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Feminism in Philosophy of Language: Communicative Speech Acts

Jennifer Hornsby

Some philosophical work about language and its use has been inspired by feminist agenda, some by malestream philosophical agenda.[1] Reading work in these two areas—in feminist-philosophy of language and in philosophy of language, as I shall call them—one easily gets the impression that they are totally separate enterprises. Here I hope to show that the impression is partly due to habits of thought that pervade much analytical philosophy and have done damage in philosophy of language. My claim will be that an idea of communicative speech acts belongs in philosophy of language (§2). I think that the absence of such an idea from malestream accounts of linguistic meaning might be explained by ways of thinking which are arguably characteristically masculine (§3). Once communicative speech acts are in place, various feminist (and other political) themes can be explored (§4).

1. Feminist-Philosophy of Language and Philosophy of Language

Language's relation to gender was at the centre of discussions from the beginning of feminism's second wave.[2] Dale Spender, in a path-breaking book, claimed that 'males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought and reality'.[2a] Some feminists refused to share Spender's pessimism, and questioned whether language could be the powerful controlling influence that Spender represented.[2b] But a view of language as a vehicle for the perpetuation of women's subordination was prevalent in the 1980s, even if it was often based upon less radical claims than Spender's. Writers gave attention to the sexism implicit in language that contains purportedly generic uses of masculine terms, especially the supposedly neutral 'man' and male pronouns.[2c] One question raised was whether concerted attempts to avoid sexism in speech might themselves constitute a feminist advance, or whether language's working to women's detriment is merely a symptom of existing power relations.[2d] On the assumption that language can be a site of oppression in its own right, some argued that women's enfranchisement—whether as political subjects or as knowledgeable beings—required women to find a distinctive voice.[2e] The use of language as it is passed down to her can seem to falsify a woman's experience, and present an obstacle to discussing it authentically.[2f] Women have been described as "silenced".[2g]

The drift of feminist-philosophy of language has been affected by a change in the agenda of feminist academic work since the early days. Speaking broadly and roughly, one might put this by saying that feminists have moved from the material to the symbolic—from sociological understandings of patriarchy to explorations of the contingencies of gendered identities. Following the change, there has been work concerned with the need for female subjectivity to become symbolized.[2h] The place of language in the make-up of the unconscious has occupied thinkers; and prominent feminists have been concerned with how "male" and "female" act as symbols.[2i]

In all of this feminist work, the use of language is treated always in a social context, in which the presence of gendered beings is taken for granted. In philosophy of language, by contrast, when modality, say, or relative identity, or reference is the topic, the subject matter is apparently far removed from any social setting. Studying the products of the malestream, it becomes very easy to forget that language is part of the fabric of human lives. And readers who come to philosophy of language unversed in its professional techniques and technicalities find themselves on the outside of an "alien hermeneutical circle".[3]

Questions about *meaning* belong in any philosophy of language. And when the topic is *meaning*, one might expect to find connections between malestream and feminists' agenda. Yet focus on semantic theories has actually helped to sustain the appearance of a gulf between philosophical treatment of language and the treatment of social phenomena. When semantic theories are constructed, languages appear to be treated as objects; the institution of language use, in which people participate, is set to one side. Some feminist writers in consequence have been hostile to the very idea of a semantic theory.[4]

Such hostility seems to me misplaced. I believe that the real objections should be targeted on the conception of the institution of language use that one finds in the malestream. I hope to demonstrate this by giving an account of *saying something to someone* which is intended to replace the standard account. It is a natural account for anyone guided by feminist methodology, and it can assist in the project of understanding language use as a phenomenon in the real social world.

2. Communicative Speech Acts

A leading question in contemporary English-speaking philosophy is how it is that elements of natural languages have meaning: What is it for words and sentences to be meaningful? The idea of a semantic theory is supposed to help with this question. But no one thinks that it can be answered by appealing to semantic theories alone. The account of *saying something to someone* to which I should want to appeal can be based in an idea I find in J.L. Austin, the originator of so-called speech act theory. I start with some of the Austinian background.[5]

2.1: Speech acts

Austin is famous for drawing attention to what he called performatives. When a performative is spoken in appropriate circumstances, a person manifestly *does something* using words. One of Austin's own examples (and he gave plenty) was 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*', in using which, in an appropriate setting and with an appropriate bottle to hand, a person manifestly *names a ship*. The idea of performativity has been picked up in many areas, including in feminist theory. But the present concern is not with performativity as such, but with a fact which examples of performatives bring to prominence—the fact that speech is action. In order to appreciate this, we need to look to the category of speech acts within which Austin located performatives, which is the category he named "illocution". Illocutionary acts are things a speaker does *in* speaking, 'such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking etc.'.[6]

Illocutionary acts are one among three broad categories of things people do with words. Austin distinguished between locutionary, *il*locutionary and *per*locutionary acts—between speaking, things done *in* speaking, and things done *by* speaking. His main interest was to 'fasten onto the illocutionary act and contrast it with the other two'.[7] Locutionary acts he thought of as belonging in the territory of those concerned with "sense and reference"—of semantic theorists, that is;[8] and perlocutionary acts (such as *amusing*, or *threatening*, or *persuading*) he thought of

as requiring effects of speaking which go beyond anything needed for a piece of language use. Illocutionary acts, which one can home in on by marking off the locutionary and the perlocutionary, are the central ones. They occupy the dimension of language use one has to know about in order to grasp what is special about the action that is speech.

