Power

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18.1   Introduction

Power is a Protean and elusive phenomenon that pervades our social life, and hence our linguistic practices. In most if not all forms of communication – whether oral written, or technologically mediated, whether informal or institutionalized – different kinds of power, authority, or domination are articulated: between man and woman, between parent and child, between teacher and pupil or student, between employer and employee, between rich and poor, between members of different classes, ethnic groups or cultures, or between speakers of different languages or language varieties.

Yet, power is surprisingly absent in most linguistic theorizing. Whereas different forms, modalities and aspects of power have received serious attention in social theory, power has received scant attention in the various linguistic subdisciplines (with the partial exceptions of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology) and in the philosophy of language. Generally, power is assumed rather than investigated: most authors take it either as given, or as at best a conceptually primitive contextual parameter or variable, rather than analysing how power may be constituted, reproduced or contested in linguistic practice.

One reason for this lack of attention may be the presence in these approaches of a number of implicit and therefore uncontested language-ideological assumptions about how language functions in the social world. Some of these language-ideological assumptions are the belief that power is normally, or should ideally be, absent in cooperative communicative behaviour (an assumption most explicit in Habermas' (1986) theory of communicative action as informed by an ideal of a power-free speech situation); the belief that any power involved, in communication is normally legitimate; and the belief that the linguistic and the social are two analytically distinct realms, with power exclusively belonging to the latter. Another reason may be the fact that, as a number of authors have argued, some modalities of

power are not usually seen or recognized as such, and are effective precisely *because* they are misrecognized. Thus, Pierre Bourdieu (1991, 1998) famously distinguishes what he calls 'symbolic power', or the power to constitute the social world in and through symbols, as functioning to the extent that it is mistaken for socially neutral and universally shared forms and norms of communication. Likewise, Michel Foucault ([1978] 1994) suggests that power may be invisible precisely because it is omnipresent, and may be overlooked precisely because it is right in front of our eyes. Thus, it may seem odd or far-fetched to treat the institutionalized authority of, say, civil servants and priests to conclude marriages as a form of social power, or to analyse seemingly structural linguistic phenomena, like standard language as opposed to dialect, or polite speech as opposed to vulgar talk or slang, as involving social domination.

This inability to see, or reluctance to acknowledge power for what it is also informs much work in semantics, pragmatics and the philosophy of language. As a result, the workings of power in language have remained largely unanalysed. Yet, as I will argue in more detail below, various currently dominant frameworks rest on language-ideological assumptions that either take power as legitimate by default (Speech Act Theory); see power as a deviation or distortion of 'rational' or 'normal' communication (Gricean approaches); or deny, neutralize or naturalize the presence of power in language (communitarian approaches). I also hope to show that power is not merely an interesting and important *empirical* aspect of language use, but that it is actually *constitutive* of language.

One omission of the present chapter may strike some readers as odd: I will not be addressing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in this chapter. Although the study of how inequality and exclusion are communicated in and through discourse would seem a prototypical way of studying power in communication, CDA appears to focus on the structure and content of discourse itself, rather than on the principles of its use, thus rendering it a less obvious topic in a volume on sociopragmatics; but I realize others may disagree on this point. Moreover, CDA generally presumes a rather monolithic, Marxist-inspired concept of power as a feature of a reified class consciousness, which is problematic in its own right. For a more detailed critique of the power concept presupposed by CDA, see Leezenberg (2013: 279–81).

18.2 Concepts of Power in Linguistic and Social Theory

Because of this lack of theorizing, it is not even clear at present with what conceptual tools power relations in communication should be analysed. How should power be represented theoretically? Is it part of what is communicated in language, or is it an aspect of the non-linguistic setting within which linguistic communication takes place? If the former, should it be

represented as (part of) propositional content, as illocutionary force, as a perlocutionary effect or as another aspect of the utterance? Is whatever information it involves asserted or presupposed by sentences, or conversationally or conventionally implied by speakers? If the latter, should we model power as a property *of* the various participants in a conversation, as a relation *between* participants, or as a structural feature of the broader social or cultural context? Put differently: is power part of the micro- or the macro-context? And exactly where should any such contextual factors be located? In, respectively, the consciousness of language users, in institutions like the state, or elsewhere?

It is not to be excluded a priori that power may be articulated at all of these levels; perhaps it is not a unitary phenomenon in the first place. Hence, it may be useful to start by distinguishing a number of different concepts or modalities of power. First, there is the well-known Weberian characterization of power as the ability to constrain other people's actions; call this 'subjective' power, as it is phrased in terms of individual actors' actions and intentions. Second, we may distinguish an 'objective' or 'structural' mode of power; it appears, albeit unobtrusively, in the writings of Durkheim (1982) and Marx (1976: 270–306).[1]

Subjective and structural modes of power differ not only in accessibility to individual consciousness or intentionality, but also in scale: the former appears at the micro-level of face-to-face interaction, whereas the latter functions at the macro-level. There appears to be no good reason for reducing either to the other. Eric Wolf (1990) has tried to refine this distinction by identifying four types or modalities of power: first, a Nietzschean or individual sense of power as capability, which implies that power is an individual property; second, a Weberian or interpersonal (or what one might call 'relational') mode of power, as individuals' ability to impose their will on others; third, a 'tactical' or 'organizational' mode of power, which is not interpersonal or intentional but captures how actors 'circumscribe the actions of others within determinate settings' (presumably, close to what Marx in the *Grundrisse* (McLellan 1971: 65–9) calls 'social power' in processes of production or exchange); and fourth, 'structural' power as the ability to organize those settings themselves and thus to 'structure the possible field of action of others' (Wolf 1990: 586–7). Despite an emphasis on political economy, this typology is not based on any single coherent, let alone explanatory, principle. Wolf's notion of structural power, in particular, captures quite heterogeneous forms and modes of power, ranging from Marx's 'relations of production' and Foucault's 'government' to the Chinese doctrine of the 'correction of names' (*zheng ming*). Wolf's characterization does imply, however, a rejection of the autonomy of linguistic meaning, or symbolism more generally:

