semantically complex area of English syntax is the verbal group, and one long-standing puzzle is the difference in meaning between pairs such as:

I go, I am going; I warn, I am warning.

I will use the terms simple form and *ing*-form to refer to the surface morphology and syntax. We must make a clear distinction between surface forms and meanings, since these forms can be used to convey tense, aspect and modality. It would thus be prejudging the issue to use a term such as 'simple present-tense form'. Many descriptions of English provide detailed discussion of the basic facts about different classes of verbs which are 'typically' or 'normally' used in one form or the other, and about the range of meanings of the two forms with different verb classes. [NOTE 8.2.] It is often argued that performative verbs differ from other verbs in the relation between the two forms (Austin 1962: 64). With many verbs, reference to the moment of utterance is made using the *ing*-form (*I'm working, go away*), but performative verbs use the simple form (*I promise*): a common view is that performative verbs are odd in this respect. It is also well known that stative verbs (e.g. *contain, own*) often do not admit the *ing*-form: but they are also regarded as an exception among verbs (e.g. Quirk and Greenbaum 1973: 15, 21). However, these observations leave unexplained the relation between performative and stative verbs, and also disguise the fact that many types of verbs take simple forms, either exclusively or regularly. The following are main categories of verbs often said to be regularly or normally used in the simple form. If such claims refer

merely to frequency of use, then they are true. But a mere frequency statement cannot explain what the less frequent form means when it does occur. The essential difference is:

the simple form encodes certainty and permanence
the *ing*-form encodes uncertainty and change.

8.10.2. Verb classes and uses

1. Psychological verbs and verbs of cognition (e.g. *believe, like, love, realize, suspect, think, understand*).

*I know / *am knowing he's right*
I love / ?am loving it

An *ing*-form can, however, occur, to indicate change of state. Note the co-occurring words which indicate change in these examples:

we are understanding more and more how the earthquakes are produced [A]
more of our passengers are realizing the benefits of travelling by coach [A]
and for the first time people are suspecting that he might not win [A]
he is loving his second chance at fatherhood [A]
Botham is loving his new lease of life too much. [A]

2. Verbs of perception (*feel, look, smell, sound, taste*).

*that tastes / *is tasting funny.*

But, again, *ing*-forms can imply recent change:

former hostage Terry Anderson is tasting his first full day of freedom today [A]
after three lean years, Wall Street is tasting fat again. [A]

3. Verbs of conveying and receiving information (e.g. *hear, see*), especially with reference to the recent past:

I hear you were at the bungalow the other day [A]
I see what you mean now [A]

The simple form is also used when the information is given (authoritatively?) in a book:

as Foucault puts it. [A]

Again, *ing*-forms imply recent or current change:

medical personnel are hearing more and more about this technique [A]

we are seeing the beginnings of a revolution [A]

I am seeing the spotlight turned increasingly on so-called unproductive partners [A]

Verbs such as *see*, *hear*, *feel* often occur in the simple form when they are used non-literally. When used literally, to refer to physical sensations, they usually co-occur with *can*: see below. (Sinclair ed 1990: viii.)

4. Relational verbs and verbs of permanent state (e.g. *belong*, *consist*, *depend*, *deserve*, *matter*, *possess*).

Such verbs are normally used in the simple form:

I own / * *am owning six cars*

it contains / * *is containing arsenic*.

Here a mere statement of frequency avoids an explanation of the semantics.

Again, with at least some such verbs, an *ing*-form can be used to indicate change:

more and more people are owning their own houses and perhaps inheriting parents' houses. [A]

5. Performatives.

I promise / * *am promising to come*.

It is often claimed that *-ing*-forms can only be used for repetitions of speech acts, but forms such as *I'm warning you* are common. (See the large literature on performative *-ing*-forms, e.g. Edmondson 1981.) Certain uses also require either the simple or *ing*-form.

