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Linguistic underdeterminacy: A view from speech act theory

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to reformulate the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis by making use of Austin's theory of speech acts. Viewed from the post-Gricean perspective, linguistic underdeterminacy consists in there being a gap between the encoded meaning of a sentence uttered by a speaker and the proposition that she communicates. According to the Austinian model offered in this paper, linguistic underdeterminacy should be analysed in terms of semantic and force potentials conventionally associated with the lexical and syntactic properties of the *pheme* uttered by the speaker; in short, it is claimed that the conventionally specified *phatic meaning* of an utterance underdetermines its *content* and *force*. This Austinian version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis plays a central role in a contextualist model of verbal communication. The model is eliminativist with respect to rhetic content and illocutionary force: it takes contents and forces to be one-off constructions whose function is to classify individual utterances in terms of their representational and institutional effects, respectively.

1. Introduction

John L. Austin famously distinguished between two aspects of what he called "the total speech act in the total speech situation" (Austin, 1975: 148): the locutionary act and

the illocutionary act. This distinction is theoretically motivated and conceptually clear: it corresponds to the contrast between saying and doing understood as two different functions of verbal utterances. According to Austin, to make a locutionary act is to say something (Austin, 1975: 94) or, in other words, to produce a locution construed as a linguistic representation of a worldly state. For example, the speaker can use a sentence of the form "I will do *A*" to say that she will do *A* or, to put it in different terms, to produce a locution that represents her doing *A* as a future event; by the same token, she can use a sentence of the form "Do *B*!" to produce a locution that represents the hearer's doing *B* as a future event. The illocutionary act, in turn, is an act made *in* saying something (Austin, 1975: 99). Successful or felicitous illocutionary acts *take effect* (Austin, 1975: 117) by bringing about certain changes in the domain of normative or institutional facts such as entailments, rights, commitments, obligations, and so on (see Sbisà, 2007, 2013). For example, a successful promise made in uttering a sentence of the form "I will do *A*" results in the speaker's being committed to perform action *A* as well as in the hearer's being entitled to expect her to perform this action; a felicitous command made in uttering a sentence of the form "Do *B*!" brings about the speaker's right to expect the hearer to perform action *B* as well as the hearer's obligation to perform this action.

A central tenet of Austin's theory of speech acts is that "the locutionary act as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech act is both" (Austin, 1975: 146). By saying this, he rejected his initial distinction between constatives and performatives, i.e., the contrast between utterances whose only job is to describe states of affairs to be found in the world and utterances whose sole function is to create conventional or institutional facts. According to Austin, almost every speech act performs these two functions simultaneously and, as the corollary of this, can be ascribed, first, "with a certain more or less definite 'sense' and a more or less definite 'reference'" (Austin, 1975: 93), which together constitute the central aspect of the act's *locutionary meaning*, and, second, with a certain more or less definite *illocutionary force*, e.g. the force of asserting, warning, commanding, promising, and so on.

Another observation made by Austin is that the illocutionary force of an utterance and its locutionary meaning are underdetermined by its lexical and grammatical properties. He claimed, for example, that in uttering an imperative sentence — e.g., "Shut it!" — one can, depending on context, perform the act of making "an order, a permission, a demand, a request, an entreaty, a suggestion, a recommendation" (Austin 1975: 76-77), and so on. He also argued that the same sentence — or, to put it in his own words, the same *pheme*

understood as a structured sequence of words (Austin, 1975: 92) — "may be used on different occasions of utterance with a different sense or reference" (Austin, 1975: 97). In other words, Austin maintained that the locutionary content of an utterance — i.e., what the speaker says — is constituted in context and as such goes beyond the meaning that can be attributed to the utterance in virtue of its lexical and syntactic properties (see Kissine, 2009: 125). Unfortunately, he was very unspecific about the nature and aspects of the locutionary meaning (see Sbisà, 2013: 27); as Robert M. Harnish observed, Austin "had almost nothing novel or constructive to say about speaking, beyond vague allusions to speech sounds, traditional grammar, and even more obscurely, meaning, sense and reference" (Harnish, 2005: 12). Nevertheless, the general idea behind Austin's theory of speech acts (Austin, 1975) seems to be sufficiently clear. Namely, it says that in most, if not all, cases, the actual meaning and force of an utterance are linguistically underdetermined or, more precisely, that the lexical and grammatical properties of the utterance fail to provide a sufficient basis for determining its locutionary content (i.e., what the speaker says) and its illocutionary function (i.e., what the speaker does in saying what she says). The purpose of this paper is to elaborate on this idea and, as a result, develop an Austinian account of the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy. In other words, my aim is to reconsider John L. Austin's contribution to the study of verbal communication. It should be stressed, however, that I do not want to develop a comprehensive interpretation of the conception presented in *How to Do Things With Words* (Austin, 1975). Rather, in what follows I focus on some conceptual distinctions drawn by Austin and consider the role that they could play in accounting for the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy.

In the reminder of this paper I proceed as follows. In section 2, I provide a brief review of the current debate on linguistic underdeterminacy and claim that the received version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis — according to which the decoded meaning of the words uttered by the speaker fails to determine the proposition that she communicates (Bach, 1994, 2001; Carston, 1999, 2002, 2004; Recanati, 2001, 2004; Sperber and Wilson, 2002) — focus on the locutionary aspect of verbal activity. In section 3, I discuss elements of Austin's conceptual framework: in subsection 3.1., I focus on phatic and rhetic acts construed as abstract components of locutionary acts; in subsection 3.2, in turn, I elaborate on Austin's idea that locutions and illocutions are nothing but abstract aspects of "the total speech act in the total speech situation" (Austin, 1975: 148). In section 4, I develop an Austinian model of linguistic underdeterminacy: in section 4.1, I

formulate an Austinian version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis; next, in section 4.2, I offer a brief presentation of Austinian contextualism, which takes the form of eliminativism about force and content. Finally, in section 5, I discuss the main conclusion of this paper.

2. Linguistic Underdeterminacy and the Gricean Tradition

The phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy is extensively examined and discussed by scholars working within the Gricean tradition in pragmatics (Bach, 1987, 1994, 2001; Carston, 1999, 2002, 2004; García-Carpintero, 1998, 2001, 2006; Korta and Perry, 2006, 2007, 2011; Recanati, 2001, 2004; Sperber and Wilson, 2002). Despite differences in details, they share a general picture of verbal communication. First, they adopt the view that communicating with language involves the expression and recognition of Gricean communicative intentions (Sperber and Wilson, 2002; Carston, 2002). Second, they accept the Gricean idea that the overall meaning communicated by the speaker can be analysed into two aspects (Carston, 2004; Recanati, 2004; García-Carpintero, 2006): the primary meaning (i.e., what is said) and the secondary meaning (i.e., what is conversationally implicated).

For Grice, the primary meaning of an utterance is "closely related to the conventional [or encoded] meaning of the words (sentence) [the speaker] has uttered" (Grice, 1989: 25), and "is specially and appropriately connected with what the signifying expression (or its user) *says* as distinct from implies, suggests, hints, or in some other less than fully direct manner conveys" (Grice, 1989: 360); to identify the primary meaning of the speaker's utterance, then, the hearer uses his knowledge of the language the speaker speaks and, if necessary, allows for any contextual information needed for disambiguation and fixing indexical reference (Grice, 1989: 25). The secondary meaning of the utterance, in turn, is not constrained by the conventionally determined meaning of the words used by the speaker, but is interpreted in context by maxim driven inferential processes in accordance with the so-called working-out schema (Grice, 1989: 31). In short, the main idea underlying Grice's model of verbal communication is that the primary meaning of an utterance is conventional and largely context-independent, whereas its secondary meaning is inferred and highly context-sensitive.

