

## SAYING

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Neither linguists nor psychologists have begun the study of conversation, but it is here that we shall find the key to a better understanding of what language really is, and how it works (Firth 1957:31).

As 'truth' is not a name for a characteristic of assertions, so 'freedom' is not a name for a characteristic of actions, but the name of a dimension in which actions are assessed (Austin 1970:180).

The present inquiry originated in my wish to try to understand what the verb *say* may mean, in English. I shall begin by examining ways in which *say* is attestably used — grammatically or appropriately — in speech and writing. I shall then hope to throw light on: a) what kind of an act or activity *saying* is; b) what we are actually doing when we *say* p, and — in particular — when we use the form of words "X *said* that p"; and c) what sorts of linguistic things can, and what cannot, be *said*.

When I describe my intention as that of discovering what we are doing when we *say* p, I am not thereby committing myself to any Austinian or neo-Austinian view. Thus I would not wish to describe the unacceptability of the following texts:

1A What's Jack doing?

B He's saying he's fed up

and

2A Has Bill said anything about his new job?

B Yes, he did so this morning

in terms of the putative lack of illocutionary force in *saying* and *said*.

I shall seek to show that *saying* has its own mode of existence, independent of the abstract oppositions proposed by linguistic theory and also independent

of the substantial opposition of the spoken and written modes. Some evidence for this view comes from two observations. First: the explication of *saying* is not held to be a pressing task of linguistic theory, for which the grammar of *saying* appears to be about as interesting as the grammar of eating and drinking (and definitely less interesting than the grammar of hitting, or forgetting, or telling). Second: the explication of *saying* seems to hold little attraction for philosophers of language, who turn their microscopes on words of presumed greater theoretical interest — *claim, believe, assert, judge* — but seem generally content to treat *say* as an unanalysed sleeping partner. This is evident in the rich tradition, represented by such writers as Black, Cavell, Grice, Schwayder, Ziff and Zwicky, according to which meaning is the primary object of theoretical inquiry. In such a view, *saying* is assumed not to need independent analysis; *saying* something is taken to be a philosophically uninteresting activity, no more than the linguistic incarnation of something prior and discrete, called meaning. Austin's invitation, in "A plea for excuses",

Expressions like "doing an action", or "doing something", are still too little examined on their own account and merits, just as the general notion of "saying something" is still too lightly passed over in logic (Austin 1970: 178)

has been neglected.

The present discussion does not set out to disparage "meaning": I see no way of denying the conceptual primacy of meaning over *saying*. Couched in such a theory-independent form, however, the statement amounts to a fairly uninteresting admission. Much depends on what one's theory of meaning is. Fashionable nowadays is a form of functionalism in which an unanalysed process called "communication", consequent upon intention, is held to be the hallmark of meaningful language use. Thus, Gordon and Lakoff (1971) can distinguish, in one and the same utterance, between what is *said* and what is *communicated*: a distinction in which *saying* appears as no more than the voicing of an epistemically void grammatical sentence, to which the speaker has no commitment.

I shall argue in the following that *saying* (unlike, for example, speaking) exists essentially at an abstract level, and is characteristically signalled in performed language; that an analysis of *saying* is an enterprise every bit as worthwhile as the study of meaning, and one which promises to expose at least one important flaw in the Gricean model. Grice sees meaning in terms of the interplay of the utterer's and the audience's intentions: *saying* something to someone is a matter of persuading him to believe something, or getting him to believe that the speaker believes something. But, as Gandhi (1974) observes, it may well be that if a listener decides that a speaker is trying to get him to believe something, he will have reason, not to believe it himself, but to believe that the speaker himself does not believe it. In other words, we

cannot elucidate a speaker's meaning in terms of instrumental intentions and their recognition by an audience. *Saying* may, accidentally, be an expression of an intention; but, significantly and necessarily, it is the expression of a belief. I should like to think that there is a place for the study of *saying* in a linguistics that is not so ecumenical as to evaporate into sociology. I take it that it has now been satisfactorily argued, by Chomsky and others, that a metatheoretical linking of language with "systems of knowledge and belief" is more illuminating than a view of language in which such notions as intention and function are cardinal. The climate in which Austin could raise his famous challenge:

What we want is a new doctrine of what one is doing in saying something, and of the speech act in its totality (Austin 1971: 22).

is, perhaps, the most hospitable one for the present inquiry, after all.