6. Definitions, eternal truths, habitual states, permanent and timeless states.

a normal curve by definition describes an infinite number of cases [A]

the region where frontal depressions form is where the polar and tropical air masses are adjacent to each other [A]

Harry smokes / * *is smoking after dinner* [I]

7. Permanent states versus impermanent or recently changed states.

A simple form implies a permanent or at least settled state of affairs, whereas an *ing*-form implies a temporary state:

you're unreasonable [I]

you're being unreasonable. [A]

my dad works in Saudi Arabia [A, Sinclair ed 1990: 247]

I'm working as a British Council officer. [A, *ibid*: 248]

8. Future states of affairs which are predictable, possibly because they are part of some official scheme.

Several grammars of English give examples such as

the exams start / ? are starting on Thursday [I]

Corpus data shows, however, that both forms are used to refer to events which are timetabled and therefore certain:

the first of ten flights leaves tomorrow [A]

we're leaving tomorrow morning on the 7.30 ferry [A]

However, *ing*-forms are used to indicate a hypothetical statement about a future event:

looking into 1994, [organization name] should be seeing profits starting to flow [A]

And, in a case which explicitly signals indeterminacy and uncertainty, the simple form seems impossible:

it is always starting tomorrow and tomorrow never seems to come [A]

A case where a simple form seems quite impossible is where it refers to a future event which is inherently undecidable, such as a sports event. Hence the oddity of:

**Scotland beat France tomorrow*

But the oddity of even such cases disappears if the context makes it clear that a fixed schema is involved:

I've fixed everything, bribed the referee and the linesmen: Scotland beat France tomorrow and lose to Germany next week [I]

9. Demonstrations and commentaries.

I take / ? am taking six eggs ... [I]

I place / ? am placing the rabbit in the hat [I]

Gray takes the ball upfield, passes to McInally [A, Sinclair ed 1990: 247]

10. Headlines, captions below pictures, etc.

The following are from captions in a reference book:

Gromyko lies in state in Moscow [A]

Students march into Tiananmen Square [A]

UN forces move a wounded Swapo guerrilla [A]

11. Directions of various kinds. E.g. stage directions:

The doorbell rings. The young man enters. Grandma looks him over. [A]

Or instructions:

you test an air-leak by ... [I, from Leech 1971: 13]

you take the first turning on the left past the roundabout, then you cross a bridge
... [I, from Leech 1971: 13]

Leech (1971: 13) finds such examples 'hard to classify'. However, they fit easily into a view which sees the simple form as an expression of authoritative knowledge.

12. Summaries of stories, narratives in 'historic present'.

he sits down at his desk chair, reaches for the telephone and dials a number [A,
 Sinclair ed 1990: 257]

Elsewhere (Stubbs 1983a: 197ff), I provide several examples of the simple present forms characteristically used when people summarize stories. G. Lakoff (1987: 473) also points to structures such as *Here comes Susan* and *There goes my bus*, where reference is to the moment of utterance.

8.10.3. Other parallels: can plus verb

There are other parallels between performatives and some of the above categories. For example, universal truths are also formulated with *can*:

ice can float on water [I]

And other categories above also take non-literal *can* or *could*. In all the following cases [all A], *I can/could hear*, etc., means "I do/did hear", not "I am/was able to hear".

I could hear the murmur of voices
I could see a firefly winking to and fro in the bushes
they can smell another major spy scandal
as I opened the door, I could smell her perfume
I can understand she doesn't want to rake up the past
he won't report you, I can promise you that

Sinclair (ed 1990: viii-ix) points out that such verbs are used with *can* when they refer to physical sensations, but occur without *can* in broader psychological meanings. Contrast the examples above with these [also A]:

*Jenny could feel her hands trembling
 he could feel the warmth of her breath against his mouth
 I did feel a little sorry for him
 I feel kind of responsible for her*