It turns out, however, that this idea is untenable. The proponents of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis (Bach, 1994, 2001; Carston, 1999, 2002, 2004; Recanati, 2001,

2004; Sperber and Wilson, 2002) argue that in most, if not all, cases, the encoded or linguistically determined meaning of the words uttered by the speaker underspecifies the primary meaning she communicates. For illustration, consider the following examples:

(1) He is happy.

(2) The steak is raw. (Recanati, 2004: 24)

(3) The ice is thin.

(4) France is hexagonal. (Austin, 1971: 21; Bach, 1994: 134)

(5) The ham sandwich left without paying. (Recanati, 2004: 26)

The crucial point here is that their truth-conditional contents goes beyond their linguistically coded meanings. More specifically, their primary meanings are determined (i.e., ascertained) in context by processes that seem to involve modifying meaning constituents encoded by predicates "happy", "raw", "thin" and "hexagonal", as well as by referential expressions "the steak", "the ice" and "the ham sandwich"[1]. As Robyn Carston puts it,

> the discrepancy between the explicit content (what is said) of an utterance and the conventional (or 'encoded') meaning of the linguistic expression employed is far greater than that presented by ambiguous words and overtly indexical expressions, and pragmatic inference (that is, maxim-guided inference) is required to make up the shortfall (Carston 2004: 67).

Most of the current theories of linguistic underdeterminacy (Bach, 1994, 2001; Carston, 1999, 2002, 2004; García-Carpintero, 1998, 2001, 2006; Korta and Perry, 2006, 2007, 2011; Recanati, 2004; Sperber and Wilson, 2002) seem to focus on the locutionary aspect of linguistic interaction. It is often claimed, namely, that the linguistic meaning of an utterance fails to determine what the speaker says, where the latter can be likened to the locutionary meaning of the speaker's act or, as John R. Searle (1968; cf. Korta and Perry, 2007, 2011) would put it, to the act's propositional content. The proponents of the received version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis claim that there is a gap between the linguistically determined meaning of the utterance and its primary meaning, where the latter is called *intuitive* (Recanati, 2001) or *official* content (Perry, 2001), its *impliciture*

1 Of course this list is not complete. For a comprehensive survey of linguistic underdeterminacies, see Carston 2002.

(Bach, 1994) or *explicature* (Sperber and Wilson, 2002; Carston 1999, 2002, 2004), or its *truth-conditional* (Carston, 2004) or *dictive* (García-Carpintero, 2006) content. What these all conceptual proposals have in common is that they are designed to capture the representational or propositional content of an act of verbal communication. For example, according to Sperber and Wilson,

> the linguistic meaning recovered by decoding vastly underdetermines the speaker's meaning. There may be ambiguities and referential ambivalences to resolve, ellipses to interpret, and other indeterminacies of explicit content to deal with. (Sperber and Wilson, 2002: 3)

Admittedly, in the next sentence they add that there "may be (…) illocutionary indeterminacies to resolve". Nevertheless, taking into account the examples they use to illustrate the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy, it is clear that Sperber and Wilson focus on the underdetermination of the *propositional content* of an act. In a similar vein, Carston claims that:

> the linguistic form employed by a speaker inevitably underdetermines the proposition she explicitly expresses because natural language sentences do not encode full propositions but merely schemas for the construction of (truth-evaluable) propositions. (Carston, 1999: 105)

In what follows, I examine the possibility of reformulating the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis in terms of Austin's theory of speech acts (Austin, 1975). I assume that the "linguistic form employed by a speaker" can be understood as the *pheme* that the speaker utters, and that the "linguistic meaning recovered by decoding" can be likened to what I call (in subsection 3.1) the *phatic meaning* of her act (i.e., the meaning that the pheme has in virtue of its lexical and grammatical properties only). By analogy; I also assume that the "explicit content" of the speaker's utterance or, using Carston's phrase, the "proposition she explicitly expresses", can be equated with what Austin called the *rhetic content* of the act. With these assumptions in mind we can reformulate the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis. According to its Gricean version, in most, if not all, cases, there is a gap "between the explicit content (what is said) of an utterance and the conventional (or 'encoded') meaning of the linguistic expression employed" (Carston, 2004: 67). Its Austinian paraphrase, in turn, says that normally there is a gap between the phatic meaning of an utterance and its actual force and meaning.

My contention, then, is that the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy can be

re-described in terms of Austin's theory of speech acts (Austin, 1975). Admittedly, some of the scholars working within the field of the Gricean pragmatics adopt the Austinian distinction between the locutionary level of saying and the illocutionary level of stating (Bach, 1994: 144, and 2004: 31; García-Carpintero, 2006: 45-46) as well as the contrast between the phatic act and the rhetic act (Kissine, 2009: 125, and 2013: 16). In my view, however, the *whole* conceptual framework developed by Austin can be used as an adequate basis for developing a comprehensive account of the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy. In particular, it allows us to distinguish between the underdetermination of rhetic content and the underdetermination of illocutionary force and, consequently, to formulate two contextualist positions: *eliminativism about rhetic content* and *eliminativism about force*.

3. Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts

According to Marina Sbisà, the central idea underlying Austin's theorising about linguistic practice is that of speech acts as "context-changing social actions" (Sbisà, 2002: 421). In other words, to make a speech act is to affect the context of its production by bringing about certain conventional effects. In particular, to make a locutionary act is to produce a locution construed as a linguistic representation of a state of the world; to issue an illocutionary act, in turn, is to bring about changes in the domain of normative of institutional facts construed as rights, entitlements, permissions, duties, obligations, and so on (for a discussion of this idea, see Sbisà, 2002, 2007, 2013, and Searle, 2010; cf. Witek 2013a, 2013b, and Budzyńska and Witek 2014). It is worth stressing that in performing a locutionary act the speaker follows certain semantic conventions: the descriptive conventions, correlating sentences with types of situations, and the demonstrative conventions, correlating acts to individual situations to be found in the world (Austin, 1950: 114-115; cf. Kissine, 2009: 125); to perform an illocutionary act, in turn, the speaker invokes a certain conventional procedure "having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances" (Austin, 1975: 14).

In this section I offer a brief reconstruction of the categories of locutionary and illocutionary acts. In section 3.1 I discuss the structure of locutionary acts; in particular, I construct the category of *phatic meaning* that, together with the concept of *rhetic content*, plays a central role in formulating the Austinian version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy

thesis. In section 3.2 I discuss the category of illocutionary acts; in particular, I examine the relationship between illocutionary acts and phatic acts.