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[1] Thus, Durkheim appears to talk of power when he talks of the 'coercive force' of social facts, adding in a footnote that this coercive power is 'so small a part of its totality' that we often take it for its opposite (Durkheim 1982: 16n4).

power, he argues, 'inhabits' meaning, as it upholds one set of meanings as true, correct or beautiful (1990: 593).

Wolf's four-fold typology suggests that power may function both at the micro-level of individual agency and intentions and at the macro-level of (economic, linguistic and other) structure. Perhaps, however, such attempts at classification are premature if not misguided. Foucault (1978: 93) has warned, famously, against reifying power relations: power, he argues, is not a stable and reified (let alone recognized or legitimate) institution or structure, but 'the name of a complex strategic situation in a particular society'. Power is omnipresent, he adds, not because it is a unitary and sovereign, transcendent or transcendental entity or condition of possibility, but because it is produced in every social relation, and as such, is always local, unstable and contested (Foucault 1978). It is not the possession of or emanation from a sovereign and antecedently given subject, but is actualized in social practices that may also produce truths, subjects and knowledge. Foucault proceeds to characterize, but not strictly define, power as 'both intentional and nonsubjective' (94); meaning, presumably, that power is a relation *between* actors rather than a property *of* actors; that it involves aims and meanings; and that it does not presuppose subjects as foundational. In other words, according to Foucault, power relations are not only internal to linguistic meanings, but also constitutive of language-using subjects; his practice approach also appears to crosscut the structure-agency divide to which Wolf still seems beholden.

Another theorization of power, and an important attempt to bridge the gap between structure and agency and between micro- and macro-levels in its own right, may be found in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology; of particular relevance here are his notions of habitus and symbolic power. According to Bourdieu, social practices are neither driven by conscious calculation nor fully determined by structures outside of individual consciousness; instead, they are generated by what he calls 'habitus', that is, the actor's semi-conscious dispositions to act in a particular way. For example, in many societies, men's habitus disposes them to look up, and to act assertively, whereas women's habitus disposes them to look down and act modestly. Such practices involve what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic power', a form of domination exercised by symbolic rather than physical means, or through communication rather than coercion; it involves the power to constitute social reality by determining which meanings are correct or legitimate, for example by distinguishing which forms of language are authoritative, correct and/or civilized. Hence, Bourdieu argues, it is simultaneously *recognized* as legitimate and *misrecognized*, or mistaken for a relation of communication rather than domination (Bourdieu 1991: chapter 7).

Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power would seem highly relevant for discussions in pragmatics and philosophy of language; but this potential has remained largely untapped. In the literature on politeness, and in some forms of post-Gricean pragmatics, the notion of habitus as an intermediary

between structure and agency has gained some currency (see e.g. Levinson 2000: 386n; Leezenberg 2002; Terkourafi 2001; Watts 2003); but this exclusive focus on habitus has generally led to overlooking the fact that Bourdieu sees habitus as internalized structure, involving the acquisition, reproduction and indeed naturalization of domination and inequality.

Another way of mediating between linguistic microanalysis and political-economic macro-processes and of explicating the interconnections between the linguistic and the political may be found in linguistic anthropology, in particular in the notions of 'language regime', i.e. the relation between linguistic practices and forms of governance, and of 'language ideology', i.e. the beliefs and legitimations concerning words and their societal functioning developed by language users (cf. Kroskrity 2000: 1–2). Language ideologies both represent and rationalize group interests; as such, they need not be uniform across social divisions of, for example, class or gender. One important effect of such language-ideological research has therefore been the denaturalization of homogeneous and community-wide standard languages assumed as the self-evident object of theorizing in structural linguistics, and as the unproblematic end-product of successful national movements, as presented by early scholars of nationalism, like Ernest Gellner (1983) and Benedict Anderson (1991). The former's idea of shared languages as a prerequisite for successful modern industrialized societies and the latter's notion of an 'imagined community' both overlook the inherently political process of standardization, the concomitant marginalization of non-standard dialects and the heterogeneity – often accompanied by violent conflicts and struggles – within any supposedly homogeneous and harmonious national linguistic community (Silverstein 2000).

In theoretical linguistics and the philosophy of language, it is only in recent years that questions of power have started to attract more systematic attention; and this attention has often been a side effect of the study of phenomena like impoliteness, slurs, hate speech, pornography, and propaganda (cf. Butler 1997; Culpeper 2011; Langton 2009). Hence, in what follows, I will discuss a number of recent studies of these topics, asking how they conceptualize power. It will emerge that many of these studies reproduce a number of largely implicit assumptions about societies and the social functioning of language. Such political-ideological and language-ideological assumptions are not only debatable once made explicit; they also seem to prejudice or preclude raising the very question of how power functions in linguistic communication. For example, Habermas' (1986) theory of communicative action is informed by a strongly normative notion of an 'ideal speech situation' of power-free communication, which, he argues, is constitutive of communicative rationality as opposed to egocentric goal rationality. This notion of an ideal speech situation as power-free implies that power ideally *should* be absent from relations of communication; but it is not at all clear that this is a viable ideal. Methodologically, this and similar normative assumptions may have the

effect of making any actual power expressed in linguistic practices appear as abnormal or theoretically secondary.