My conclusion is as follows. The uses of the simple form illustrated above have the following in common. They all report events which are habitually or eternally or necessarily true, which are certain or predictable or presupposed to be true, or which are authoritative or unchallengeable in some way. This includes events to which the speaker has privileged access (what Labov and Fanshel 1977 call A-events). If I claim that I feel ill, you may accuse me of lying, but you have no way of checking on the truth of my claim. For this reason, the terms private verbs or mistake-proof sentences (Ljung 1980: 50ff) are sometimes used. Other events are unchallengeable because the speaker has some special expertise: in a radio commentary, the hearers cannot see the original events. This is essentially Palmer's (1974: 60ff) argument, that the simple form is used for reports in those special cases where we need to report present activity: normally we do not have to, since present activities are normally observable. The simple form in all these cases conveys that speakers have special reasons to be confident of the truth of the proposition. In some cases, they could not, logically speaking, be wrong. In all cases, their confidence derives from more than publicly accessible observations. It follows that performatives can be analysed naturally as reporting propositions which are true by virtue of being uttered. If I say that I promise, then it is true that I have promised, even if I have promised in bad faith and have no intention of keeping my promise. The commitment has been made. And it follows that performatives are not a special class of verbs. They are especially difficult to distinguish from private verbs and reporting verbs. In summary: performatives and stative verbs are not clearly distinct from other verb classes. They are not odd. [NOTE 8.3.]

8.10.4. Other verbal forms

It is also well documented that other verbal forms also encode modal meanings. A present perfect form with *have* signals the speaker's evaluation that a past event is still relevant:

*it has been provisionally arranged for next Thursday [A]
 the Minister of Defence has been working on the plan for some months [A]*

Past tense forms signal unreal or hypothetical states of affairs, for example, in counter-factual conditionals which commit the speaker to the falsity of a proposition (*If only he was here ...*). *If she was still here, ...* implies that she isn't. *If she is still here, ...* leaves open the possibility that she is. Past tense forms are also used to signal politeness:

*I wondered if we might take the car [A]
 I was wondering if you've a book on birds I could borrow [A]*

Such uses signal remoteness. A past tense form shifts the speaker back in time, thus distancing speaker from hearer, and putting a hedge on illocutionary force. In general, what are traditionally known as past, present, and future tenses have more to do with expressing modality than with time reference (Lyons 1981: 239). And as Lyons (1977: 817) also points out, it is no accident that the so-called future tense in English uses *will*, which also expresses inference (cf. *That will be the postman*). References to future time are necessarily hypothetical and predictive. (See also Levinson 1983 for a detailed argument that almost every utterance encodes the speaker's point of view in the sense of deixis, and that the pervasiveness of deixis has also been greatly underestimated in linguistic description.)

8.10.5. Private verbs

Another case of a relation between pragmatics and syntax is the use of private verbs (e.g. *believe*, *expect*, *suspect*, *think*) as markers of tentativeness. Such verbs are often ambiguous between objective and subjective interpretations. Utterances such as

I think my mother had visions of my swimming the Channel [A]
I don't think there's a fracture, just a bad sprain [A]

are unlikely to be fully committed statements about the speaker's personal beliefs (objective modality), and more likely to be tentative assertions that "x is probably the case" (subjective modality). Similarly,

it looks like dried blood [A]

could be a dogmatic assertion about an appearance (objective), but could also be a qualified assertion that "it is probably dried blood" (subjective). Thus private verbs can be used to make statements about internal psychological states. But they also have modal uses which release speakers from total commitment to propositions. It can be difficult to recognize which use is intended, and this can depend on the content of the proposition. An example such as

which brings me to what I think is the clue, the common factor [A]

could be taken either way: an expression of tentativeness or of firmly held personal conviction. In examples such as