2.2: Semantic theories and linguistic meaning

One doesn't need Austinian terminology to recognize that some idea of people doing things with words needs to be brought into a philosophical explication of linguistic meaning. Semantic theories are supposed to reveal *words and sentences* as the meaningful things they are; but we gain a conception of words and sentences as meaningful through an idea of *speakers'* using them.

A semantic theory is a formal and axiomatized thing that deals with a particular language.[9] The axioms of a semantic theory treat the individual words of the language; its inference rules allow for the derivation, in the case of any of its very many sentences, a theorem that can be taken to specify that sentence's meaning.[10] The concept of linguistic meaning, though, has application not to one particular language but to any of a host of human languages. And if the idea of a semantic theory is to cast light on the general concept of linguistic meaning, then something general has to be said about the relations between languages (thought of now as the objects of semantic theories) and groups of speakers. We might say that a semantic theory for a language is correct only if it belongs inside an overall account of the lives and minds of the people who use the language—people who interact with one another, rational agents with their various bits of knowledge, and with thoughts and wants and hopes and fears. A very wide range of psychological and social concepts must be in play, then, if a semantic theory is to be assessable for correctness. Still the concepts on which one needs to focus, if the task is to explicate linguistic meaning, are those which make connections between what a semantic theory tells one about a language and what the speakers of that language *do* with its sentences—concepts for speech acts.

The aspect of linguistic meaningfulness that is missing when semantic theories are treated in detachment from language users is often studied under the heading of 'force'. 'Theories of force' of various kinds have been offered. And Austin's views about illocution can be taken to amount to his own account of force. Austin speaks of an utterance's '*illocutionary* force'; and he distinguishes as finely between the different forces that utterances may have as between different illocutionary acts that speakers may do. Thus if someone warns someone of something, her utterance has the force of a warning; if someone congratulates someone, her utterance has the force of congratulations … One might suggest that it is the same for saying: if someone says something to another, her utterance has the force of *saying*.

Austin's own project was not that of explicating linguistic meaning; and he offered no account of *saying*.[11] He was more interested in providing an exhaustive survey of species of illocutionary acts than in uncovering a unified account of the phenomenon of illocution. Wishing to show linguistic action off in all its great variety, Austin made many distinctions among sorts of illocutionary acts, and he paid special attention to particular conventionalized illocutionary acts (such as the example we noted of naming a ship). S*aying* would hardly have been the speech act of choice for Austin, given its humdrum character. But its very ordinariness ensures that *saying something to someone* will count as fundamental among the various things that speakers do in making meaningful noises.[12]

And it is plausible that an account of *saying something to someone* is part of what is needed in the explication of linguistic meaning. Whatever language she speaks, a person who utters a sentence which means that *p* is likely to be saying

that *p* to someone. A connection is made here between something issuing from a semantic theory—namely, what a certain *sentence* means—and something that a *speaker* may do in giving voice to the sentence—namely say something. *Saying* is thus a speech act that comes to notice if one thinks about general connections between what sentences mean and what speakers do with them. (If we look to non-indicative sentences, as well as to indicative ones, then there will be other connections to think about. It is for simplicity's sake that I treat only *saying* here.[13])

2.3: *Saying something to someone* as communicative

Austin thought that people do things *in* speaking in virtue of their being understood by others. More precisely, he claimed that doing something illocutionary:

> involves the securing of uptake … [i.e. it involves] bringing about the understanding of the meaning and force of the locution.[14]

To see what this implies, suppose that Sue says something to Helen, and does so in uttering a sentence which (as a semantic theory might tell one) means that *p*. Then what Austin here calls the 'meaning' of the locution is that *p*; and what Austin calls the 'force' of the locution is *saying* (we saw that, for Austin, force is illocutionary force). According to Austin's claim, then, Sue's saying that p to Helen involves Helen's being brought to understand that *p* was said. When *saying something to someone* is treated as an illocutionary act in Austin's sense, it is thought of as something that a person does in bringing it about that she is taken to have done it.

In this account, the act of saying that *p* is characterized by reference to a certain type of effect. It is common enough to think of what a person does in terms of effects of her actions. (Someone who has broken the jug, for example, is someone an effect of whose action—in terms of which we think about what she did—is that the jug is now broken.) But in the case of an illocutionary act like *saying* we encounter something more than this common phenomenon. For here the effect a speaker must have is the effect of being taken by the hearer to have done *that very act*. The idea, then, is that what Austin called 'uptake' is an effect of a very special kind, which is peculiar to some linguistic acts. What is special about illocutionary effects is that our concepts for them (*saying to another*, for example) are just the speech act concepts of the actions whose effects they are. An illocutionary effect is someone's taking a piece of speech to be the sort of speech act that it (thereby) is. Illocutionary effects guarantee that speech is communication.