18.3   Positioning Power: The Linguistic and the Social

One seemingly intuitive reply to the question of why linguistics has shown so little concern with power is that the linguistic is autonomous with respect to the social, and that only the latter is a domain of power. One influential formulation of such a conceptual division of labour, in fact, comes from Geoffrey Leech, the very author who coined the term *socio-pragmatics*. In his well-known 1983 pragmatics textbook, Leech distinguishes 'general pragmatics', which explores the general conditions of the communicative use of language, from the "less abstract" field of 'socio-pragmatics', or the "sociological interface of pragmatics", as the study of local conditions of language use. As a third item, he also distinguishes what he calls 'pragmalinguistics', at the interface of pragmatics and grammar, which studies the "particular resources a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions" (Leech 1983). Thus, he argues that general pragmatic principles, like the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle, "operate variably in different cultures and different language communities" (10). Unlike pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics, that is, general pragmatics is neither language-specific nor culture-specific. One of the main tasks of pragmatics, Leech (1983: 84) continues, is to study how different language communities realize and articulate universal principles, like the Principle of Politeness.

This idiosyncratic definition not only presumes an unproblematic distinction between the linguistic as the domain of grammatical structure, the pragmatic as the domain of general or universal principles of language use, and the social as the specific sphere of the 'merely socially or culturally specific'; it also implies that linguistics and pragmatics as such have nothing to do with the social. Put differently: Leech presumes a level of purely linguistic structure and language use, which he sees as distinct from, and perhaps prior to, social action. Thus, his characterization not only reproduces the familiar structuralist belief that linguistic structure is *sui generis*, and is in itself autonomous with respect to the social; it also implies that there is such a thing as language use in itself, in isolation from particular social conditions and cultural conventions.

It should be emphasized, however, that structural concepts of language themselves rest on a rather ambiguous methodological exclusion of the social. Thus, in his *Course in General Linguistics*, Ferdinand de Saussure (1983: chapters II–III) sets out to define the science of linguistics in such a way that it is autonomous with respect to, say, history and social psychology, and follows its own, purely linguistic, laws. But despite this attempt to create an autonomous linguistics, Saussure states that "language is a social fact"

(*la langue est un fait social*) and speaks of langue as a matter of "collective consciousness".[2] That is, the key structuralist concept of *langue*, or the language system, as the proper object of study for linguistics, appears to be formulated in large part in the terms of Durkheim's (1982) sociology. Although Saussure nowhere elaborates on this idea, his characterization of a language (tacitly identified, moreover, with a unified and standardized state language) as a social fact does seem to reflect a consensus-oriented view of societies as essentially unified, harmonious and geared towards social integration, as opposed to the conflict views of, for example, Marxists. The very assumption, however, that *langue* is a shared and anonymous 'collective representation' rather than, say, a set of norms or standards imposed by socially dominant individuals or groups, appears to prejudice the very attempt to raise questions concerning conflict or domination in language. Similar objections may be raised against other structuralist conceptions of language, such as those found in Generative Grammar or Cognitive Linguistics. Thus, Chomsky (1965) appears to naturalize standard languages to the extent that he characterizes them in terms of a biologically endowed 'language organ', and represents grammaticality judgements as the purely cognitive acts of a 'linguistic competence', rather than the recognition or reproduction of social norms.

Bourdieu (1991: 43–4) has pointed out the ambiguity in authors like Saussure and Chomsky, arguing that the former, in the very act of separating *langue* from *parole*, also separates language from its social conditions of production and reproduction; while Chomsky, in postulating that linguistic competence is the perfect knowledge of an ideal speaker-listener belonging to a perfectly homogeneous linguistic community, converts the 'immanent law of legitimate discourse' into universal norms of correct linguistic practice, while sidestepping the social conditions underlying the establishment and imposition of this legitimacy (Bourdieu 1991: 44). Put differently: these and other authors tacitly legitimize and naturalize standard language as opposed to substandard varieties, like dialects, slang or patois.[3]

If Bourdieu's argument holds, the structural features of languages are not quasi-naturally given but constituted by social relations – that is, by relations of power. Seen in this way, structuralist and cognitive approaches not only represent public and culture-specific practices as purely linguistic, universal and/or cognitive structures; they also presume a very specific – and debatable – consensus view of society, which sees conflict and – illegitimate – power as socially abnormal and/or theoretically secondary phenomena.

Bourdieu thus criticizes the autonomy of the linguistic with respect to the social. In turn, Judith Butler (1999) teases out the ambiguities in

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[2] *Cours*, ch. I.i; tr. Harris: 6.
[3] Although a number of later authors working in the generative framework have analyzed dialects as distinct from standard language, the normative (and indeed political) questions underlying the very opposition between standard and dialect have remained largely untouched.

Bourdieu's own argument, and in particular in his appropriation of Saussure's (as cited by Bourdieu 1991: 34) claim that "the social nature of language is one of its inherent characteristics", arguing that the linguistic and the social are more deeply and more radically mutually implicated than Bourdieu allows for.