3.1. The Locutionary Act

The locutionary act is an act of saying something. According to Austin, saying something involves performing the following three acts: a *phonetic act*, i.e., "the act of uttering certain noises" (Austin, 1975: 92); a *phatic act*, i.e., "the act of uttering certain vocables or words, i.e. noises of certain types belonging to *and as* belonging to a certain vocabulary, in a certain construction, i.e. conforming to and as conforming to a certain grammar" (Austin, 1975: 92); and a *rhetic act*, i.e., the act of using those vocables or words "with a certain more or less definite 'sense' and a more or less definite 'reference' (which together are equivalent to 'meaning')" (Austin, 1975: 93). In short, every locutionary act is constituted by a rhetic act, which is, in turn, constituted by a phatic act and its corresponding phonetic act. Of course this brief description fails to do justice to the complexity of locutionary acts (for an extensive discussion of this topic, see Sbisà 2013). Nevertheless, it provides a sufficient starting point for considering the relationship between the locutionary act and its two abstract components: the phatic act and the rhetic act. Let us first consider phatic and rhetic acts in more detail, and next turn to the discussion of the roles they play in constituting locutionary acts.

3.1.1. The Phatic Act

According to Austin, to perform a phatic act is to produce a *pheme* understood as a well-formed sentence token (Austin, 1975: 92). In other words, phemes are complex units of language — structured strings of words constructed in accordance with certain lexical and grammatical rules — and as such should be typed in terms of their lexical and grammatical properties. Do Austinian phemes have semantic properties too? At first sight it seems that they do not. The problem is, however, that Austin was unspecific about the function of phatic acts and the properties of their products. On the one hand, he defined phemes as purely formal objects equipped with lexical and grammatical properties only (Austin, 1975: 92); on the other hand, he claimed that the "pheme is a unit of *language*: its typical fault is to be nonsense — meaningless" (Austin, 1975: 98). What is more, discussing the way we report acts of saying, Austin observed that:

> [i]f the sense or reference is *not* being taken as clear, then the whole or part [of the report — M.W.] is to be in quotation marks. Thus I might say: 'He said I was to go to the "minister", but he did not say which minister' (…). (Austin, 1975: 96-97)

It is possible to assume, therefore, that Austinian phemes and their constituents do have semantic properties or, more precisely, that there is a type of meaning — let us call it the *phatic meaning* — that can be ascribed to the products of phatic acts in virtue of their lexical and grammatical features. In particular, one can assume that the description "the minister" contributes something to the phatic meaning of any utterance of the sentence "Go to the minister". What it contributes, it seems, is a linguistically specified constraint on the type of object that "the minister" can be used to refer to (as far as literal uses of language are concerned). To know the phatic meaning of this description is to know that it can be literally used to refer to a certain minister. That is why it is possible for the hearer to recognize this constraint and at the same time be unable to identify the object that the speaker refers to; in other words, it is possible for him to report on the speaker's act by saying "She said that I was to go to the "minister", but did not say which minister".

It is not my aim in this paper to give an adequate interpretation of Austin's account of phatic acts. Rather, my purpose is to construct a concept of phatic meaning and use it to develop an Austinian version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis. The only exegetical point I would like to make is that the concept of phatic meaning *may* be regarded as an implicit element of the original theoretical framework developed by Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 1975).

In what follows, then, I assume that to make a phatic act is to produce a *pheme* whose meaning — i.e. the *phatic* or *linguistic meaning* of the speaker's utterance — is determined by the compositional and lexical semantics of the language used by the speaker. Normally, the phatic meaning of an utterance involves at least two components: first, the *reference act potential* conventionally associated with the referential terms uttered, and, second, the *phatic sense* conventionally associated with the descriptive terms used by the speaker. For example, the central aspect of the phatic meaning of any utterance of the sentence:

(1) He is happy.

can be represented by means of the following formula:

(6) [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON] IS HAPPY.

where the phrase "[A CERTAIN MALE PERSON]" stands for the referential act potential associated with the indexical expression "he", and "IS HAPPY" stands for the phatic sense of the predicate "is happy". It should be noted that constructing meaning representations I use the capitalizing convention, according to which "e" means E no matter what kind of entity "E" stands for (see Horwich, 1998: 11)[2]. Following Kent Bach (2001: 33), next, I use square brackets to signal that what "he" contributes to the phatic meaning of (1) is not the concept A CERTAIN MALE PERSON, but a referential constraint "on the sort of individual the indexical can be used to refer to" (Bach, 1987: 188). It is instructive to stress that this constraint applies only to *literal* uses; in other words, [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON] is a linguistically or semantically determined constraint on any *literal* referential act made in uttering "he". From the point of view of lexical semantics, "he" is not synonymous with "a certain male person", but it is part of the semantics of "he" that it can be literally used to refer to some male person.

The idea of conventionally or semantically determined referential constraints comes from Bach (1987, 2001). In my view, it can be used to define the concept of referential act potentials: the reference act potential of an expression is a linguistically specified constraint of the type of objects that this expression can be used to refer to. According to Bach "[a]nyone who utters [(1)] at any place and at any time is saying the same thing" (Bach, 1987: 186). In other words, anyone who utters (1) is producing a pheme whose meaning is described by formula (6) (As a matter of fact, Bach (2001: 41) would use formula (6) to represent the locutionary or rhetic meaning of the utterance of (1); in my view, however, the purely linguistic meaning of an utterance should be better identified with its phatic rather than locutionary meaning.)

Besides the referential act potential [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON], the phatic meaning of utterance (1) contains en element encoded by the predicate "is happy". It is the predicate's phatic sense: a linguistically specified constraint on the sort of property that the predicate can be used to attribute. The phatic sense of this predicate functions as an input to a contextual process that determines its locutionary or rhetic sense (see subsection 3.1.2

2 One merit of using this convention is that it allows us to remain neutral about the nature of meanings: we can take them to be concepts construed as elements of Mentalese, objectively existing abstract objects, collections of source situations, etc.

below).

Formula (6), however, cannot be regarded as a complete representation of the phatic meaning of the utterance of sentence (1). Note, namely, that sentence (1) can, in virtue of its indicative mood, be used to make a literal and direct statement, whereas sentence (7) can, in virtue of its imperative mood, be used to make literal and direct acts of commanding, exhorting, permitting, advising, instructing, and so on (see Austin, 1975: 73).

(7) Be happy!

In what follows, I take grammatical moods to encode what I call illocutionary force potentials. Roughly speaking, the illocutionary force potential of a pheme is a linguistically determined constraint on the types of illocutionary acts that this pheme can constitute. It should be stressed, of course, that this constraint applies to literal and direct speech acts only. For example, the mood of an utterance encodes a certain constraint on the literal and direct forces that the utterance can have. The crucial point is that the illocutionary force potential of an utterance is an elements of its phatic meaning.

It is instructive to note that besides the mood, Austin (1975: 74-77) considered a few other linguistic devices whose function might be to indicate the force of an utterance: performative prefixes, intonation and the tone of voice, illocutionary adverbs, connective expressions, gestures and even the circumstance of the utterance. What is more, he regarded intonation as one of the properties of a phatic act (Austin, 1975: 92). For the sake of simplicity, however, I limit my analysis to syntactic and lexical properties of an utterance and examine the role that they play in determining elements of its phatic meaning.

Following Bach (1994: 144-149), I assume that quite often the purely linguistic meaning of an utterance — that, I think, can be identified with its phatic meaning — involves presupposed conditions and conventionally implicated contents. For the sake of illustration, let us consider the following three sentences:

(8) He is happy, too.
(9) He is poor and happy.
(10) He is poor but happy.