The bulk of this paper will be devoted to an attempt to chart the domain of *saying*. As a coda, I shall briefly refer to three areas to which, I think, an explication of *saying* has relevance. These are: linguistic description, language pedagogy and the theory of literature.

One stepping-stone on the way to an understanding of what is *said* — and, possibly, to a demarcation of what can be *said* from what cannot be *said* — is afforded by an analysis of the two different modes in which we can convey utterances. The physical realisations of these modes are speech and writing. The model (Appendix) seeks to compare features of language in the two modes. I operate with two parameters (in addition to the variable of mode itself): formality and sufficiency.

On the axis of formality is recorded the degree to which a particular utterance (I use this term neutrally with respect to mode) is formal: that is, the degree to which it manifests such linguistically-signalled features as precision, explicitness, unambiguousness, repeatability and self-consciously "careful" formulation. On this axis we can mark off points of ascending order of formality; to each point there belongs a particular utterance-type, manifested by a peculiar and distinct linguistic profile.

The axis of sufficiency records the degree to which a particular utterance-type is sufficiently transmitted in the mode. On this axis, we mark off points of ascending order of linguistic complexity. Empirically, some measure of sufficiency could be obtained by noting the relative frequency with which instances of a single utterance-type are encoded in the same mode. Intuition, moreover, suggests that the spoken mode is more typically or suitably used for certain utterance-types, and the written mode for others. It would be pleasant to go further: to be able to define a point on the formality axis (signalling a specifiable utterance-type) and a point on the sufficiency axis (signalling

a specifiable level of language complexity) such that we could establish a relation of necessity between them. However, even if such an explanatory description is beyond our reach, I think that the model is suggestive in a number of respects.

It offers, in the first place, a rationale for the notions "mainstream written English" and "mainstream spoken English". Mainstream spoken English is located in the band of the spoken mode where sufficiency is highest; mainstream written English is located in the band of the written mode where sufficiency is highest. Comparison of the two modes shows that, roughly speaking, sufficiency in spoken English is highest at the points where in written English it is lowest.

The model gives support to the pedagogical convention of exposing learners to only certain types of written English; however, it also justifies exposing them to more of certain kinds of spoken English than is normally the case.

If we now consider the horizontal axis as a spectrum of formality, and confront the spoken spectrum with the written one, we shall see that they are not aligned. The spoken mode can encode utterance-types that are located to the left of the limits encountered by the written mode; conversely, the written mode can encode utterance-types to the right of the limits of the spoken mode.

The spectrum suggests bands of ultra-violet and infra-red beyond the "visible" portion. Indeed, following the steep drop in sufficiency at the right edge of the formality axis of the written mode, there is a band of symbolism: natural language is henceforward increasingly insufficient because insufficiently formal. In parallel fashion, following the steep drop in sufficiency at the left edge of the formality axis of the spoken mode, there is a band in which natural language is increasingly insufficient because insufficiently informal: syntax and lexis tend to disintegrate, while sound — in its physicality — prevails.

Just as one may go one stage further still to the left of the spoken spectrum; and discover gesture; so one may go one stage further still to the right of the written spectrum, and propose the icon. Gesture is the use of bodily muscles other than the vocal organs; iconography is the use of visible marks other than natural-language symbols.

Confrontation of the two spectra suggests that there might be some "middle region" in which an utterance-type can be encoded with equal sufficiency in speech and writing. It may be that the presentation of an academic paper at a conference comes into this category.

To assert that certain utterance-types cannot be spoken, and certain others cannot be written, is probably indefensible. But it is clear that as one approaches the point of maximum sufficiency in one mode, it becomes increasingly difficult for the other mode to handle the same utterance-type. It is hard, for example, to talk good philosophy; and equally hard to write a lovers' quarrel.