Bourdieu claims that the illocutionary effect of words is located not in linguistic rules but in the extralinguistic social power of speakers; in doing so, however, he appears to imply that the linguistic is wholly secondary to, if not constituted by, the social. Against this, Butler argues that social positions and institutions are constituted performatively. Her analysis undermines the idea that 'the social' is simply an extralinguistic context in which the habitus achieves its effects, and amounts to a complex analysis of the performative constitution – and contestation – of linguistic rules, social power, and gendered and other identities (see also Section 18.5). Analytically minded readers may balk at this deconstruction of the seemingly obvious opposition between the linguistic and the social; but for now, it may serve as a useful reminder that the apparently purely linguistic is in fact socially constituted, and may be based on a very particular conception of the social – and that vice versa, the social may be linguistically constituted. Either way, social power appears to be performatively – that is, linguistically – structured; and conversely, language is at least in part constituted by social power. This implies the more concrete methodological question of whether we should analyse power as a form of information that is communicated, or instead see language as merely an instrument for exercising power, and consequently set out to unmask relations of communication as relations of domination. There is no easy answer to these questions – but the views discussed below all appear to take the former option.

18.4　Power, Authority and Speech Acts

With the above considerations in mind, let us discuss how a number of influential frameworks in pragmatics treat, or may be construed as treating, the articulation of power in language use. Do they see power as part *of* the utterance? If so, what part exactly? Or is it perhaps an aspect of the (non-linguistic) context *in* which utterances are made? Speech Act Theory is an obvious starting point for studying such questions. For classical speech act theorists, like Austin and Searle, the answer seems rather straightforward: for them, whatever power is involved in speech acts primarily belongs to their conventional illocutionary force, rather than to their locution, or propositional content, or to their (primarily non-conventional) perlocutionary effects. That is, they locate whatever social power is involved in speech acts in their constitutive, that is, conventional linguistic rules rather than in the speaker (cf. Bourdieu 1991: 170). Thus, in his original discussion, J. L. Austin ([1962] 1975) shows himself well aware

that the felicitous utterance of performative speech acts like naming children and concluding marriages may involve specific forms of social power, either by requiring a specific authority on the part of the speaker or by conferring a particular authority on the addressee. He nowhere discusses these forms of power in any detail, however, instead generically heading them under the label of 'authority'. Moreover, he clearly appears to assume that the authority of priests and civil servants is institutionalized and recognized, that is, legitimate.[4]

There is one class of speech acts, however, which Austin explicitly characterizes in terms of 'the exercise of power' (151), viz., the class of *exercitives*, like naming, appointing, ordering, voting and bequeathing.[5] Unlike verdictives like convicting and acquitting, he argues, exercitives are legislative rather than judicial acts. They are decisions rather than judgements, and as such they cannot be correct or incorrect in the light of the facts: they involve a decision that something *be* so, or a normative proclamation that it *should* be so, rather than a descriptive judgement that it *is* so. All exercitives involve the assertion of influence or the exercising of powers, in that they amount to a decision in favour of or against a particular course of action.[6] To the extent that they may allow or compel others to act in particular ways, they may be said to confer rights and powers on others, or may take rights and powers away from them.

Austin's characterization of exercitives, as of other kinds of speech acts, is enumerative and inductive rather than based on theoretical principles or general criteria. Nor does he discuss exactly what powers are involved in exercitives. From his account, however, it becomes clear that the uttering of an exercitive both has the conventional illocutionary force of bestowing particular rights or powers on the addressee, and requires or presupposes as a preparatory condition a specific institutionalized or conventional authority on the part of the speaker. Thus, the very fact that performative utterances like exercitives can be used to create or change social realities points to the social powers these utterances, or the speakers using them, may have.

It is not at all obvious, however, whether this power should be located in the speakers, in the linguistic rules constituting performatives, or elsewhere. This ambivalent role of power emerges especially in what one might call 'contested performatives'. Austin's examples are restricted to settings where the authority or power involved is tacitly or explicitly recognized as legitimate; but it is not clear how power or authority functions in performatives uttered in less clearly institutionalized or more conflictual situations.

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[4] See e.g. Austin ([1962] 1975: 28, 29, 57, 59, 156, 161).

[5] See in particular Austin ([1962] 1975: 155–7). My discussion of exercitives owes much to Sbisà (1984) and to still unpublished work which Marina Sbisà has kindly put at my disposal.

[6] In itself, the insight that some kinds of language use involve power is not new or very surprising. Thus, the link between naming and political power was known already to pre-Han thinkers in ancient China; for example, in the *Analects* (13.3), Confucius states that the so-called correction of names (*zheng ming*) is the first task of government (cf. Leezenberg 2006).

In such settings, it appears, the authority involved in a felicitous speech act need not be supported by institutions, nor need it be recognized by all participants involved; rather, this power may be arrogated and/or contested. For example, when the Founding Fathers uttered the words that constituted the American Declaration of Independence,

> "We, the Representatives of the united States of America . . ., do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these united Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown".

They did not *possess* the authority to do so (nor, of course, had they been named the 'Founding Fathers' yet); rather, they *claimed* or *arrogated* the very power to represent the 'good peoples'. More precisely, their declarative power appears to be presupposed rather than asserted; and by the very act of its being uttered successfully, the power it presupposes comes into existence. This suggests that the speaker's power or authority need not exist prior to the utterance, but may in some contexts be *accommodated*, much as some presuppositions may not obtain prior to an utterance but come into being just by being required at a particular moment.