In the manner similar to example (1), the phatic meaning of (8) comprises three

components: the referential act potential [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON], the phatic sense encoded by the predicate “is happy”, and the illocutionary force potential encoded by the indicative mood. Unlike the phatic meaning of (1), however, the phatic meaning of (8) contains a condition contributed by the presuppositional trigger “too”; the condition lays down that *either* someone else apart from the person referred to by “he” is happy *or* that the person referred to by “he” is, apart from being happy, characterised by some other attribute. It is also worth noting that the phatic meaning of (10) differs from that of (9): the former, unlike the latter, contains the condition which is conventionally implicated by the use of the connective expression “but” and conveys the meaning that normally poor people are not happy.

In summary, what I call the phatic meaning of an utterance normally embraces the following three components: (*i*) the reference act potentials encoded by the referential expressions uttered, (*ii*) the phatic senses of the descriptive terms used, and (*iii*) the illocutionary force potential encoded by the mood of the pheme or other linguistic devices. In some cases it may also comprise (*iv*) presupposed conditions and (*v*) conventionally implicated contents generated by the use of expressions such as “even”, “too”, “but”, “therefore”, etc.

In what follows, I assume that different utterances are of the same phatic type if they are equivalent with respect to their lexical and syntactic properties and, in virtue of the semantic rules of the language used by the speaker, have the same phatic meaning. It is worth stressing that phonetic equivalence does not entail phatic equivalence: as Austin observed, “(…) if a monkey makes a noise [phonetically] indistinguishable from ‘go’ it is still not a phatic act” (1975: 96). In other words, it is not the case that every phone in Austin’s sense automatically counts as a pheme. Therefore, numerically different phonetic acts can be regarded as phatically equivalent provided two conditions are met: first, they are phatic acts; second, they are indistinguishable in terms of their lexical and syntactic properties and, as the corollary of this, in terms of their phatically determined meaning. Allowing for the fact that a single lexical unit can have different phonetic realisations or variants, it is also possible that different phonetic acts can be of the same phatic type.

3.1.2. The Rhetic Act

In typical circumstances, to perform a phatic act is to make a rhetic act; in other words, it is to produce a *rheme* construed as a linguistic representation of a certain state in

the world[3]. The meaning of the representation is the *rhetic content* of the speaker's utterance. Following the spirit of Austin's theory of truth (Austin, 1950), I take the rhetic act to involve two ancillary acts: first, the act of *referring to* or *demonstrating* a historical situation to be found in the world and, second, the act of *describing* the situation as being of a certain type (see Austin, 1950: 116; cf. Austin, 1975: 97; Kissine, 2009: 125). Similarly, the content of the rheme can be analysed into two components: first, the *reference* conceived of as the situation or object demonstrated by the speaker and, second, the *rhetic sense* that is closely related to the *phatic* sense of the words used by the speaker. The point is that in most, if not all, cases, the phatic sense of a predicate needs contextual modification. Recall that the phatic sense of predicate *P* — e.g., "is happy" — is a linguistically specified constraint on the sort of property that *P* can be used to attribute; in other words, it can be identified with a linguistically coded semantic potential (Recanati, 2004: 148) that corresponds to a type of situation — e.g., the situation of one's being happy — with which the predicate used by the speaker is associated in virtue of what Austin called *descriptive conventions*. (I assume that the conventions in question form the central part of the compositional and lexical semantics of the language used by the speaker and, consistently, that the type of situation they ascribe to the words that she utters is one of the components of the phatic meaning of his utterance.) But being happy can take many different forms and each such form corresponds to some contextually determined rhetic sense of the predicate "is happy". As Forguson put it, the phatic meaning is contextually determinable and the "rhetic act (...) disambiguates the meaning of the pheme" (Forguson, 1973: 164). In other words, the rhetic content of an utterance results from the contextual determination of its phatic meaning; in particular, the rhetic sense of the speaker's words results from the contextual determination of their phatic sense.

Recall that two individual utterances are of the same phatic type if they are equivalent with respect to their lexical and syntactic properties and, in virtue of the semantic rules of the language used by the speaker, have the same phatic meaning. In many cases, however, phatically equivalent acts differ in respect of their rhetic contents. To illustrate this point, let us consider the following two speech situations. In the first one, Ann and Peter are talking about Tom, who is a new apprentice mechanic; Ann asks "Where is Tom?", and Peter answers:

3 Following Austin (1975: 92-93), I take both the pheme and the rheme to be utterances in the sense of *utteratum* (i.e., what is uttered) rather than in the sense of *utteratio* (i.e. the act of issuing an utterance).

(11) He is in the grip of a vice.

In the second situation, Ann and Tom are talking about Peter, who is known to have a weakness for sweets; Ann asks “How is Peter?” and Tom responds by uttering sentence (11). Note that the two utterances of sentence (11) under consideration, one produced by Peter and the other produced by Tom, can be counted as belonging to the same phatic type, since the semantic rules of English assign to them the same phatic meaning:

(12) ⊢ [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON] *EITHER* IS UNABLE TO RID HIMSELF OF A CERTAIN KIND OF BAD CHARACTER TRAIT *OR* SOME PART OF HIS PERSON WAS CAUGHT IN A CERTAIN KIND OF TOOL OR INSTRUMENT[4].

Following Forguson (1973: 163; cf. Recanati, 1980: 208, and 1987: 251), I take the reference act potential [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON] and the two alternative phatic senses of the predicate “is in the grip of a vice” to be elements of the phatic meaning of any utterance of sentence (11); the sign “⊢”, in turn, stands for the illocutionary force potential encoded by the indicative mood. It must be noted that in uttering his token of sentence (11), Peter *refers* to Tom and *describes* him as having been caught in a certain tool called “vice”, whereas Tom, in uttering his token of the sentence in question, *refers* to Peter and *describes* him as being unable to get rid of his weakness for sweets. In other words, even though Peter and Tom produce phatically equivalent sentence tokens, they use them to represent different states of affairs. The situation represented by Peter’s utterance involves Tom and the property of being caught in a vice, whereas the situation represented by Tom’s utterance involves Peter and the property of being unable to get rid of a weakness for sweets. In short, the rhetic contents of the two utterances under discussion result from the process of contextual elaboration or modification of the phatic meaning (12). However, the pragmatic mechanism that determines the content of the rheme produced by Tom involves not only disambiguation, i.e. the contextually controlled process of deciding which one of the two linguistically encoded phatic senses of the lexeme “vice” is the operative one, but also the procedure of *strengthening* or *enrichment*. Following Recanati, I take *strengthening* to be a local pragmatic process that takes linguistically encoded concepts as

4 According to Grice (1989: 25), from whom I borrow this example, contextual information plays no role in determining formula (12).

its input and restricts the scope of their applicability "by contextually providing further conditions that are not linguistically encoded" (Recanati, 2004: 25). This is exactly what takes place in the case of constructing the rhetic sense of Tom's token of the noun "vice": given the context of the conversation, the bad habit that Peter is unable to get rid of, i.e. the *vice* that Tom ascribes to Peter, is to be interpreted as Peter's weakness for sweets.

By analogy, let us consider the following sentence:

(2) The steak is raw.

The phatic meaning of any utterance of sentence (2) takes the form of the following representation:

(13) ├ [A CERTAIN STEAK] IS RAW.