Uttering, however, is not the same thing as *saying*. Accepting, therefore,

that everything can — more or less awkwardly — be uttered, we are still entitled to ask whether, by the same token, everything can be *said*. At how many points on the spectra could we expect an answer to the question: “What did he *say*?” or “What is he *saying*?” What are the criteria of the *sayable*?

In the first place, examination of used language suggests that of all the language that is uttered (recall that I am using this term neutrally with respect to mode), only some language is *said*. I define “to utter”, noncontroversially I hope, as “to produce” (of language): to be successfully accomplished, uttering requires no more than a language-producing device. *Saying* is, in four respects, a more specific activity. There must be a human *sayer*; there must be something that is (being) *said*; there must be a human to whom something is *said*; and that human must be able to understand what is *said*. Consider these sentences:

- 3 \*Sarah (the chimpanzee) said she didn't like English.
- 4 \*John said to his wife that the world is too much with us.
- 5 \*Crusoe (alone on his island) said he was hungry.
- 6 \*I said to the baby that I'd be back at nine.

For different reasons, these sentences all display a type of unacceptability that I shall call discordance. Discordance is manifestable at the level of text; it does not designate internal properties of syntactic strings. Rather, it denotes a relation between two successive bits of text such that the second of these bits does not realise expectations aroused by the first. It is perceived by the speaker-hearer (writer-reader) as some form of incongruity. Sentences 3,4,5 and 6 above exemplify four different discordant uses of *said*; and this constraint on *sayability* will be explored in the next section.

There is, however, another possible approach to the analysis of the *sayable*. One might propose that *saying* is not subsumed by uttering at all, but that it is an entirely different and conceptually prior activity. If we place what is *said* within the domain of what is uttered, we make it amenable to linguistic description; but if we bring *say* squarely into the foreground, and apply techniques of conceptual analysis to it, we shall obtain a very different description. Our boundaries now will be between *say*, and such other concepts as *state*, *claim*, *assert* and *allege*. All of these lie at the interface between the logic of propositions and the grammar of natural language. However, it seems to be the case that *say* has proved less interesting, to philosophers of language, than the other concepts with which I have grouped it. The reason for this neglect may be sought in the fact that *say* is in one important respect distinct from *state*, *claim*, *assert* and *allege* in that it not only verbalises true/false propositions but also signals a separate dimension of truth which, following Austin, I will call the dimension of sincerity. Just as truth is a property of

propositions in abstracto, so sincerity is an attribute of those propositions as they emerge — as formulations of belief — in the fabric of a human, natural-language exchange: a conversation. As Hornsby (1977) observes, there are parallels between sentences which contain *believe* and sentences which contain *say*. It remains to underline the difference, implicit in the foregoing, between *saying* and asserting. In both activities, we utter what we believe to be true; but *saying*, additionally, takes place in the dimension of sincerity. Thus, *say* in English signals not only that a proposition is being verbalised but also that a belief is being proffered. I think that speakers of English are fortunate in possessing a verb which has this complex and valuable function, and which is yet so common that it rarely draws attention to itself.

You have long wanted and dreamed of having a Volkswagen. Finally you get one and stand in its presence, showing it off to your friend. He smiles and says: "Well, it's yours now". This is no ordinary telling you something (Aldrich 1967: 52–53).

*Say* invites comparison with *tell*; every learner of English must note the syntactic differences between them. Implied, I think, in these differences is a difference of pragmatic meaning. I propose therefore to make a few comparisons between *saying* and *telling*, in the hope that the peculiar force of *say* will emerge more clearly than hitherto.

The reader is invited to consider the following pairs of sentences (a context is supplied for each pair):

- 7 (They had been waiting to cross the road for ten minutes)  
 A "Traffic is bad to-day", John said.  
 B \*"Traffic is bad to-day", John told them.
- 8 (Employer to employee)  
 A "There's something I want to say to you".  
 B "There's something I want to tell you".
- 9 (Foreman passing instructions to workers on a building site)  
 A \*"Say (to them) they can go home early to-day".  
 B "Tell them they can go home early to-day".
- 10 (Marketing manager talks to his secretary)  
 A "Tell them we're having problems with deliveries".  
 B "Say we're having problems with deliveries".
- 11 (no specific context)  
 A "Tell her it was my fault".  
 B "Say it was my fault".
- 12 (no specific context)  
 A "Tell me the answer".  
 B \*"Tell me your lines".