Generalizing from this, one might argue that the power required for the felicitous utterance of performatives involves presupposed information rather than asserted information, and that consequently, it may be analysed as analogous to linguistic presupposition.[7] This opens up all sorts of questions, however, which we have not even begun to explore; for example, should we analyse such presupposed power in terms of semantic presuppositions, i.e. as necessary conditions on meaningfulness, or of pragmatic presuppositions, i.e. as the information a speaker takes for granted? How does power-as-presupposition interact with conversational principles, like Grice's maxims? The latter assume that language use is normally rational and cooperative, and thus seem to deny or neutralize power differences in communication (cf. Leezenberg 2006). And, perhaps most importantly, exactly when is the power presupposed by an utterance accommodated, rather than leading to a presupposition failure or an infelicitous utterance? In other words: when is the power claimed by the speaker *recognized* or *accepted* by the addressee? These are difficult questions; and in different settings, the answer may have to be sought in semantics, in pragmatics or in extralinguistic factors.

A good case can be made that exercitives are central to Austin's entire undertaking: as his editors note, all explicit performative utterances with which he opens his argument are in fact exercitives, invokviung a speaker

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[7] The original study that introduced accommodation as a particular kind of pragmatic inferencing is Lewis (1979), but the subsequent literature has considerably nuanced and enriched Lewis' original sketch. See e.g. Beaver and Zeevat (2007) for an overview.

endowed with an institutionalized authority and granting the addressee specific rights and duties (Austin [1962] 1975: 5n). This would make the development of a fuller account of what power is and how it functions in speech acts an all the more desirable goal; but this desideratum was hardly taken up by later scholars working on Speech Act Theory.[8]

Thus, in his 1969 study and in later works, John Searle ignores the social dimension of linguistic practices, and instead focuses on what he takes to be the purely linguistic rules constituting speech acts.[9] In doing so, he rejects the category of exercitives altogether, arguing that Austin classifies not illocutionary *acts* but only English-language illocutionary *verbs*; moreover, this classification is not based on any clear or consistent principles (Searle 1975: 8). Hence, he concludes, Austin's categories are heterogeneous within themselves, and display considerable overlap with each other. Next, Searle himself distinguishes a broader category of *directives*, the illocutionary point of which is the speaker's "attempt to get the hearer to do something" (Searle 1975: 11). This classification is formulated entirely in – supposedly purely linguistic – terms of illocutionary point and direction of fit between words and the world, and accordingly leaves out social factors.

As a result, in Searle's approach to speech acts, the dimension of social power drops out completely. Much later, however, social power reappears in Searle's speech act-theoretical analyses, in particular in his account of social or institutional facts, *The Construction of Social Reality* (Searle 1995). Here, Searle sets out to give an account of 'social' or 'institutional facts'. Such facts, he argues, are as objective as any, but they exist only by human agreement; thus, things like money and marriages only exist because people *believe* that they do. Many of these institutional facts may have been created by explicit performatives, or declarations; but Searle makes the rather stronger claim that all of institutional reality is created by exactly one logical operation. This operation may, but need not be, explicit; moreover, it may be superimposed on the result of earlier operations. According to Searle, this operation has the form:

> We accept (S has power (S does A))

By the (possibly repeated or superimposed) exercise of such operations, particular powers – or what Searle, tellingly, calls 'status functions' – are conferred on an individual. For example, by conferring the status-function of president of the United States on an individual, the people who do so accept that that person has the right to present the federal budget, declare wars, etc. (Searle 1995: 104–11).

At first blush, this suggests that institutional reality is based on a series or a superimposition of exercitives, as distinguished by Austin. Searle's

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[8] But see Sbisà (1984) for a defence of the distinct characteristics and importance of exercitives.

[9] In *Speech Acts*, Searle does acknowledge that a theory of speech acts is, or should be, part of a general theory of action; but he does not start developing this line of thinking until several decades later.

account, however, displays some significant – and problematic – features of its own. First, it suggests that the 'we' involved in this operation rests on collective intentionality – a phenomenon which, Searle claims, is primitive and cannot be reduced to any combination of individual intentions (Searle 1995: 24–6). But this *presumes*, rather than accounts for, the rational agreement of language users as free and equal actors. Second, the speaker's authority presupposed by this operation is not restricted or limited to particular institutional settings as it is in Austin's exercitives; rather, it is the general mechanism underlying *all* forms of social power. But that implies that the members of a community already have the power to grant specific powers to others. Thus, Searle's account not only presupposes a collective or a community, as expressed in a 'we', as a conceptual primitive; it also turns out to presuppose the very phenomenon of social power it sets out to explain.

18.4.1   A Case Study: Power and Pornography

Speech act theory has also been applied to – and in the process, transformed by – the study of pornography. Early feminist critics, such as, most famously, Catharine MacKinnon, have argued that pornography not only *depicts* but also *constitutes* oppression of women: in construing a woman's *no* as a *yes*, they argue, pornography effectively silences women and deprives them of the right to consent. This implies that defending pornography in the name of free speech would amount to granting men the freedom to deprive women of *their* right to free expression. In speech act-theoretical terms, this means that oppression is a conventional illocutionary force of pornography. One may object that such an analysis is too coarse-grained, as it tacitly identifies pornography with the representation of heterosexual intercourse, and assumes that it is *inherently* oppressive, regardless of the context in which it is uttered, by which 'speakers' (the actors, the director, etc.), and with what intentions.

For the sake of argument, however, let us assume that pornography can indeed be unproblematically analysed as a speech act with more or less determinate 'speakers' and 'addressees' and explore the forms of power it may involve.

In a series of articles, Rae Langton (2009: 30) has argued that the ability to perform particular speech acts can mask political power: "powerful speakers can generally do more, say more and have their speech count for more than can the powerless". Building on McKinnon's argument, she then explores exactly what kind of speech act pornography amounts to, and exactly where its effect should be located. She argues that pornography may indeed be an illocutionary speech act of subordinating or silencing, as it undermines the felicity conditions of women's speech by taking the woman's 'no' as a 'yes'. More specifically, she argues that earlier discussions of pornography overlook this illocutionary force by focusing on its locutionary dimension and perlocutionary effects.