Let us assume that (2) is uttered in a restaurant by an annoyed client who thinks that the steak on his plate is not well-done. To arrive at the rhetic content of his utterance, the hearer has to determine the reference the client makes by uttering his token of "the steak" and to construct the rhetic sense of the predicate "is raw". The procedure of reference assignment, it seems, involves contextually enriching the referential constraint [A CERTAIN STEAK] and as such can be likened to strengthening; the construction of the predicate's rhetic sense, in turn, consists in *loosening* the linguistically encoded concept RAW. As Recanati puts it, "[t]here is loosening whenever a condition of application packed into the concept literally expressed by a predicate is contextually dropped so that the application of the predicate is widened" (Recanati, 2004: 26).

3.1.3. The Constitution of the Locutionary Act

My purpose in this subsection is two-fold. First, I examine the relationship between the locutionary act and its two abstract aspects: the phatic act and the rhetic act. Second, I develop the idea expressed in section 1, according to which the job of locutionary acts is to produce locutions understood as linguistic representations of states of the world.

The phatic and rhetic acts "are merely abstractions from the locutionary act, which is itself an abstraction from the total speech act" (Forguson, 1973: 165). Let us stress that they are *theoretically motivated* abstractions: we describe individual utterances as phatic

acts and abstract from their rhetic aspect if our focus is on their purely linguistic properties, whereas we describe them as rhetic acts and abstract from some aspects of their phatic meaning if our focus is on their purely representational properties.

Normally, to make a phatic act is to make a rhetic act. It must be stressed, however, that "normally" does not mean "always". There are utterances that can be described as *merely* phatic acts, i.e. as phatic acts that fail to constitute rhetic ones. A common example of a mere phatic act is practising one's pronunciation by reciting a sentence in a foreign language without full understanding (see Bach, 1994: 143; Kissine, 2013: 16; Sbisà, 2013: 27). However, one cannot make a successful rhetic act without succeeding in making a locutionary one. Unlike the phatic act, therefore, the rhetic act is "a *pure* abstraction" (Forguson, 1973: 166) in that it can have no existence independent of the locutionary act that it constitutes. For this reason some theorists are tempted to equate the rhetic act with the locutionary act and the rhetic content with the locutionary meaning (see Bach, 2001: 41, and Kissine, 2009: 126).

Following Forguson (1973) and Recanati (1987), however, I assume that the rhetic content of an utterance does not exhaust its locutionary meaning. When we describe an utterance as the performance of a rhetic act, our focus is on the rheme produced by the speaker, i.e. on the force-neutral linguistic representation of a state of the world. When we describe it as a locutionary act, however, what we focus on involves something more. To make a locutionary act is to represent a state of the world in a certain mode, where the mode of presentation corresponds to the illocutionary force potential which is part of the phatic meaning of that utterance. In other words, a successful performance of a speech act *qua* locutionary act results in the production of a linguistic representation, a publicly observable *locution*, whose structure can be represented by means of the formula "$\vartheta(p)$", where "ϑ" stands for the linguistic mode of presentation, and "p" stands for the rhetic content of the act.

Using the concepts of the rhetic act and the rhetic content, then, we can isolate the *force-neutral* or *purely representational* aspect of the locutionary meaning and, consequently, speak of rhetically equivalent though locutionarily different acts. Assume, for example, that Ann, who utters sentence (1), refers to Tom and ascribes to him a certain contextually determined property HAPPY*. Consider, by contrast, a situation in which Paul is talking to Tom and utters sentence (7); in doing this, he produces a rheme that represents a complex state involving Tom and the property HAPPY*. Note that these two utterances under consideration, though rhetically equivalent, are locutionarily different: they are

equivalent with respect to their rhetic contents, but different with respect to their illocutionary force potentials (see the discussion in subsection 3.1.1 above).

According to Kissine (2009), from whom I borrow the convention to depict the structure of locutions by means of the formula "$\vartheta(p)$", locutionary acts are linguistic *representations* of mental intentional states. In my view, however, what locutions represent are worldly states of affairs, some of which can, but do not have to be mental states. Undoubtedly, there is an interesting relation between types of locutionary acts and types of intentional states: the locutionary act of saying that *p* corresponds to the intentional states of believing that *p*, the locutionary act of telling to see to it that *p* corresponds to the desire that *p*, and so on. In general, the linguistic representation $\vartheta(p)$ and its corresponding intentional state $\Psi(p)$ "share the same propositional content *p* and the same direction of fit — the latter being sufficient to individuate both the psychological mode of presentation Ψ and its linguistic counterpart ϑ." (Kissine, 2009: 127). To recognize this relationship, however, is not to justify the view that what the locution $\vartheta(p)$ *represents* is its mental counterpart $\Psi(p)$.

In summary, one cannot perform a rhetic act with the content that *p* without producing a certain locution $\vartheta(p)$. The point is that every rhetic act is constituted by some phatic act, and that making the latter essentially involves using conventional devices whose function is to indicate certain illocutionary force potentials and, by the same token, to determine certain linguistic modes of presentation. As Forguson puts it, there is "no slip 'twixt the rhetic act and the locutionary act" (Forguson, 1973: 166). To say this, however, is not to equate the locutionary meaning with the rhetic content. The former goes beyond the latter. In fact, the locutionary meaning is a hybrid construct: besides the contextually determined reference and the rhetic sense — which together constitute the act's representational or rhetic content — it comprises the illocutionary force potential that it inherits from the meaning of its constituting pheme. It can also inherit further components of the phatic meaning discussed in subsection 3.1.1: presupposed conditions and conventionally implicated contents.

3.2. The Illocutionary Act

The illocutionary act is an act made *in* saying something (Austin, 1975: 99). Following Sbisà (2002, 2007, 2013; cf. Witek, 2013a, 2013b, and Budzyńska and Witek, 2014), I assume that the function of illocutionary acts is to bring about certain changes in

the domain of conventional or institutional facts: rights and obligations, entitlements and commitments, and so on. In other words, to perform an illocutionary act is to say something, i.e., to produce a locution, with a determinate conventional force, e.g., the force of naming a ship, the force of announcing a couple man and wife, the force of promising or stating something, and so on. For example, uttering the sentence:

(14) I will come to your lecture tomorrow.

a speaker produces a locution that represents, in the mode determined by the indicative mood, her coming to the addressee's lecture the following day. In saying this, however, she can either *predict* her future behaviour, *promise* the addressee that she will come to his lecture, present the addressee with an *offer*, or *warn* the addressee against her coming to the lecture. In other words, the speaker can utter sentence (14) with the *illocutionary force* of either *predicting*, *promising*, *offering* or *warning*. A successful performance of an illocutionary act produces an *illocution*: a conventional action that "takes effect" (Austin, 1975: 116) or, in other words, brings about a change in the normative sphere of the rights and commitments of interacting agents. For example, a successful promise creates the speaker's obligation to perform the action she represents, as well as the hearer's right to expect the speaker to do what she says she will do; a successful warning, in turn, results in the hearer's being committed to be on alert against the danger represented by the speaker's words, as well as in the speaker's not being responsible for the potentially negative consequences of the state she describes.

Illocutionary acts should be carefully distinguished from perlocutionary acts. To make a binding or felicitous illocutionary act is to bring about a change in the domain of conventional or institutional facts. To make a perlocutionary act, by contrast, is to "produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other person" (Austin, 1975: 102). For example, by uttering sentence (14) the speaker can get her addressee to believe, or expect, that she will come to his tomorrow's lecture, to motivate him to work harder, frighten or astonish him, etc.