In accepting that *saying to another* is a communicative speech act, one allows that the idea of people saying things coexists with the idea of people understanding others as saying things to them. Austin probably didn't intend anyone to extract this from his claims. But it seems reasonable enough. A language user is a potential party to normal linguistic exchanges. A normal linguistic exchange involves (at least) two parties. So there being acts of saying requires not only abilities on the part of speakers but also co-ordinated abilities on the part of hearers who are receptive to things being said to them.

3. Against Individualism in Philosophical Accounts of Language

There will certainly be resistance to the account of *saying* I have just presented. I shan't be able to answer every objection that might be made. But I shall try to show that many of them spring from a common fount, and that this is a source of feminist dissatisfaction with much malestream philosophy—whether philosophy of mind, political theory, or epistemology.

3.1: Why invoke hearers?

It might be thought that *saying* as explicated here really can't belong in the Austinian category of *illocution*. For (as we saw) Austin wanted to use the idea of effects of speech to characterize *per*locutionary acts, and thereby to distinguish them from illocutionary ones. But now we find effects of speech—albeit effects of a special sort—used in the characterization of the illocutionary. Well, "uptake" occurs often enough in what Austin has to say about *illocution* that there cannot be any doubt that he thought of what a speaker does *in* speaking as done by virtue of her speech impinging on a hearer. The question then is why Austin should have thought that effects only get in at the perlocutionary level. Why did he fail to acknowledge that he used effects to characterize *illocution*? One possible answer is that Austin supposed that the essence of what a speaker does is present in a self-contained account of a single individual. If this is the explanation of his inconsistency, then, despite his having pointed up the communicative character of speech, Austin was prone to a sort of individualism.

Questioning its fidelity to Austin will not be the only occasion for making objections to the account. Many philosophers will deny that *successfully saying something to another* could be a simple notion, or a fundamental one. (And they might say that if I have interpreted Austin correctly, then so much the worse for Austin.) They want to treat *saying something to another* as containing a basic speaker-related ingredient from which any reference to communication, or to hearers, can be separated off. They may allow that we need to think of speakers having intentions directed towards hearers. But they say, 'What one can do with a hearer-directed intention, one can also do without'. And from this they deduce that there must be two separable necessary conditions of a person's saying something to another. A piece of conceptual arithmetic is meant to ensure that an individualistic property attaching to an individual speaker is an extricable component of her communicating with someone else. But I should claim (in company with P.F. Strawson[15]) that the arithmetic of these philosophers is bogus.

Such conceptual arithmetic is the basis of a kind of "decompositionalism", which can lead to accounts from which relations are extruded. In the present case, the relation lost through decomposition is the relation between one language user (a speaker) and another (a hearer). Decompositionalist thinking pervades analytic philosophy wherever "necessary and sufficient conditions" for the applications of concepts are sought. Philosophy of mind is one of the areas in which such thinking has been called into question recently: many have come to doubt, for instance, that the attribution of the state of mind of 'seeing x' to a person is equivalent to any conjunction of something purely internal with something purely external.[16] In the philosophy of language, I suggest, we have similarly to acknowledge that the attribution of a piece of linguistic communication between two people is not equivalent to the conjunction of something purely speaker-related with something purely hearer-related.[17]

The decompositionalism to which I am objecting here might be regarded as a masculine way of thinking. For we are sometimes told that men—men in our culture, that is—'prefer what is separable', and that women 'assign importance to relational characteristics'.[18] If it is true that, being women, we 'are less likely to think in terms of independent discrete units', then philosophers' failure to give an account of *saying something to someone* that introduces an idea of communication might be blamed on habits of thought which we should expect to strike us—culturally situated as we are—as male.

When it comes to linguistic communication, decompositionalist thinking underwrites a kind of individualism that has independently been castigated as male.[19] When 'seeing *x*' is treated as decomposable, subjects of experience are cut

off from visible objects. But when communicative linguistic concepts are treated as decomposable, human beings are cut off from one another. The treatment of language then exhibits the kind of individualism which has been taken to be characteristic of liberal political theory—in which accounts of social arrangements are based in properties of individuals atomistically conceived. Such theory, which lacks a conception of politics which gender can easily mix with, does not suit feminists.[20]

One cannot make a case for communicative speech acts merely by showing that they emerge when habits of thought that may strike one as male are rejected. Of course not. If men are indeed acculturated to think in one way and women in another, then that is not yet to say that either style of thinking has a monopoly on the truth in any area. But in a culture where most philosophical writing has come from the pens of men, a certain significance is bound to attach to a criticism of a piece of philosophy if the target of the criticism is a male habit of thought. And the individualism to which decompositionalism leads goes deep in modern philosophy (as we shall see).

3.2: Gricean intentions repudiated

It might help to make a case for the communicative nature of some speech acts to show that alternative accounts ought not to be congenial to anyone.