Judith Butler, however, has criticized Langton for allegedly reifying the effects of pornography. In *Excitable Speech* (1997), she rejects reductionist analyses that unambiguously locate the effects of such utterances either in the words or in the speakers, or in, respectively, conventional illocutionary force or perlocutionary effects.[10] Against any such attempt, Butler suggests that performatives are not fully conscious acts by sovereign subjects endowed with authority prior to their utterance; rather, she argues, "the subject who 'cites' the performative is temporarily produced as ... the origin of the performative" (49). Speech acts, she argues, are bodily acts and as such are never fully controlled by the intentions of the speaker; moreover, because they can be quoted or iterated, they cannot be controlled by their original context of utterance, but may acquire new meanings in new contexts, witness the reappropriation by homosexuals of the word *queer*, or by African Americans of the N-word. A felicitous performative, that is, is neither governed by speaker's intentions nor constrained by its (original) context of utterance; rather, it *acquires* the 'force of authority' through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices (51). The very repetition by which it does so, however, opens up the possibility of iteration, quotation and subversive re-signification. In line with these considerations, Butler criticizes Langton's speech act-theoretical account of the silencing effect of pornography. The latter's analysis of pornographic images as imperatives that *order* women to be subordinated, she argues, turns pornography into 'a subject who speaks and, in speaking, brings about what it names'. That is, echoing Althusser's view of the subject-constituting power of ideology as a 'divine voice', she argues that one should not ascribe such a performative agency, and indeed 'divine authority', to pornography (69).

Against this criticism, Langton (2009: chapter 6) has retorted that she does not analyse pornography as an imperative that *commands* women, but as a verdictive that *declares* women inferior, analogously to the way a jury declares a defendant guilty in a court case. The self-fulfilling or performative aspect of verdictives, she argues, is typically illocutionary or constitutive in that the addressee's social status changes itself to fit the speaker's words; but on occasion, verdictives may also have a perlocutionary or causal effect of the world itself rearranging itself to what the powerful say (Langton 2009: 106). Butler, she continues, is too sceptical about the ability of pornography to silence women, and too optimistic about the possibility of the subversive acts of parody, reappropriation or re-signification to help or empower silenced or oppressed women.

In more recent years, Mary Kate McGowan (2004) has argued that there is another way in which speech may enable people to speak or, conversely,

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[10] Butler also rejects the – understandable – calls for greater regulation of hate speech by the state, claiming that 'the state produces hate speech'; i.e. what language may be spoken in public is decided by state power. Thus, she argues, the allegedly sovereign power of hate speech 'is itself modeled on the speech of a sovereign state' (77).

silence them and in particular contribute to the silencing of women. She does so by distinguishing what she calls 'Austinian exercitives' from 'conversational exercitives'; the former, she argues, require institutional settings and a specific and recognized authority, whereas the latter occur in more informal settings and involve a less visible form of power. The former *explicitly* express the content of the permissibility fact, as in "Playing music after 11PM is not permitted"; in the latter, what is permitted in the subsequent conversation is *tacitly* changed, just as happens with presuppositions that are accommodated. For example, if I make a statement presupposing that I have children, and this is not challenged by the hearer, this presupposition becomes part of the conversational score, and changes what may subsequently be uttered. This points to a more general fact about conversational exercitives: they do not require that the speaker already has a conventionalized or institutionalized power before making an utterance; nor do they depend on either speaker's intentions or on recognition by the hearer. Rather, they invoke a rule of *accommodation* (cf. Lewis 1979).

McGowan (2004: 93) not only argues that pornography may be analysed as involving accommodated conversational exercitives, and thus rendered immune to much of the criticisms raised against MacKinnon and Langton; she also makes the stronger claim that *any* conversational contribution that invokes a rule of accommodation is an exercitive speech act. This analysis recalls how the relevant power to declare independence came into being in the very act of being uttered by the Founding Fathers, as discussed in Section 18.4; but it need not imply that *all* social power works in this way. Subsequently, however, McGowan (2009: 396) has generalized her analysis to the claim that all speech constituting a move in a rule- or norm-governed activity is exercitive, in that it may *change* the rules, by enacting facts about what is subsequently permissible in that activity. Thus, McGowan's analyses raise questions concerning the articulation of power presupposed in speech acts, and the role of accommodation in such presuppositions. In short, in particular the notions of exercitives and accommodation seem promising for the further study of the workings of power in language use; but at present, it is undecided whether these questions are best answered in linguistic or in social-scientific terms.

18.5   Politeness, Impoliteness and Power

Another area of pragmatics that touches on questions of power without really addressing them systematically or in detail is Politeness Theory. The basis for much of this work, and arguably still the single most influential model, is Brown and Levinson's (1987) pioneering study, which presents all language users as rational actors endowed with 'face', and all linguistic exchanges as inherently face-threatening acts; accordingly, polite language use is one of the main strategies to deal with such threats (cf.