Like "phatic act" and "rhetic act", the terms "locutionary act", "illocutionary act," and "perlocutionary act" stand for abstract aspects of "the total speech act in the total speech situation" (Austin, 1975: 148). In other words, phemes, rhemes, locutions, illocutions and perlocutions are not independently existing entities that can be combined into larger structures called speech situations. Rather, they are abstract objects posited to reflect five

different senses in which one could say of two utterances that they are instances of doing the same: if two utterances (*i*) involve producing sentence tokens of the same type, they are *phatically equivalent*; (*ii*) if they *represent* roughly the same state of affairs, they are *rhetically equivalent*, or even (*iii*) *locutionarily equivalent*, provided they represent the state in the same conventionally specified mode; (*iv*) if they *bring about normative states* of roughly the same type, they are *illocutionary equivalent*; and finally, (*v*) they are *perlocutionarily equivalent*, provided they have roughly the same *consequential effects* on the feelings, thoughts and actions of the participants in a speech situation[5]. In short, the distinction between the phatic, rhetic, locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts corresponds or even comes down to the distinction between five different *speech act levels* posited for the sake of analysis.

To illustrate the above points, let us consider the following four speech situations. In the first one, Tom is talking to Ann about his financial problems and Ann says:

(15) Peter is very rich.

thereby *informing* Tom that Peter is very rich and *advising* him to ask Peter for a loan. Tom finds Ann's remark comforting and responds to it by forming, first, a belief to the effect that Peter is very rich and, second, an intention to ask him for a loan. In the second situation, Tom and Ann are talking about the same subject with the difference that instead of uttering (15) Ann says:

(16) Ask Peter for a loan.

thereby advising Tom to ask Peter for a loan. Let us assume that Tom responds to Ann's act by feeling comforted and by forming an intention to ask Peter for a loan. In the third situation, Ann and Peter are talking at a cocktail party and Peter says:

(17) I am very rich.

thereby informing Ann that he is very rich. His primary intention in speaking, however, is to

5 I use the term "roughly" to allow for the fact that different descriptive and theoretical needs requires different standards of equivalence. As Austin put it, ""The same" does not always mean the same" (Austin, 1950: 114).

boast about his financial success and to get Ann to admire him. Let us assume that Ann recognizes his intention to boast and, as a result, is disgusted by his behaviour. In the fourth speech situation Ann and Peter are talking about their plans for the future and Peter says:

(18) I will be very rich.

In saying this, Peter either reveals his intention to become a rich person or, provided certain other contextual conditions are met, e.g., that it is common ground that, first, Peter wants to marry Ann and, second, that Ann wants to marry the richest man she can find, promises Ann that he will be very rich.

Note that the considered utterances of sentences (15), (17) and (18) are *rhetically equivalent* or, in other words, equivalent with respect to the representational effects they have on the speech situations in which they occur. It is noteworthy that Ann and Peter produce publicly observable linguistic representations of roughly the same state of affair whose structure involves Peter and the property of being rich. In other words, the utterances under consideration are equivalent with respect to their referential content. It should be assumed that the time of the situation represented by an utterance does not contribute to its rhetic content; rather, it constitutes a component of its phatic meaning. By analogy to Recanati's account of the satisfaction conditions of perceptual and mnemonic experiences (Recanati 2007), I assume that the time encoded by tense markers constitutes what can be called the *temporal mode of presentation*. It is a platitude that the perceptual experience that *p* is satisfied only if it *is* the case that *p* at *present*, whereas the mnemonic experience that *p* is satisfied only if it *was* the case that *p* in the *past*. According to Recanati (2007), however, the temporal component of the satisfaction conditions of an experience is determined by the experience's psychological mode — i.e., mnemonic, perceptual or anticipatory — rather than by its content. In a similar vein it can be argued that in uttering her token of (15), Ann represents the situation that Peter is very rich *as actual*, whereas Peter, in uttering his token of (18), represents it *as a future situation*.

What is more, utterances (15) and (17) are equivalent in respect of their direct and literal *illocutionary forces*. More specifically, they are issued with the force of informing and, as such, bring about normative states of roughly the same type. By calling them direct and literal cases of informing I mean that their actual force accords with or, more accurately, lies within the limits determined by the illocutionary force potential ├

conventionally associated with the indicative mood of sentences (15) and (17). (What is more, the two utterances under consideration are equivalent with respect to their temporal mode of presentation.) Ann's utterance of (15) results in her being responsible for the truth of what she says as well as in Tom's being entitled to update his stock of beliefs with the proposition that Peter is very rich. By the same token, utterance (17) brings about Peter's responsibility for the truth of what he says as well as Ann's right to form the belief that Peter is very rich. Nevertheless, despite being entitled to believe that *p*, the receiver of the speaker's statement that *p* can fail or refuse to believe that *p*. The hearer's being entitled to believe that *p* is one of the normative effects of the statement that *p*, whereas the hearer's actually forming such a belief is one of the statement's perlocutionary consequences. One can produce the former without producing the latter.

It should be noted that utterance (15) can be additionally described as an indirect act of advising, which results in Tom's having a reason to ask Peter for a loan. In this respect, it is illocutionarily equivalent to Ann's utterance of sentence (16), which is a direct and literal act of advising performed with the use of an imperative sentence. It is direct and literal because the force of advising lies within the limits of the illocutionary force potential **!** associated with the imperative mood of sentence (16). Peter's utterance of sentence (18), despite being rhetically and referentially equivalent to the considered utterances of sentences (15) and (17), differs from them in respect of its illocutionary force. In other words, in uttering his token of (18) Peter represents the state of affairs which involves him — i.e., the speaker — and the property of being rich *as* a future state rather than *as* a present one. This temporal mode of representation, in turn, is characteristic of the illocutionary force of promising rather than of that of informing (see Searle, 1969: 63). That is why utterance (18) can be legitimately taken to bring about Peter's commitment to see to it that he will be very rich and Ann's being entitled to expect Peter to keep his promise.

Finally, Ann's utterances of sentences (15) and (16) can be regarded as *perlocutionarily equivalent* with respect to the effects they have on the addressee's emotions, since they both produce in Tom the feeling of consolation. Nevertheless, the utterances under discussion differ in respect of the cognitive effects that they have on the hearer, i.e., in respect of the propositional attitudes they evoke: they both produce Tom's intention to ask Peter for a loan, but the utterance of (15) additionally results in getting Tom to believe that Peter is very rich. It must be remembered that all perlocutionary acts that have been discussed so far can be regarded as planned or intended by Ann. The actual perlocutionary consequence of utterance (18), by contrast, is at odds with the

effects that Peter envisaged for his words: rather than getting Ann to admire him, he made her feeling disgusted with his behaviour.

In summary, one can say of two utterances that they are equivalent acts if they either (*i*) represent the same state of affairs, or (*ii*) bring about the same normative states, or (*iii*) produce the same consequential effects on the feelings, thoughts and actions of the participants in a speech situation. If condition (*i*) is met, then the utterances under consideration are rhetically equivalent; if condition (*ii*) is met, they are illocutionarily equivalent; finally, they are perlocutionarily equivalent provided condition (*iii*) is satisfied.

In *Reference and Reflexivity* Perry (2001: 20-21) claims that propositions are "abstract objects that we use to classify states or events by the requirements their truth (or some other form of success) impose on the rest of the world." By analogy, let us assume that rhetic contents and illocutionary forces are nothing but abstract entities that we use to classify individual utterances by the representational and normative effects they have on the speech situations in which they occur.