Intentions of a sort which Grice first proposed are often supposed to be characteristic of language use.[21] On an orthodox (malestream) account, what is central to language use, which enables connections to be forged between semantic theories and accounts of speakers' lives and minds, is a particular kind of complex, hearer-directed intention on the part of speakers. Thus, it is claimed: someone who addresses a hearer, H, using an indicative sentence that means that *p* typically has a three-part intention. This comprises a primary intention to produce a belief in H by using an utterance whose content is that *p,* a secondary intention that the utterance should have a feature by means (in part) of which H recognizes the primary intention, and a further intention that recognition of the primary intention should be part of H's reason for believing that *p*. Such an intention is supposed to belong to a speaker who says something to H.[22]

I think that this ought to seem ludicrous. Real people regularly get things across with their utterances; but real people do not regularly possess, still less act upon, intentions of this sort. Developmental psychologists find it doubtful whether three year old children possess the concept of belief; but they do not find it doubtful that three year olds can, for instance, tell them things. And notice that an enormous amount would be demanded of hearers, as well as of speakers, if such complex intentions really were needed in order to say things. Unless a hearer H actually thinks, for example, that her (H)'s recognition of S's primary intention is intended …, there could not be any point in S's intending that it should be so intended. And there would seem to be various things that a hearer would have *not* to think if speakers had these complex intentions. (It is often said to be necessary for S's saying something to H that S does not intend that H should think that she (S) lacks the intention that H's recognition of her primary intention should be part of H's reason for believing that *p.* But then H must surely *not* think that S lacks the intention that … .) So a person would have to achieve an extraordinary wariness in order to grasp that a speaker with Gricean intentions had said something to her. But surely one doesn't need to judge the extent of someone's complex intentions exactly aright in order to converse with her. I think that it should strike us as plainly incredible that it might be as difficult to participate in the ordinary communicative use of language as the orthodox account of saying would have it.

It requires explanation why such obviously implausible accounts have gained the acceptance they have. Part of the explanation would surely be found in philosophers' readiness to think individualistically, and another part in their unduly intellectualized conception of human beings, as "men of reason".[23]

3.3: Speech acts and semantics again

I have responded to those who doubt that *successfully saying something to someone* could be a simple and fundamental concept (§3.1). But there will be further doubts when it is suggested that this concept has a place in an overall philosophical understanding of linguistic meaning.

Part of the point of attending to *saying* was to get into a position to understand better a connection between the deliverances of semantic theories and the practices of speakers. When the account I have offered is brought to bear, the suggestion must be that where a semantic theory tells one that a sentence *s* means that *p*, utterances of *s* are seen as fit for use to say that *p* to someone, and that an utterance is fit for such use only where a fellow language user's taking it to be so used could suffice for a speaker who uses it having said that *p*. The application of semantic concepts is now viewed as inseparable from the application of concepts of linguistic force; and a communicative concept, which has application only when speakers and hearers can find one another intelligible, is introduced into the account of force. No linguistic meaning without saying, and no saying without communication.

This view of the matter represents a departure from the usual one. Usually a semantic theory for a language is taken to correspond to an isolable psychological state belonging to each of the individual speakers of the language.[24] The conditions of a sentence's being fit for a certain use (its having a certain meaning) are then treated as something that could in principle be known by someone who never participates in speech acts—they are treated as separable from the conditions required for a sentence's actually being put to use. The usual view is supposed to be recommended by the fact that speakers of English, of Turkish, of Hindi, of Malay ... have something in common. The thought then is that the theorist's task is to extract what is common, so that, in any particular case, what is left over corresponds to a theory for a particular language—for English, ..., for Malay, etc.. But the thought shows only the possibility of a theoretical piece of abstraction. What is in question here—which divides the communicative view from the usual one—is not the abstraction that semantic theories represent, but the idea that any real description of an individual person should be articulated along its lines.

The decompositionalism we were suspicious of earlier might encourage a conception of semantic knowledge as psychologically self-standing. And we should notice now that such a conception may be the product also of a certain philosophical frame of mind, which again has struck women as inimical to feminist thinking.[25] I mean a frame of mind which is characteristic of the sort of philosophy whose problems are generated in the first instance by inquiries into what relations might hold between a self-contained subject (on one hand) and a world of objects, or of other self-contained subjects (on the other). When it comes to language, alone in one's study one may think of one's own language as something one could know in isolation from others. The sentences of one's language can appear to equip one simply to "express beliefs"; directing remarks to another person appears to be a separate matter, requiring "other minds". It then appears as if one could perfectly well have the knowledge that a semantic theory might be supposed to record one as possessing, but lack what it takes to communicate.

Appearances can be be deceptive. It surely isn't plausible that it is possible actually to learn a first language except in interaction with other speakers. Why

should it be thought possible even in principle to achieve the state of mind of someone who knows a language but cannot say anything to anyone? By what right does a philosopher in his study assume that a person could possess the skill that a semantic theory records but have no communicative abilities? Provided we avoid decompositionalist arithmetic, we can allow that the notion of "expressing belief" that a person thinks she applies to herself in isolation actually depends upon notions picked up in the situation in which language is learnt. Then we shan't think that it is really possible that someone should know a language but be unable to communicate.[26]

Philosophers who think in isolation about language make an assumption about the self-sufficiency of the individual language user. Just such an assumption, about the self-sufficiency of the *epistemic* subject, has recently been brought to the surface in epistemology.[27] (Here we see that the individualism of liberal political theory is characteristic of much more than properly political thought.) In epistemology, the assumption has been put under pressure by inquiring into the function of knowledge, or into the point of having the concept.[28] And so it can be in philosophy of language. The philosopher who thinks about language in abstraction from use forgets about its function: he forgets what sentences are *for*. Sentences of course are for communicating with. Thus we make the function of language evident if we accord a central role to *saying something to another* in the explication of linguistic meaning.