I believe the situation in South Africa is now in a state of ferment [A]
I believe that murderers should be hanged – provided they're sane, of course [A]

the deletion of *I believe* alters the meaning very little, if at all. And it is natural to interpret them as assertions about personal beliefs (objective interpretation), though there is nothing in the surface syntax which signals this. One rule of

interpretation is that if the proposition is not empirically verifiable, then the utterance will be given a personal belief interpretation. However, on other occasions, the syntactic behaviour of these verbs does reflect these different interpretations. For example, the structure *believe in NP* can only be used as a psychological report, either meaning "be sure something exists":

believe in God / fairies / Father Christmas / hell [A]
he never believed in the possibility of a general peace settlement [A]

or meaning "be in favour of":

countries that believe in freedom [A]
both directors believed in the closest personal contact with their customers [A]

Whereas the subjective modal use is signalled by the use of *so* or *not* as a dummy clause in structures such as: *I believe so, I think not*. Similar constructions are possible with

believe, expect, guess, hope, imagine, suppose, it seems.

8.10.6. Logical and pragmatic connectors

A third case of the interaction of pragmatic and syntactic matters is provided by the so-called logical connectors (e.g. *and, but, or, if, because*). Their uses in everyday English are not reducible to their logical functions in the propositional calculus, but have to do with speakers justifying their confidence in the truth of assertions, or justifying other speech acts. There is a large literature on connectives: Johnson-Laird (1983) summarizes much psycholinguistic material; and see Davison (1975), van Dijk (1979), Morreal (1979), McTear (1980), and Stubbs (1983a) for many further examples and discussion. The main notions are evident in the behaviour of *because*, which has two uses, logical and pragmatic, as in these examples:

he was drowned because he fell off the pier [I]
he was drunk, because he fell off the pier [I]

The first has the structure: effect plus cause. The second: assertion plus justification. In the second, pragmatic, use an inference is often signalled by epistemic *must*:

he must have been drunk, because he fell off the pier [I]

Attested data contain a large number of such examples:

the sky must have been clouded over, because the stars had disappeared [A]

The disappearance of the stars does not cause the sky to cloud over. Their disappearance is cited to justify the inference. The same statement-justification structure is seen in

his anaesthetic must have been as old as he was, because I needed five injections to numb my molar [A]
evidently the Cessna was too slow because he had the strip enlarged and bought a small Lear [A]

Such uses are common in casual conversation:

but wait till you have a baby cos you'll find sort of dirty nappies in every corner and sort of banana skins [A]

There are several syntactic tests which distinguish between these two uses of *because*. The pragmatic use does not allow reversal of the clause sequence, clefting of the *because*-clause, or yes-no interrogation of the whole sentence.

**because he fell off the pier he was drunk*
**it is because he fell off the pier that he was drunk*
**was he drunk because he fell off the pier?*

(assuming that the last example is spoken as a single tone group.) Similar points hold for pragmatic *if*, *or*, *but*, and *and*. Consider these examples:

there's some food in the fridge, if you're hungry [I]
there's some food in the fridge, or aren't you hungry? [I]

where the *if*- and *or*-clauses provide reasons for making the statement: that is, they turn the statement into an offer. Or:

A. *Let's eat.*
 B. *But I'm not hungry. [I]*

where the *but*-clause questions the justification of the preceding utterance. Channell (1994) also points to the non-logical use of *or* in vague expressions, such as *Could you get some apples or oranges or something*. The items linked by *or* must be recognizable as members of the same set, as in

sort of safari trips taking ... Australian girls round Europe or something [A]
not wanting to live in Derby or Bootle or something [A]

8.11. MODAL GRAMMAR

Ideally, grammars should be organized in such a way as to reflect the communicative functions of language. In earlier chapters, I gave some functional explanations of surface syntactic phenomena. Passivization (see chapter 4.10)