4. Linguistic Underdeterminacy and the Austinian Framework

In this section I develop an Austinian model of linguistic underdeterminacy and discuss its contextualist background. In subsection 4.1, I use the Austinian framework proposed in section 3 to elaborate on Ruth G. Millikan's (1998, 2005) idea of language conventions as criss-crossing lineages and, as a result, to formulate the Austinian version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis. In subsection 4.2, I argue that, contrary to appearances, the proposed account does not presuppose the code model of communication; what it presupposes, rather, are two contextualist positions: eliminativism about illocutionary force and eliminativism about rhetic content.

4.1 Austinian Model of Linguistic Underdeterminacy

My purpose in this subsection is to present an account of linguistic underdeterminacy that can be called Austinian. The account draws on elements of the biological model of language proposed by Ruth G. Millikan (1998, 2005). In particular, I adopt her idea that language conventions are criss-crossing lineages of linguistic forms and patterns that proliferate (*i*) by reproduction, and (*ii*) due to the weight of their cultural precedents rather than due to their capacity to perform certain functions. In other words,

every language convention can be represented as a lineage of reproduced items of a certain kind: individual speaker-hearer interactions, lexical phrases, grammatical structures, moods, intonations, and so on. In short, any natural language:

> consists in a tangled jungle of overlapping, crisscrossing traditional patterns, reproducing themselves whole or in part for a variety of reasons, and not uncommonly getting in each other's way. Places where these patterns cross can produce ambiguities. These are sorted out not by conventions, but by the hearer managing to identify, by one means or another, the source of the pattern, that is, from which family it was reproduced. (Millikan, 1998: 176)

In my view, this idea fits perfectly within the Austinian framework. More precisely, it can be elaborated with the help of Austin's distinction between phatic, rhetic, locutionary and illocutionary aspects of speaking.

According to Millikan, conventional behaviour involves doing what others have done before; in particular, to speak conventionally is to say what others said before. Recall, however, that "to do the same" does not always mean the same: two acts can be equivalent or different either with respect to their phatic, rhetic, locutionary or illocutionary properties. Strictly speaking, therefore, following language conventions involves reproducing certain aspects of what have been said before. One can, for example, produce an utterance that is phatically equivalent to some model or source utterances and thereby to contribute a new element to an appropriate *phatic lineage*. Phatic equivalence can be regarded as involving a few other aspects, i.e., can be analysed in terms of equivalence with respect to mood, syntactic structure, lexical elements, intonation and so on. It should be noted, however, that two phatically equivalent acts can belong to two different *rhetic lineages*, as it takes place in the case of two utterances, one made by Peter, and the other by Tom, of sentence (17):

(17) I am very rich.

In other words, the same pheme can be used to produce rhetically different utterances. What is more, two utterances that come from different phatic lineages can be equivalent with respect to their representational properties and as such belong to the same *rhetic lineage*. This will be the case, for instance, when Peter utters sentence (17) and someone else utters sentence (15):

(15) Peter is very rich.

In short, phatic and rhetic lineages run criss-cross. It must be observed, next, that two phatically different utterances can contribute to the same *illocutionary lineage*, e.g., that of statements, warnings, orders, etc., provided that they are equivalent with respect to what counts as their normative effects. For example, Ann's utterance of sentence (15) and her alternative utterance of sentence (16):

(16) Ask Peter for a loan.

can be regarded, if the context is appropriate, as two acts of advising the addressee to ask Peter for a loan.

In short, Millikan's general idea of language conventions as criss-crossing lineages can be further elaborated within the Austinian conceptual framework presented in section 3 above. In general, to say that language conventions are criss-crossing lineages of linguistic precedents is to assume that there are more than one criterion that can be used to group individual utterances into equivalence classes. According to the Austinian model presented in this paper, there are three different criteria of equivalence — i.e., phatic, rhetic and illocutionary — that correspond to three types of lineages. Here we arrive at the Austinian version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis. It says that phatic, rhetic and illocutionary lineages run criss-cross: utterances equivalent with respect to their phatic meanings can differ with respect to their rhetic or representational contents; what is more, phatically equivalent utterances can constitute illocutionary acts of different types. In short, the phatic meaning of an utterance underdetermines its force and content.

4.2 Eliminativism About Rhetic Content and Eliminativism About Illocutionary Force

According to Origgi and Sperber (2000: 149-151), Millikan's model presupposes the code model of communication and as such suffers from the problem of massive ambiguity: faced with the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy, Millikan seems to account for it by extending "the domain of grammar" (Sperber and Wilson, 2002: 6) and positing multiple ambiguities that have to be resolved in order to determine the force and content of an utterance. Origgi and Sperber (2000: 152) claim that any model of comprehension that postulates multiple ambiguities is psychologically implausible: the number of speaker

meanings that can be conveyed by an individual expression is potentially infinite, whereas the number of alternative senses that can be encoded by a linguistic form and stored in our limited minds is finite. Therefore, the code model is to be replaced with the inferential one according to which the operative force and meaning of an utterance is *constructed* in context rather than *disambiguated*.

A similar objection can be raised against the Austinian model presented in subsection 4.1. One can say, namely, that the model under discussion reduces linguistic underdeterminacy to lexical ambiguity or, in other words, that it is committed to the claim that places where a phatic lineage is intersected by different rhetic (or illocutionary) lineages produce semantic (or illocutionary) ambiguities. Indeed, phatically equivalent utterances can differ with respect to their illocutionary forces. Recall, for example, that pheme (18) discussed in subsection 3.2 can be uttered either with the force of predicting, promising, offering or warning. By analogy, the form “Eat!” can “be interpreted as an order, a request, an encouragement or a piece of advice” (Origgi and Sperber, 2000: 150); in other words, the form seems to encode at least four illocutionary forces.

In my view, however, one can accept the gist of Millikan’s model without accepting her further claim to the effect that places where different illocutionary lineages cross a phatic lineage — say, the lineage of “Eat!” — produce illocutionary ambiguities. I would say, rather, that what these places represent are different source situations that, first, make up the illocutionary force potential associated with the pheme “Eat!” and, second, provide inputs to pragmatic constructions of new contextualised forces. Every ambiguous word encodes a *limited* sequence of its alternative meanings; its disambiguation consists in selecting one of these meanings as the operative one. The pheme “Eat!”, by contrast, encodes an *open* collection of its *past* or *source uses* that can be subsequently updated or extended by competent speakers.

The idea of potentials as collections of source situations comes from Recanati (2004: 148-153), who in *Literal Meaning* develops a radically *contextualist* or *eliminativist* view on meaning. My proposal is to extend this approach so that it may be applied to the illocutionary aspect of linguistic practice. In other words, I would like to consider a position that can be called *force eliminativism*.

According to *meaning eliminativism* — which is the view advocated by Recanati — what natural language sentences encode are not propositions understood as structured sequences of concepts, but semantic potentials construed as collections of source situations. It is worth stressing that potentials can be represented with the help of the

capitalizing convention applied in subsection 3.1.1. Consider again the sentence (1):

(1) He is happy.

whose phatic meaning can be represented by means of the following formula:

(19) ⊢ [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON] IS HAPPY.