When the assumption about the self-sufficiency of a speaker is renounced, philosophy of language can begin from the situation in which people are such as to get their thoughts across to one another. Understanding is then seen to be attuned not only to the significance of words but also to speaker's performances of acts like saying. A certain transparency between those who share a language is acknowledged.[29] But the possibility is admitted that relations of power and authority, which differentiate speakers, will affect which speech acts they are capable of performing.[30] The institution of language is social *au fond*.

4. Feminism and Philosophy of Language

I shall finish with an attempt at an illustration of the difference that it makes for feminists to recognize that language is social *au fond*. Elsewhere I have argued that when speech is treated as illocution, an egalitarian position about *free speech* is lent a distinctive content and argumentative foundation.[31] One conclusion I tried to establish is that upholding what libertarians cherish under the head of free speech will work to the advantage of those whose speech least needs protecting, and thus, in many current climates, to women's disadvantage. That conclusion may be reinforced, I think, by considering so-called hate speech.

4.1 "Hate Speech"

Regulations that proscribe and penalize "hate speech" have sometimes been in place on university campuses in the U.S.A.. 'Hate speech' can be the name for speech which is addressed to individuals whom it is intended to insult—to insult on the basis of their sex, race, handicap, sexual orientation, etc.—, and which makes use of hate words, i.e. words which are commonly understood to convey direct and visceral hatred or contempt.[32] 'Libertarian' can be the name for the position of those who claim that any regulation of hate speech is bound to be contrary to a defensible principle of free speech. I want to cast doubt on two of the libertarians' arguments. (I don't address the question of whether hate speech should ever be regulated.[33])

The first argument is meant to make us deny that speakers should be held responsible for hate speech's harmful effects. The libertarian's premise is that the

effects of speech on a hearer are brought about through a certain kind of "mental intermediation" (as it has been called in U.S. courts).[34] The effects of speech are supposed to be mediated by the thinking and beliefs of the person to whom it is directed, so that the construction put upon the words is the responsibility of that person. When a word is construed as conveying visceral hatred, this construction is then (according to the libertarians) more the fault of the hearer than the speaker.

Well, the idea of such mental intermediation might find favour among philosophers who swallow the story about hearer recognition of Gricean intentions (see 3.2 above). But one need only see that story for the fiction it is to be in a position to allow that (say) a woman who is called 'a slag' may be directly hurt and insulted through no fault of her own. When the phenomenon of illocution is recognized, we can better understand how hate speech works to convey contempt: hearer reactions to speech are attuned directly and simultaneously to the significance of words and to speakers' performances.[35]

The second argument is meant to make us accept that a victim of hate speech always has a remedy—in the form of more speech. What the libertarians claim now is that insofar as speech can cause hurt, the hurt can always be redressed: the injured party can always contradict, or answer back, it is said. And so (it is concluded) speech, though some of it may be hateful, is bound to be harmless overall.[36] In response to this, the first point to notice is that hate words don't have obverses in a certain sense. There are words for women (say) that are commonly understood to convey contempt, but no counterpart words for men. And so it seems to be for blacks vs. whites, gay people vs. straight people, non-nationals vs. nationals. In all of these cases, there is vocabulary enabling a member of the f second group to vilify a member of the first, but not conversely. Of course in any of these cases the situation may change: a claim about asymmetries can concern only *common understandings at a particular time*. Still it is noteworthy that at any time, those who are objects of vilification are those who are then already at the losing end of discriminatory practices. The lack of an obverse for (say) 'slag', or 'nigger' or 'faggot' is not an accidental lexical gap.

The claim that hate speech can simply be redressed now seems plainly wrong. For if there is a word that you can use to insult me, but no word that I can use to insult you, then, in one straightforward sense, there is no such thing as my answering back. It isn't possible to answer back by contradicting what was said; for where a hate word adds to a neutral word an expression of contempt (as, in some quarters at present, 'nigger' adds to 'black'), there is no way in which the hatefulness can be gainsaid. (It is true that the retort 'I am not a nigger' is not itself a piece of *insulting* hate speech. But, like any other retort, it cannot serve to remove the contemptuousness conveyed in an insulting use..[37]) This explains the reaction of right-minded people to hate words that insult people in groups to which they don't themselves belong: they have no use for them.