allows the deletion of the agent, and therefore avoidance of commitment to certain propositional information. Nominalization can turn actions into static things (see chapter 4.5) and therefore attribute objective reality to states of affairs. And ergative verbs can present things from the point of view of the actor or the action (see chapter 6.8). It is possible to show that many features of surface syntax have the function of presenting speakers' attitudes to words, propositions and illocutions, and individual cases are widely discussed. However, these have yet to be brought together into a unified description, in what could be called a modal grammar of English. A case of items which function to express speakers' attitudes to the truth of what is said is sentence adverbs such as *frankly* and *obviously* (on attitudinal and style disjuncts, see Greenbaum 1969 and Biber & Finegan 1989). But many other syntactic features have this function. For example, a large number of syntactic structures can trigger presuppositions: including factive verbs, cleft sentences, and non-restrictive relative clauses (Levinson 1983: 181-4). And transferred negation (e.g. *I don't think that "p"* versus *I think that not "p"*) can signal the speaker's attitude towards propositions and interlocutors, including degree of certainty, politeness and speaker involvement: Bublitz (1992) shows this in detail using data from the London-Lund corpus. The uses of *some* and *any* (R. Lakoff 1969) can signal speaker expectations. In questions, *some* signals the expectation of a positive answer (*has someone come?*), whereas *any* remains neutral or signals the expectation of a negative answer (*has anyone come?*). The form of tag questions is similarly explicable only with reference to discourse. They allow statements to be presented as obvious, dubious, or open to challenge. Tags with the same polarity as the main clause (*he is, is he?*) refer to propositions whose source is the addressee. Tags with reversed polarity (*he is, isn't he?*, *he isn't, is he?*) refer to the speaker's own beliefs. One major function is to implicate: "I am certain / not certain that p"; "I want to check if you believe that p" (see Bublitz 1978: 140-61). Lyons (1981: 241) argues that there is much in the structure of languages that cannot be explained without reference to the notion of subjectivity of utterance; and (pp. 235-36) that much work in semantics and pragmatics is seriously flawed, because it has not given sufficient prominence to the concepts of modality, subjectivity, and locutionary agency. I have tried in this chapter to provide some data to illustrate these claims, and to begin to show what data a modal grammar of English has to explain.

8.12. APPLIED LINGUISTICS

The kind of modal grammar which I have proposed has various applications. I have briefly mentioned teaching business English. More generally, the sociolinguistic competence to make tentative or tactful statements, about controversial subjects about which one has reservations, is a problem for foreign learners. It is difficult to translate modal particles from one language to another (Bublitz 1978). And it is well known that non-native speakers of English can sound rude, brusque or tactless if they make mistakes in this area. Often mistakes are not recognized as linguistic, but as social ineptitude. It is also widely recognized that foreign learners have comprehension problems with indirect forms. (Holmes 1983.) Gumperz (1982a, b) shows that in modern bureaucratic

industrial societies, with their unprecedented cultural diversity, an increasing amount of communication is not in small familiar face-to-face groups, but between strangers who are interacting not as individuals but as members of social roles. But the interpretation of indirect utterances depends on shared, taken-for-granted knowledge, and there are cultural differences in the expression and use of indirectness. Gumperz has carried out detailed ethnographic work on cross-cultural differences in the expression and perception of credibility and trustworthiness, and documents legal cases where prosecutions hinged on whether defendants were perceived as being convincing or trustworthy, and argues that, owing to linguistic problems, they were not. (See chapter 5 Appendix.) Bell (1984) has studied how news stories arrive in New Zealand via agencies such as Reuters, in a form designed essentially for printed transmission in newspapers, and are then abbreviated for transmission on radio news. He shows that the radical shortening can lead editors to reduce details, round figures, delete hedges, omit attributions to spokespersons, and so on. And he shows how the degree and manner of commitment can be altered between the original text and the broadcast version. Slembrouk (1992) has studied how the spoken language of parliamentary debate is represented in a written form in Hansard. He shows that, although Hansard is often regarded as a verbatim record of what is actually said in parliament, considerable changes are made to the words spoken. There is 'a general tendency to under-represent interpersonal meanings, especially modal constructions, hedges, expressions of degrees of commitment towards what speakers say, etc.' He finds that expressions such as *I hasten to stress, I think, I can only say, actually* are deleted in an attempt to reduce the record to ideational claims. There is a 'systematic removal of interpersonal and textual dimensions of utterances' (p. 110) from the written record. (A knowledge of such features of language is also of great practical use to linguists working on other written representations of spoken language, such as when spoken interview evidence is recorded by police: see chapter 5 Appendix.)