- C \*Say the answer (to me)".
- D "Say your lines (to me)".
- 13 (no specific context)
- A "Say I died yesterday".
- B \*?"Tell him I died yesterday".
- 14 A \*"He told me that the moon was made of cheese".
- B He said that the moon was made of cheese".
- 15 (Harry: 'Dixon, the well-known Mormon, is coming to dinner')
- A Harry said that Dixon was a Mormon
- B \*Harry told me that Dixon was a Mormon
- 16 (Harry: 'that man Dixon who's coming to dinner is a Mormon')
- A Harry said that Dixon was coming to dinner
- B \*Harry told me that Dixon was coming to dinner
- 17 (two people whose relationship is not going well)
- A "Say something to me".
- B \*?"Tell me something".
- 18 (Eliot: from "Four quartets")
- A I said to my soul, be still.
- B \*I told my soul to be still.
- 19 (You've just had an audience with the Pope)
- A "What did he say to you?"
- B \*?"What did he tell you?"
- 20 (answer to the question: 'What did he say?')
- A "He said that the Lefevre affair generated more heat than light".
- B \*?"He told me that the Lefevre affair generated more heat than light".
- 21 (no specific context)
- A "He told me that everything in the garden was lovely".
- B "He said that everything in the garden was lovely".
- 22 (what did your boss think of the dinner you cooked?)
- A "He said (to me) very quietly that the carrots were hard".
- B \*?"He told me, very quietly, that the carrots were hard".
- 23 (you ask what time the performance starts)
- A "I've already told you".
- B \*?"I've already said (to you)".
- 24 (no specific context)
- A "He never said anything naturally".
- B "He never said anything, naturally".
- C \*?"He never told me anything naturally".
- D "He never told me anything, naturally".
- 25 (who was Jack dancing with last night?)
- A "He told me it was his cousin" (stress on *me*)
- B "He said it was his cousin" (stress on *said*)

Of sentences 7, only 7A is concordant because the context is not one in which information is transmitted; John is simply verbalising shared thoughts. In sentences 8, A focuses on the speaker, B on the message; in the context of conversation between employer and employee, B would appear to me more concordant than A. If, however, we imagine that a wife is talking to her husband — and if we assume that this type of communication is less informative than that between employer and employee — then it is sentence A that is concordant. In sentences 9, the context (passing instructions) demands a verb that focuses clearly on a message; therefore only B is concordant. In sentences 10, in which we may suppose that the manager is advising his secretary how to deal with an impatient customer, he can choose between either using his secretary as a vehicle for his message (thus, A), or attributing to her a certain responsibility (thus, B) (I shall return later to the peculiar answerability of the *sayer*). Analogously, both 11A and 11B are concordant, but with different implications. It is to be noted that 10B and 11B differ from 10A and 11A in making a claim to sincerity; so that a person who utters some such sentence as: “Why should I say that? It isn’t true” objects, not to the prospect of conveying a falsehood as to the ethically much less acceptable prospect of conscious mendacity.

In sentences 12, we see the metalinguistic function of *say*: the nominal direct object of *say* can be only a NP standing for a linguistic entity (word, sentence, lines, prayers). The verb *tell*, on the other hand, takes as its direct object only NPs representing “facts” (news, story, result, answer, truth).

In sentences 13, it is questionable whether we can accept B, since this could be re-written as “The speaker instructs me to inform you that he died yesterday”. Sentence A, however, is concordant because it attributes, not truth to a message-content but credibility to the reporter’s assertion. Similarly, we cannot accept 14A — it is discordant to inform someone of something that is universally known to be false — but we can allow 14B by crediting the speaker with the freedom to place his own interpretation upon the world, to believe that the moon is made of cheese.

Sentence 15 contains an assertion embedded within a message. *Say* focuses on the assertion; therefore 15A is concordant. *Tell* focuses on the message; therefore 15B is discordant. If, as in sentence 16, we switch round the main and embedded components, we see that the same rule holds.