A different reaction may be possible for people who do belong to groups that hate words insult. And it is a response that may be possible also for people who are well placed to evince solidarity with members of insulted groups, or, again, for people who have the medium of satire to play with. For such people the words can be put to a *new* use. If a word is used in a context in which there cannot be an intention to insult, then its use will not be a piece of hate speech. But words mean what they are used to mean. And uses of hate words, in enough new contexts, may serve to counteract the possibility of their hateful use, and thus to change their common understanding. When the libertarian said that "more speech" was the remedy for hate speech, such cumulative non-hateful usage was not what he had in mind. Nevertheless, it seems that a hate word might, through benign usage, be deprived of its power to insult. We can probably all think of cases where re-signification seems

to have happened through a political process of appropriation: 'gay' is one striking example. Examples in which a hate word has ceased to be a hate word are hard to find except within particular dialects. (In some dialects, perhaps, the power of 'dyke' to insult has been defused.)

4.2: Meaning and change

Hate words, then, may change their meanings. And so, of course, may other words: the phenomenon of meaning-change at the level of vocabulary is familiar enough. But it is theoretically quite challenging to account for. I suggested that "mental intermediation" is an obstacle to appreciating how very simple it can be for one person to hurt another using words. I should also suggest that the usual individual and rationalistic model of the workings of language is an obstacle to appreciating the social mechanisms at work in meaning-change.

To recognize meaning-change is to recognize that the abstraction from social patterns to which a semantic theory corresponds is not an invariant thing. A much finer-grained understanding of 'a language' than I have worked with will be required to accommodate this. "A language" is something shared by people who are readily intelligible to one another at that time. In my view, such intelligibility depends upon the sort of (normal, human) social environment that is illocution's *sine qua non*. Of course it depends on very much more than this. On any actual occasion of language use, there are many things that a speaker does, all of which would need to be specified to record her "total speech act".[38] The abstraction which corresponds to "what the speaker's words meant then" is an abstraction from such total speech acts. And total speech acts depend in their turn upon (among other things) the attitudes of those whose acts they are.

When a pejorative term, whose application to a group of people is derogatory, comes to lose its negative associations, the attitudes expressed by those who use it change. Relevant changes of attitude, it seems, might be directly brought about in the use of language itself. But it may not be possible to make the right sort of allowance for this if one is required to think in independence about the speaker and the hearer on an occasion when a word is used in a slightly new sense. One wants to admit that the message conveyed with a piece of speech, in simple cases at least, can be something immediately shared between people. One wants, in a word, to allow that speech acts are communicative.

Conclusion

If communicative speech acts are admitted into philosophy, there could be more than one reason to count that a feminist advance. In §3, I represented that a current of thought created by the feminist tide can lead to the repair to malestream philosophy of language that I should want to make—in which communicative speech acts are introduced at the place where Gricean intentions feature in the orthodoxy. And I have just suggested that the orthodox (unrepaired) account may be unable to accommodate meaning-change. If so, it is surely unfit to serve as the basis of accounts of actual social phenomena. (Some philosophers may claim that a philosophical account of language, being non-empirical, is no more obliged to illuminate the phenomenon of meaning-change than to speak directly to, say, questions about particular sexist usages. But if the idea of these philosophers is that philosophy never makes empirical commitments, then they should think about what flows from the supposition that linguistic meaning might be explained by crediting speakers with Gricean intentions. Empirical claims about the nature of the generic, but individualistically conceived, human subject are rife in modern philosophy.)

At any rate, real-world social linguistic phenomena are bound to be neglected while philosophy of language is pursued along malestream lines. Not that even the repaired philosophical account makes any actual progress with practical political questions by itself. The account I advocate assumes that language users are socially related, but it does not speak to any of the actual properties, whether individual or social, of the socially related people who use languages. A realistic account of language use, by reference to which questions that concern feminists can be formulated, has to refine and extend, as well as instantiate, an abstract philosophical account. But the philosophical account must have the right ingredients before the gulf between philosophical treatment of language and the treatment of actual linguistic phenomena in the social world can be bridged.[39]

[Notes]

[1] 'Malestream'—introduced at least twenty years ago (I don't know by whom)—remains a useful term for the preponderantly male mainstream. It might seem tendentious to identify a body of philosophical work by allusion to its maleness. But the claim need only be that the contributors are *de facto*, nearly all men. (In the 1997-98 edition of *Philosophy Study Guide* (© Philosophy Panel, University of London), for example, around 98% of the entries under 'Philosophy of Language' are written by men.)

[2] I have had to ignore discussions in psychology and sociolinguists here; and even within philosophical work, the brief overview that follows is very selective. Where bibliographical details are incomplete, a full reference appears in the Further Reading.

a. *Man Made Language*. **b.** E.g. Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*. **c.** E.g. Janice Moulton, 'The Myth of the Neutral "Man"' and Carolyn Korsmeyer, 'The Hidden Joke, Generic Uses of Masculine Terminology', in *Feminism and Philosophy*, 124-53; Adèle Mercier, 'A Perverse Case of the Contingent A Priori'. **d.** Virginia Valian, 'Linguistics and Feminism' in *Feminism and Philosophy*, 154-166. **e.** For a phenomenologically acute presentation of one such argument, see Carol Cohn, 'Nuclear Language and How We Learned to Pat the Bomb'. **f.** Alienation is discussed in Chs. 6-8 of Cameron (cited at b.). **g.** Cameron Chs. 6-8 are relevant again. And see T. Olsen, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978). One focus of debate has been Catharine MacKinnon's claim that 'pornography silences women': see 'Francis Biddle's Sister', in C. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1987). **h.** E.g. Patrizia Violi, 'Gender Subjectivity and Language', in *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity* eds. Gisela Bock and Susan James (Routledge: London, 1992) 164-176. **i.** For references to ideas about how imagery and metaphor work in philosophical texts, see Lloyd's paper in the present volume. For French feminism and the philosophy of language, see Nye 'The Voice of the Serpent'. And for relevant psychoanalytical material, see 'Further Reading under 'Feminism and Psychoanalysis' in this volume.