Chapter 16). The most important ingredient of this approach is undoubtedly Grice's theory of conversational implicature. From Grice, Brown and Levinson inherit a Kantian or contractarian view of speakers as free, equal, and rational; or, put differently: a linguistic ideology that views language use as normally cooperative, power-free, and geared towards social integration.[11] Hence, they suggest that their conception of politeness is universal, in that it reflects general principles of rational communication (4–5, 58). Against this view, Sachiko Ide (1992, 1993) and various authors in her wake have argued that, in languages like Japanese and Korean, politeness is encoded in grammatical structure, and hence not an optional strategy of communication.[12]

Both approaches appear to make rather different, but equally strong and equally debatable assumptions about the kind and status of power in language use, and in society at large. Brown and Levinson (1987: 77) presume a Weberian, or subjective, conception of relative power as the degree to which one actor can impose their own plans and self-evaluations at the expense of those of others; this power, they add, may be authorized or unauthorized, and may result from both material and metaphysical control; a greater power difference leads to more 'deference' in interaction by the weaker side. By thus locating power squarely in speakers, rather than in, say, rules of illocutionary force, they render it an entirely extralinguistic phenomenon; accordingly, they pay little if any attention to possible performative effects of polite or impolite language use in reproducing, arrogating or contesting power for speakers and hearers. Later refinements and modifications have generally not directly addressed Brown and Levinson's underlying Weberian concept of power. Ide's and other approaches that treat norms of politeness as grammatically encoded and shared by an entire community appear to skirt questions of power and social domination altogether.

More recently, a so-called discursive approach to politeness has been developed, according to which no act is inherently polite or impolite; what is crucial is that actors *perceive* or *interpret* it as polite or other in the light of existing social norms (cf. Locher 2006). Thus, a discursive approach mitigates the strict dichotomy between polite and impolite language use; it also emphasizes the inherently norm-dependent character of politeness. It also conceives of power as negotiated rather than possessed; but it does not engage in a more radical questioning of the modalities, scale and workings of power involved in communication. This becomes clear from Locher (2004), one of the few studies that explicitly link politeness to questions of power, which focuses on power in cases of verbal disagreement.

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[11] For more discussion of the Kantian assumptions in Brown and Levinson, and in Grice, see Leezenberg ([2006] 2010).

[12] Often, such claims are backed by essentializing orientalist oppositions between an 'individualist' West that has ideals of rational calculation as self-interest, and a 'communitarian' East, allegedly driven by values of social harmony and collectivity. Even authors who reject the idea of an East–West divide in politeness, like Leech (2007), do not contest the individualist–communitarian opposition that informs it.

Following Steven Lukes' 'three-dimensional' concept of power as one actor's affecting another against the latter's interests, Locher characterizes power as relational, dynamic and contestable. But although she makes a number of useful conceptual distinctions between, among others, power-over and power-to and between power and force, coercion and influence, her conception of power remains recognizably Weberian and strongly normative: it views power as essentially negative, distortive or repressive.

It seems that it was only with the rising interest in *im*politeness that questions of power started to emerge among politeness scholars.[13] Thus, criticizing Leech and Brown and Levinson, Jonathan Culpeper (2011) adduces some empirical evidence concerning the importance of power asymmetries in establishing whether particular instances of directness or indirectness are polite or impolite. Others have cautiously suggested that impolite language may involve the assertion of power or the resistance against authority; but even these discussions often appear to proceed from the tacit assumption that impoliteness and the assertion of power in language use are marked, exceptional and/or abnormal.[14] Far rarer are explorations of the possibility that politeness *itself* is a communicative ideal created and reproduced by socially dominant groups, and may thus contribute to the reproduction of that domination.[15] Indeed, many existing frameworks would seem to militate against the very possibility of exposing social domination in polite communication. Scholars inspired by Brown and Levinson's approach see linguistic actors as rational, equal and free; while Ide and other communitarian-oriented authors appear to elide questions of power altogether, tacitly assuming that the cultures or traditions they are dealing with are agentless and anonymous, and result in homogeneous and harmonious, communities. In its most extreme form, such a position would amount to an outright denial of social domination, whether through language or by other means. Both approaches thus appear to make a number of very specific, and debatable, language-ideological assumptions: to the extent that polite communication (say, between older and younger speakers, between noblemen and commoners, or between men and women) involves authority at all, both seem to hold, and this authority is generally or normally perceived as legitimate.

Yet, against both positions, it may be argued that notions, norms and principles of politeness are neither universal and timeless nor agentless. Rather, specific forms and conceptions of politeness have emerged in very specific historical and social circumstances, and appear to have been

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[13] See e.g. Leezenberg (2005); Culpeper (2008, 2011: 186–94); and the various papers collected in Bousfield and Locher (2008).

[14] See in particular the papers by Bousfield and Schnurr a.o. in Bousfield and Locher (eds.) 2008.

[15] Watts (2003) seems to go some way in this direction, but does not address the question of social domination in detail. Moreover, his 'social model' of politeness repeatedly refers to Bourdieu's work, but proceeds to use notions like symbolic power and symbolic violence in a rather idiosyncratic way that does no justice to Bourdieu's more radical suggestions.

produced by specific forms of social power. In fact, the very etymology of various folk terms for politeness already indicates its link to dominant social classes, and hence to domination (cf. Ehlich 1992). German *Höflichkeit* (literally 'courtliness') clearly reflects its origins in court culture. Likewise, in seventeenth-century England, the ideal of polite language use emerged as a means of avoiding religious conflict if not outright civil war; moreover, it was perceived as the language of urban, and urbane, 'gentlemen', as opposed both to women and to lower-class males. Various authors have discussed the historical development of forms and norms of politeness (see e.g. Watts 2002; Jucker 2011; Terkourafi 2011); but few if any of them acknowledge that the history of politeness is also, and perhaps even primarily, a history of power.