Sentences 17 and 18 illustrate once more that *say* signals words — it is metalinguistic — while *tell* signals messages. The discordance of 18B throws a glimmer of light, I think, on the nature of poetry — a matter to which I shall briefly return. An audience with the Pope is more of a ritual than a genuine communicative experience; therefore 19A is concordant, 19B not. In sentences 20, there is a further reason why 20B is discordant. The Pope uses a metaphor (“more heat than light”); the use of *tell* literalises a message,



and since his Holiness is evidently not talking about physics, 20B is discordant. In sentences 21, however, either A or B is concordant, depending on whether the speaker is talking about a real garden, or using a figure of speech.

If *say* focuses on language use (on how we utter things), while *tell* focuses on language content (on what our utterances refer to), then we shall expect to find *say*, rather than *tell*, collocated with adverbials describing manner of utterance. So, tentatively, I suggest that 22A is concordant, while 22B is not. Sentences 23 illustrate the interesting fact that NPs of fact can be deleted, whereas NPs of linguistic entity cannot.

Exploiting the ambiguity of "naturally", sentences 24 supply more evidence for the distinction revealed by 22. The three sentences 24A, 24B and 24D are concordant; 24C is arguably discordant, because *tell* focuses on the content rather than the manner of an utterance. In sentences 25, finally, stress and intonation features show up the difference between A and B. Sentence 25A purports to pass on a piece of information, and if the hearer wants to signal his disbelief, he does so by stressing *me* (contrastively); sentence 25B, on the other hand, attributes responsibility to the reporter, and the hearer's scepticism is signalled by "uncertainty" stress on *said* — giving a more complex intonation contour.

I do not propose in this paper to offer a point-by-point comparison of the uses of *say* and *tell*; *tell* has served its purpose if it has thrown into relief the meaning of *say*. It is worth noting in passing, however, that philosophers of education are accustomed to operating with a conceptual spectrum that includes such items as *tell*, *inform*, *instruct*, *train*, *indoctrinate*, with the object of deciding whether the cardinal *teach* belongs there or not (for example, Hirst 1974). Indeed, it would not be surprising if the philosophy of education, seen as a branch of the philosophy of action, showed more interest in *saying* and *telling* than is shown by the philosophy of language. Hamlyn's remarks are interesting, and germane to the present discussion:

An understanding of what men say involves an understanding not only of the individual words they use ... but also of the criteria of truth of the statements that they make by means of those words (something that implies agreement on the circumstances in which those statements might be said to be true). There are thus certain conceptual connections between the concepts of meaning, truth and agreement... (Hamlyn 1972:246).

The philosophy of language operates with a spectrum that includes such items as *state*, *assert*, *allege*, *claim* — and has to decide whether it is hospitable to the concept of *saying*.

Some of the utterances listed above (7 to 25) are reports; some are definitely not reports, and some are of doubtful status (utterances listed as 9,

24 and 7 might exemplify these three categories). I should now like to examine what kinds of things can be reported, and what is the significance of the use or non-use of *say* by the reporter. In this section, my approach will differ from that of Schiffer (1972:110—116), for whom “the most interesting use of ‘say’ is the use of ‘say’ in contexts of indirect quotation, as exemplified in ‘S said that the cat was on the mat’ and in ‘S said that you were to leave’”. The notion of ‘indirect quotation’ is, in my view, much too vague; the category accommodates cases of the use of reporting *say* which I would judge to be discordant. (I find it hard, incidentally, to imagine circumstances in which someone would *say* the textbook sentence “The cat is on the mat”).

It should be noted first of all that many reports are not of utterances. The following, presumably, are reports:

- 26 “The enemy are advancing”
- 27 “I’m tired”
- 28 “The experiment was inconclusive”

but they report facts/events, not utterances. In case, however, we are tempted to claim that any non-utterance can be reported (that, therefore, the proposition “Many reports are not of utterances” is trivial), consider the following pairs:

- 29A “An elephant was sighted 100 metres away”
- B The elephant is the largest land mammal
- 30A “We’ll meet again on Monday”
- B It’s Monday to-morrow
- 31A “The child is undernourished”
- B The child is father to the man

I submit that of the states-of-affairs referred to in the above pairs of sentences, only those marked A are reportable; hence the quotation marks.