Recall that what the word “he” encodes is referential act potential [A CERTAIN MALE PERSON] (see the discussion in subsection 3.1.1 above). According to the eliminativist model, however, what the phrase “[A CERTAIN MALE PERSON]” stands for is nothing but a collection of past speech situations in which the word “he” was used to refer to a certain male person. Roughly speaking, the elements of this collection put certain constraints on future referential uses of “he”: the latter are supposed to be “sufficiently like” the former. Recall, next, that the predicate “is happy” encodes phatic sense IS HAPPY construed of as a linguistically specified constraint on the sort of property that “is happy” can be used to attribute. From the eliminativist point of view, this constraint is determined by a collection of source speech situations in which the predicate was used: to say that the situations in question constrain our current use of “is happy” is to say that they function as reference points for drawing analogies between what is currently said and what was previously said. In general, the *semantic* or *rhetic act potential* of sentence (1) is a certain phatic lineage — i.e., the lineage represented by formula (19) — intersected by a number of rhetic lineages. Consistently, the actual rhetic content of an utterance of (1) made in a novel situation is a set of features that the utterance “must possess to be similar to [some of the rhetic acts made in] the source situations” (Recanati, 2004: 148), where “similar” means “similar with respect to their representational effects.” (Recall that two utterances are rhetically equivalent if they have roughly the same representational effects on the contexts of their production; see subsection 3.1.3 above). It is worth stressing that this contextually constructed set of features is a one-off product that cannot function as a stable, recurrent semantic value of sentence (1).

By analogy, force eliminativism is the view that natural language sentences can be conventionally associated with illocutionary force potentials understood as phatic lineages intersected by a number of illocutionary lineages. Consistently, the contextualised force of a novel act made in uttering a certain pheme token can be defined in terms of features that

the act must have in order to be sufficiently similar to acts made in some of the source situations, where "similar" as used here means "similar with respect to normative effects." It should be stressed, however, that the force so defined is a one-off construct that has little chances to reoccur.[6]

In summary, the Austinian account presented in this paper does not presuppose the code model of communication and, as the corollary of this, is not subject to the massive ambiguity problem. What it presupposes, rather, are two radically contextualist positions: eliminativism about force and eliminativism about rhetic content. In other words, places where phatic, rhetic and illocutionary lineages criss-cross produce linguistic underdeterminacies rather than ambiguities. In particular, places where different illocutionary lineages intersect a given phatic lineage — e.g., that of the pheme "Eat!" or pheme (18) — represent different source situations that can be used as inputs to pragmatic constructions of contextualised forces. The central idea behind force eliminativism is that the actual force of an individual act is nothing but a one-off construct that we use to classify the act as a member of a certain illocutionary lineage. Utterances equivalent with respect to their phatic meanings can differ with respect to their rhetic or representational contents and constitute illocutionary acts of different types.

5. Concluding Remarks

Most scholars working within the field of pragmatics and philosophy of language account for the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy in terms of the Gricean category of *what is said*. In this paper, I have argued that the phenomenon in question can be analysed and explained within the Austinian conceptual framework, the central part of which is occupied by the categories of phatic, rhetic and illocutionary acts.

It is worth noting that the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy was observed and recorded by Austin (see the discussion in section 1 above). In *How to Do Things with Words* (Austin, 1975), he noticed that the same pheme — understood as a structured sequence of vocables or words constructed in agreement with the syntactic and lexical rules of a certain language — "may be used on different occasions of utterance with a different sense or reference" (Austin, 1975: 97); he also argued that in many cases the lexical and grammatical properties of an utterance fail to determine its performative character (Austin, 1975) and, by the same token, its actual illocutionary force. Interestingly,

6 For a more detailed discussion of meaning and force eliminativism, see Witek 2015.

despite the fact that Austin recognized the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy, he did not assign much theoretical significance to this observation. Rather, he took it for granted, as something that goes without saying.

By contrast, the observations to the effect that the linguistically specified meaning of an utterance underdetermines its truth-conditional content play a theoretically prominent role in the Gricean pragmatics (see Bach, 1994, 2001; Carston, 1999, 2002, 2004; García-Carpintero, 1998, 2001, 2006; Korta and Perry, 2006, 2007, 2011; Recanati, 2004; Sperber and Wilson, 2002; and the discussion in section 2 above). According to Grice, what the speaker says — i.e., the primary or central aspect of the speaker's meaning (Grice, 1989: 359-361) — is "closely related to the conventional [or encoded] meaning of the words (sentence) [the speaker] has uttered" (Grice, 1989: 25). The Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis, then, undermines one of the central tenets of Grice's original model of communication and, as a result, poses a serious challenge to scholars working within the Gricean tradition. For example, Sperber and Wilson claim that "[t]he central problem for pragmatics is that the linguistic meaning recovered by decoding vastly underdetermines the speaker's meaning" (Sperber and Wilson, 2002: 3).

It turns out, however, that the phenomenon of linguistic underdeterminacy can be systematically accounted for within an extended version of Austin's original conceptual framework. Namely, what we need to formulate an Austinian variant of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis is the concept of *phatic meaning* constructed in subsection 3.1.1 above. The central aspect of the phatic meaning of an utterance can be spelled out in terms of its semantic and force potentials and, consequently, represented as a phatic lineage intersected by a number of rhetic and illocutionary lineages (see subsections 4.1 and 4.2 above). Places where these lineages criss-cross function as source situations that provide inputs for pragmatic constructions of one-off rhetic contents and illocutionary forces. In short, the Austinian version of the Linguistic Underdeterminacy Thesis says that the phatic meaning of an utterance fails to determine its content and force.

One can ask whether the proposed reformulation has some advantages in comparison with the Gricean accounts of linguistic underdetermination. I am tempted to say that it does, for two reasons. First, it offers a uniform account of the linguistic underdetermination of both the rhetic content of an utterance and its illocutionary force: according to the Austinian model proposed in this paper, the contextual processes whereby the force and content of an act are constructed take as their inputs two different components of the act's phatic meaning: its force potential and its rhetic or semantic

potential. Second, the proposed model allows us to examine how the locutionary and illocutionary aspects of an act *are interdependent on* or *interact with* each other. For illustration, consider the following sentence:

(3) The ice is thin.

whose phatic meaning can be described as follows:

(20) ├ [A CERTAIN ICE] IS THIN.

Symbol "├" stands for the illocutionary force potential encoded by the indicative mood, [A CERTAIN ICE] is the referential act potential encoded by the description "the ice", and IS THIN is the phatic sense of the predicate "is thin". Now, let us consider a situation in which Ann and Tom are walking along a frozen lake shore and Tom says that he wants to skate across the lake; Ann responds by uttering sentence (3). Consider, by contrast, an alternative scenario: Ann and Tom are biologists; Ann would like to go for a walk to observe what is going on under the surface of a frozen lake; Tom says that they should stay inside: he is sceptical whether they would be able to see anything at all; Ann responds by uttering sentence (3). In my view, it is natural to assume that in the first scenario Ann's utterance constitutes a warning, whereas in the second one it can be interpreted as an encouragement to go outside. If it is a warning, then the predicate "is thin" can be paraphrased as "so thin that it can break under the weight of a human body"; if it is an encouragement, the predicate in question can be paraphrased as "sufficiently transparent". The crucial points here are that the illocutionary force of Ann's utterance and its rhetic content (*i*) are determined in parallel, (*ii*) are interdependent on each other, and (*iii*) lie within the limits determined by the force potential ├ and the phatic sense IS THIN, respectively.

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