Against this, however, it may be objected that these historical changes reflect developing folk theories or linguistic ideologies rather than analytical notions of politeness. In the later literature, as is well known, it has become customary to distinguish folk conceptions of politeness, or politeness$_1$, from theoretical conceptions, or politeness$_2$ (e.g. Watts 2003). None of the authors who make this distinction, however, address the question of what social imaginaries or linguistic ideologies may be at work in the latter. Even Eelen (2001), perhaps the most radical critique of the ideological and other assumptions in dominant approaches to politeness, stops short of explicating the power concept and the societal and linguistic ideologies presupposed in the various theoretical frameworks.

One may well ask why politeness research has on the whole been so reluctant to tackle the question of power. This reluctance is all the more surprising as one of the most influential authors on the sociology of language, Pierre Bourdieu, has explicitly linked politeness to social power. Polite speech as opposed to rude language or slang, he argues, is a kind of 'legitimate language' much like standard language as opposed to dialect or patois; as such, it is an integral if normally not recognized aspect of social domination (Bourdieu 1991: 80, 88; cf. 47–8). More specifically, Bourdieu analyses both standard language and polite speech as forms of what he calls 'symbolic violence', that is, the exercise of power by seemingly harmonious social behaviour. The most familiar case of such violence is the exchange of gifts, which seemingly cements friendly social relations, but also and simultaneously amounts to a challenge of the recipient's honour. Likewise, Bourdieu analyses polite speech as seemingly expressing harmonious social relations while simultaneously marginalizing the language of oppressed groups as 'rude' or 'vulgar' (see in particular Bourdieu 1991: 80, 88).

Bourdieu's analysis suggests a complex relation between politeness, impoliteness and social power. If correct, it implies that rude or impolite language as used by dominated groups need not involve either the bare assertion of power or resistance against linguistically encoded forms of social domination: on the contrary, Bourdieu argues that, precisely in appearing to reject the dominant or authoritative form of language,

speakers using 'coarse' or 'vulgar' forms tacitly accept and reproduce the very distinction between authoritative and subordinate forms of language.

It is quite astonishing to note that this dimension of social power in Bourdieu's work has been consistently if not systematically overlooked even in discussions of politeness that explicitly appeal to his work. I have no good explanation for this silence; but I suspect that different currents in politeness studies remain beholden to powerful, if largely tacit, linguistic ideologies which deny the presence, or importance, of domination in cooperative, rational, and/or polite communication; or which tends to see societies as harmonious, inspired by communitarian values that place the (anonymous, classless and ungendered) collective over the individual, and social integration.[16]

One significant recent exception to this general neglect is Sara Mills' (2017) recent study, *English Politeness and Class*. Mills proposes to replace Brown and Levinson's Gricean rationalist account of politeness by what she calls a 'materialist discursive approach', inspired by Marxist theoreticians like, most importantly, Louis Althusser; to some extent, this enables her to explicate the role of power in polite linguistic behaviour. Her approach is materialist in its focus on class and class conflict, and on ideology as class-based distortion; it is discursive in that it treats cultural norms as locally negotiated rather than generically given. Thus, it criticizes the widely held assumption that cultures are homogeneous, and rejects oft-made distinctions between individualist and collectivist cultures, and between negative-politeness and positive-politeness cultures, as both reductionist and ideological. Although she does not thematize or define any particular concept of power, she does acknowledge the importance of a generic notion of 'authority'. Only certain speakers, she argues, can judge what counts as polite behaviour, and they can do so 'because of their authoritative position as members of an elite class, institution, or government' (54) – that is, because of their institutionalized power. Although it is far from complete, Mills' analysis thus invites us to further explore social power in linguistic behaviour judged to be polite.

18.6   Conclusion

The examples of speech acts, pornography and politeness discussed above suggest that power remains a sorely undertheorized and inadequately investigated topic in the study of language and language use. Other topics that are currently starting to attract attention – like slurs, hate speech and propaganda – would similarly benefit from a more systematic focus on the factor of power. Attempts to confront power in language use are rendered

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[16] For a fuller statement of this argument, see Leezenberg (in prep.).

more difficult by the fact that many of the currently dominant frameworks rest on language-ideological assumptions that deny, neutralize or naturalize domination in language, or even actively reproduce the marginalization of dominated groups, thus precluding these matters from even being raised almost from the start. In particular, many approaches turn out to rest on the liberal assumption that power is normally, or should ideally be, absent from communication; or alternatively, that whatever power *is* involved in speech actions is normally legitimate. Others tacitly appeal to a communitarian assumption that social collectives are essentially harmonious, anonymous and consensual. Against such assumptions, we have seen that much if not all linguistic communication involves different forms or modalities of power; that power need not be recognized as legitimate; and that power need not even be recognized as such at all.

A first step in further research, then, might be the further study of linguistic ideologies at work in the currently dominant theoretical frameworks, continuing – and radicalizing – a task initiated by authors like Eelen (2001) and Watts (2002). Furthermore, it is to be hoped that pragmatics scholars will conduct more detailed empirical research aimed at exposing systems of domination and mechanisms of exclusion, especially when they are least recognized for what they are. An equally urgent task is to develop the conceptual tools that do justice to the multifarious forms of power and the various ways in which they function. Although some valuable work has been done on both fronts, many questions – even elementary ones – remain unanswered. These challenges are formidable indeed, but that is no reason to leave this phenomenon out of consideration, or to relegate it to other disciplines. Power is involved in the articulation, and indeed the mutual constitution, of both the linguistic and the social; hence the study of power in linguistic practices should be a prime object of concern in sociopragmatics.

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