It is equally true that not all utterances can be reported; and this is more interesting in the light of the present discussion. In order to be reportable — in order, that is, to be concordantly re-written with a phrase such as “Jack said that...” preposed — it appears that an utterance must satisfy at least the following conditions.

First: it must be precisely re-writable as a proposition; that is, it must be semantically declarative (syntactically ‘indicative’ or ‘imperative’). Thus, of the following pairs, 32B and 33B are reports of 32A and 33A respectively, but 34B and 35B are not reports of 34A and 35A respectively.

- 32A “The door’s locked”
- B “He said that the door was locked”

33A "Open the door"

B "He said that I was to open the door"

"He told me to open the door"

34A "Is that the door?"

B "He said that he didn't know whether that was the door"

"He told me that he didn't know....."

35A "What a beautiful door!"

B "He said he thought it was a beautiful door"

"He told me he thought....."

Second: in order to be reportable, an utterance must be implicitly self-engaging, sincere; it must not carry any explicit engagement-marker. Consider the following pairs:

36A "I have regretfully decided to resign"

B "He said that he had regretfully decided to resign"

37A "Dixon has regrettably left his work unfinished"

B\*"He said that Dixon had regrettably left his work unfinished"

38A "We shall certainly get help before nightfall"

B "He said that they would certainly get help before nightfall"

39A "We shall surely get help before nightfall"

B\*"He said that they would surely get help before nightfall"

The words "regrettably" (37) and "surely" (39) explicate the engagement of the speaker, and render the use of the reporting "he said that..." superfluous. (Indeed, a common way to "report" attitudinally marked utterances is by *erlebte Rede*). This second condition explains why exclamations (as 35A) are unreportable with "he said that...". It suggests that *say* has itself an attitude-marking function, and thus cannot be used to report an utterance that is already attitudinally marked. It looks as though we have here a rule prescribing "one attitude-marker per utterance", reminiscent of such syntactic rules as "one negator per sentence" in English. (I do not propose a definition of "utterance-hood"; but then it is not fashionable to demand a definition of "sentencehood" either).

Third: the use of *say* endows a report with the reporter's sincerity of assertion. There are, presumably, limits to the kinds of utterance that a speaker can report sincerely. I am not sure how to characterise this constraint, but it does appear that utterances grounded in abstract and generalised propositions are suspect; so are those which seem to be meaningful but are not readily analysable. Consider:

40A "We are the daughters of the Revolution"

B ?"They said that they were the daughters of the Revolution"

41A "The Ruritanian people salute their distinguished guest"

B ? "He said that the R. people saluted their distinguished guest"

42A "All men are equal"

B ? "He said that all men are (were) equal"

It might be hypothesised that falsifiability of the proposition is necessary for concordant reportability with *say*.

It is worth while comparing the use of *tell* with that of *say* in examples 37 to 42. Consider the following pairs:

37B \* "He said that Dixon had regrettably left his work unfinished"

43 "He told me that Dixon....."

39B \* "He said that they would surely get help before nightfall"

44 "He told me that they would surely get help..."

40B \* "They said that they were the daughters of the Revolution"

45 "They told me that they were the daughters..."

41B \* "He said that the Ruritanian people saluted their distinguished guest"

46 "He told me that the Ruritanian people..."

42B \* "He said that all men are (were) equal"

47 "He told me that all men are (were) equal"

I would argue that in the above examples, reports with *tell* are more acceptable than reports with *say* — explicable on the hypothesis that *say* is an attitudinal marker, while *tell* is not. The person who *says* that "all men are equal" is, furthermore, committed to being ready to analyse his statement if challenged; the person who *tells* me that "all men are equal" is not so committed.