[3] See Andrea Nye, 'Semantics in a New Key', in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. Janet A. Kourany (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[4] An example is Deborah Cameron, whose criticisms I started to address in my 'Disempowered Speech', in *Feminist Perspectives, Philosophical Topics* 23 2 (1996), 127-147.

[5] *How to do Things with Words*, 2nd edition (Oxford: University Press, 1975).

[6] Ibid, 109.

[7] Ibid, 103.

[8] I rely at this point on what Austin says at 109 ibid.: 'a *locutionary act* is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with [something] roughly equivalent to "meaning" in the traditional sense'. Austin had no single stable conception of the locutionary, and he often used 'say' for it (incorrectly in my opinion, cp.note 11). A defence of my reading of Austin, and an account of illocution (of which only a portion emerges here) is given in my 'Illocution and its Significance', in *The Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives*, ed. S.L. Tsohatzidis (London: Routledge, 1994).

[9] 'A particular language' assumes that languages can be individuated. The assumption raises questions that I don't approach until §4 below (see note 39). In the meantime, I assume that e.g. 'English' names a language.

[10] It has been claimed (and I don't demur) that a Tarskian definition of 'true' for a language can serve as its semantic theory. The entrance of 'true' into the study of language has itself been a cause of feminist objection: see Nye (cited at note 3). In the present context, I hope it will be clear that if 'true' had a place in semantic theories, then that would not 'purge language of ... communicative power'.

[11] Austin initially contrasted performing with stating—as if stating (or saying) something was not a case of doing something—, thus making it seem that 'state' (or 'say') could not be illocutionary. Although Austin (rightly) abandoned this contrast, he (unluckily) didn't follow through on the implications of abandoning it.

[12] Ordinarily *assertion* is the speech act used to connect a semantic theory with speakers' practices (though Austin himself gave a special place to *stating*: see previous note). There are good questions about the relations between these various speech acts. The answers, I believe, need not be affected by claiming an illocutionary status for them all.

[13] And for simplicity's sake, I allow myself to assume (what I have argued elsewhere) that force and mood can be correctly related when force is understood in terms of illocution. See my "Things Done With Words", in *Human Agency: Language Duty and Value*, eds. J.Dancy et al. (Stanford: University Press, 1988) 27-46.

[14] Ibid, 160-61.

[15] 'Bogus arithmetic' is one of the resources of an opponent whom Strawson envisaged in his 1967 lecture 'Meaning and Truth'—an opponent keen to make much of the point that 'What we can do with an audience-directed intention, we can also do without any such intention', 185. The lecture is printed in *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1974) 170-189.

[16] The challenge to decomposing *seeing* (which contests the extrusion of the relation between a subject of experience and a visible object) can be an instance of a very general claim that has led to the idea of '*broad* mental states'. (Mental states' breadth is the nub of the anti-individualism mentioned at note 19 below.) For a proof that conceptual arithmetic of the kind I am resisting is bogus (i.e. leads to demonstrably false conclusions), see Timothy Williamson, 'The Broadness of the Mental: Some Logical Considerations', forthcoming in *Philosophical Perspectives*, 12, ed. James Tomberlin (1998). Williamson's paper is useful for showing why non-decomposable concepts should be serviceable.

[17] There is actually more at issue here. A speaker may be said to have gone in for an act of an illocutionary kind even though there was no uptake on the part of a hearer. For example, we can imagine someone reporting 'I warned him, but he didn't realize that I was serious'; or 'I said that —— to him, but he didn't hear me'. So we have to allow that the verb 'say to someone' might apply to someone not taken by any hearer to have said anything. This is to allow that ordinary verbs like 'warn' and 'say to someone' do not stand for illocutionary acts as Austin defined them. Commentators on Austin have all responded by revising Austin's account, so as to make only 'the aim', not 'the achievement', necessary for an illocutionary act's performance. But if one thinks that a speaker's aiming at uptake is not adequately understood except by reference to what it is for uptake to be achieved, then one has a reason to introduce a notion of illocutionary act like Austin's own, i.e. a notion designed to include the achievement. (See further my 'Illocution and its significance'.)

[18] See 'How Can Language be Sexist?', Merrill Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka, in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and the Philosophy of Science,* eds. S. Harding and M.B. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983). Sally Haslanger also cites this in the present volume; I am happy to take her reservations on board.

[19] 'Individualism' has recently been used for a number of different philosophical theses. I note that the present anti-individualism is different from one which Tyler Burge has demonstrated and which I also endorse—that propositional mental-state and event kind terms are *nonindividualistically individuated*. The difference between Burgean anti-individualism and that defended here might be put by saying that the Burgean sort bears on 'that *p*' in 'means that *p*' whereas the present sort bears on 'means that' in 'means that *p*'.