8.13. CONCLUSION

There are many other aspects of vague and indirect language. I have not discussed so-called metaphorical language, or the many non-literal or non-serious uses of language in lying, irony, exaggeration, teasing and joking. Such aspects of language, which have previously been swept under the carpet, are now being taken on board, so to speak, by some linguists. Often the pendulum has swung full circle and upset the apple cart. Aspects of language which often seemed to linguists to be far from the bread-and-butter side of language study are now being seen as the backbone of the enterprise. Fieldwork can be an uphill grind. But if you can feel which way the wind is blowing and swim with the tide, then it is possible to grasp the nettle, by taking the bull by the horns, instead of clutching at straws or planting primroses in a gale. We are not necessarily on the horns of a dilemma, between theory and data: one linguist's Scylla is another's Charybdis. Opening a can of worms does not mean throwing caution to the winds. If we can get our foot in the door, then the little acorn may grow into a mighty oak as it snowballs downhill with the theoretical wind in its sails.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. Austin's theory has an interactional emphasis which is lost in Searle's work. Lyons (1981: 172) argues that the term 'language act' is better than 'speech act', and thus draws attention to Searle's abstract, decontextualized view of language. Speech act theory applies to written language as well as spoken, but has no theory of speech-writing differences. It appears to be based on the dubious view that language can be studied independently of its medium of transmission. (Chomskyan linguistics is at least explicit about this: speech act theory is not.) But speech and writing have different possibilities for commitment: consider requests to let someone *have it in writing*, or the type of commitment made possible by a signature, for which writing is a prerequisite (Stubbs 1983b). There is a large literature on hedges and disclaimers: G. Lakoff (1972) is a classic paper. And much speech act theory (from Searle 1975 on) discusses indirection in language use. Brown and Levinson (1978) and Leech (1983) propose theories of politeness and tact. Lyons (1981) argues that more attention should be paid to the subjective attitudes which speakers convey towards the propositions they express: see chapter 8.11. And Goffman (1981) deconstructs the concept of speaker, distinguishing between the animator (who produces the sounds), the author (who selects and encodes the message), and the principal (who is committed to the beliefs expressed).
2. See practical grammars for teaching English as a foreign language such as Thomson & Martinet (1969: 92ff), or scientific grammars such as Quirk et al (1985: 175ff). Leech (1971) and Palmer (1974) give thorough accounts, although both are based on introspective, invented examples (Leech 1971: viii, Palmer 1974: 7-8). The relation of the examples in Quirk et al (1985) to attested corpus data is unclear: see chapter 2.5. The Cobuild grammar (Sinclair ed 1990) is unique in being based on corpus data. It provides many attested examples (pp. 246ff) to show that such forms express modality, and not mere time reference. The simple forms express states of affairs which are settled or generally true, whereas *ing*-forms encode states of affairs which are changing or temporary. And they give (pp. 458-59) a list of about 70 verbs 'which are not usually used' in the *ing*-form, including: *love, own, see, sound, smell, understand*. However, as I illustrate, these verbs can take the *ing*-form under certain circumstances.
3. I do not think that the *hereby* test for performatives is reliable. The word *hereby* is almost entirely restricted to written legal settings: it does not occur once in the Lund corpus of half a million words of spoken British English, and less than 100 times in a 120 million word sample of the Cobuild corpus. This throws doubt on its traditional use as a test for performative verbs, since its use will therefore disturb intuitive judgements (unreliable at the best of times). The only test I know which distinguishes performatives from other verbs is that they take optional *you*: *I promise (you) I'll come; *I deplore you what he's done*.

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