[20] See Naomi Scheman 'Individualism and the Objects of Psychology', 43, in her *Engenderings* (London: Routledge, 1993) 36-53. Much work in political philosophy plays

variations on the theme that individualism, by eradicating gender, potentially excludes feminists' concerns from the political arena.

[21] There is an enormous literature stemming from Grice's 'Meaning', *Philosophical Review,* 66 (1957) 377-88. Here I should note that there is no single account accepted by all who believe in "Gricean intentions", and that philosophers who have developed the various accounts have had different overall objectives.

[22] Both Grice and Schiffer used intentions of this sort in an account specifically of *saying*. For the use of complex intentions to make what I have called 'the fundamental connection between semantic theories and speakers' practices', see e.g. §5.1 of Martin Davies 'Philosophy of Language' in *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, eds. N. Bunnin and E.P. Tsui-James (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 90-139.

[23] *The Man of Reason*, by Genevieve Lloyd (Methuen & Co. Ltd.: London, 1984), is mentioned in the 'Introduction' to this volume, and in many papers here.

[24] Cp. John McDowell, 'Antirealism and the Epistemology of Understanding', in *Meaning and Understanding*, eds. H. Parret and B. Bouverese (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyer, 1981) 225-48. McDowell shows that a semantic theory corresponds to an isolable psychological state in Dummett's view. I take the isolability claim to be endorsed by others than Dummett, even if others don't rely upon it to draw those anti-realist theses that McDowell was concerned to refute.

[25] See e.g. Naomi Scheman 'Confessions of an Analytical Philosopher Semi-Manqué', in her *Engenderings* (London: Routledge, 1993) 245-49.

[26] Here one takes Wittgenstein's side. Many of the early remarks in *Philosophical Investigations* (trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell, 1976) are designed to free us from the standing temptation to think of language in abstraction from use.

[27] I am concerned here with 'strong self-sufficiency' in the sense of Louise Antony's 'Sisters, Please, I'd Rather Do it Myself: A Defense of Individualism in Feminist Epistemology', in *Feminist Perspectives, Philosophical Topics* 1996. (As Antony's title may suggest, she and I aren't on exactly the same side.)

[28] An example would be the practical approach to explaining the concept of knowledge taken in Edward Craig's *Knowledge and the State of Nature: An Essay in Conceptual Synthesis* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1990).

[Notes, contd.]

[29] In my 'Illocution and its Significance' (in Tsohatzidis ed.) I introduced 'reciprocity' as a name for the condition which is part of the background of any social human environment and which provides for such transparency. In emphasizing how relatively easy communication *can* be, I don't deny that (as Andrea Nye, in 'Semantics in a New Key', properly says we must allow that communication can be difficult: see next note.

[30] See, e.g. Sarah Richmond, 'Derrida and Analytical Philosophy: Speech Acts and their Force', in *European Journal of Philosophy* 4:1 (1996) 38-62, esp. 'Conclusion'. The implications of differences between speakers that arise from social relations won't be appreciated until a much wider range of illocutionary acts than I have been able to look at here is considered.

[31] See "Free and Equal Speech", *Imprints* 1, 2 (1996) 59-76. For the argument as it bears on feminist debate, see J.Hornsby and R. Langton, 'Free Speech and Illocution', *Legal Theory* 4, 1 (1998) 21-37.

[32] This (though not itself intended as a definition) is extracted from a definition that Thomas Gray formulated for use in a Code of Practice for Stanford University, which was struck down by the Courts.

[33] Questions about hate speech can arise outside any legislative context. I have spoken of ' a defensible principle of free speech' (rather than the First Amendment of the Constitution of the U.S.A., from which American libertarians actually argue) not only because we are not all U.S. citizens, but also to remind us that free speech can be a principle of political morality, and that when it comes to such a principle the legal interpretation of a particular country's legislation might be neither here nor there. For a discussion which acknowledges that questions about regulation cannot be disregarded in a full treatment, see Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (Routledge, London 1997).

[34] For an account of this, and a good discussion, see Susan J. Brison 'Speech, Harm and the Mind-Body Problem' *Legal Theory* 4, 1 (1998) 39-61.

[35] One would need to be more precise about illocution than I have been able to be here to determine whether *insulting* might itself be an illocutionary act. The present point is only that hate speech relies upon there being some illocutionary act.

[36] This conclusion—of overall harmlessness—requires that two wrongs can make a right. A less implausible conclusion (against which my arguments will also serve) would be that there are no *particular* groups of people who need be at the losing end where there are no impediments to hate speech.

[37] One sees this clearly if one thinks of pejorative words as non-conservatively extending languages to which they are added: see Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth, 1973) 454. (Not all hate words can be understood in this way, however.)

[38] For an account of how much is properly involved in this notion, see my 'Disempowered Speech', where allowance is made for fine-grained individuation of languages, so that sense can be made e.g. of 'dialects'.

[39] I thank my co-editor for her comments on an earlier draft.