Fourth: there is a class of utterances represented by:

48 Still waters run deep

49 Truth will out

50 Blessed are the poor in spirit

51 The world is too much with us

The everyday term *saying* may be helpfully applied to such utterances. *Sayings* are charged with sincerity of assertion, and therefore to report a *saying* with *say* is felt to be superfluous — derogatory, indeed, to the expressive power of the utterance. Not surprisingly, the use of *tell* forces the hearer to try to literalise the utterance. Let us return to 21A and 21B for a moment:

21A "He told me that everything in the garden was lovely"

B \* "He said that everything in the garden was lovely"

My contention is, now, that 21B is discordant if the complement of *said*

is understood as a *saying*; while 21A expressly demetaphorises the NP complement. Thus, on hearing an utterance like

52 \*"He told me that still waters run deep"

the hearer is likely to be perplexed, searching for a non-existent literal reference for the sentence: "Still waters run deep".

In contrasting *say* with *tell*, I have several times invoked the notions of sincerity and assertion. I have tried, first, to show that *saying* is significantly an asserting, and only incidentally, if at all, an information-transmitting activity. I have argued, further, that if we want to understand in what way *saying* is more than mere asserting, we have to turn into another dimension. Assertion does not of itself imply belief: it is perfectly consistent for me to assert that *p*, while knowing that *p* is false. We must add the notion of sincerity, in order to make clear that when I *say* *p*, I wish my hearer to believe that I believe *p*. Consider these utterances:

53A "He said he'd found the money, but he was lying".

B \*"He said he'd found the money, but he was wrong".

54A \*"He told me that Beethoven was born in Vienna, but he was lying".

B "He told me that Beethoven was born in Vienna, but he was wrong".

In sentences 53, the speaker's sincere assertion is concordant with his desire to deceive, but not with his being factually in error. In sentences 54, conversely, the speaker's message-giving is concordant with the factual falsity of the proposition about the birthplace of Beethoven, but not with the speaker's desire to deceive.

The truth or falsity of statements is affected by what they leave out or put in... They are selected and uttered for a purpose. It is essential to realise that true and false (like free and unfree) do not stand for anything simple at all, but only for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to being a wrong thing to say, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions (Austin 1962: 144—145).

Presumably it was this very relativisation of the concept of saying which prevented Austin from analysing it with his customary perspicacity. Following Austin, however, we can speak of sincerity as a dimension, or a continuum, extending from veracity to mendacity. This leads to the notion of a speaker-hearer relationship, marked by an activity called *saying* which cannot be accounted for in a simple encoding-decoding model of language performance, in which input is subsumed by an unanalysed *tell*, and output by an equally unanalysed *understand*. (Ziff (1972) discusses *understanding*, but throws little light on the subject of his paper: "What is said". The notion of *agreement*, adumbrated by Hamlyn (1972), seems more promising).

From the moment that we accept that the activity of *saying* entails a speaker-hearer relationship (recall the discordance of utterances 3, 5 and 6), we can understand how the *said* utterance

55 "It's cold in here"

can by its hearer be interpreted to mean "Please close the window". Indeed, utterance 55 must be interpreted: the speaker means something which, precisely because his utterance is uninformative, cannot be recovered from the linguistic structure of the utterance alone. Here, once more, it looks as though *say* can do what *tell* cannot do. Compare:

56A "He said it was cold in the room, so I closed the window"

with

56B \*"He told me that it was cold in the room, so I closed the window"

The idea that, far from being mere vehicles of competence, language users act; the idea that their language use is not "governed by rules" but that they comply with conventions; the idea of a relationship, above all: these developments cannot be expected to be welcome to mainstream linguistics. Chomsky, for example, wishes to distinguish sharply between the theory of language and the study of communication. Here is a typical recent statement:

We must distinguish between the literal meaning of the linguistic expression produced by S, and what S meant by producing this expression (or by saying *so-and-so*, whatever expressions he used). The first notion is the one to be explained in the theory of language. The second has nothing particular to do with language; I can just as well ask, in the same sense of 'meaning', what S meant by slamming the door. Within the theory of successful communication, we can, perhaps, draw a connection between these notions. The theory of meaning, however, seems quite unilluminated by this effort (Chomsky 1975: 76).

I think it is highly likely that one might be interested in "what S meant by saying *so-and-so*", without thereby being interested in "what S meant by slamming the door". *Saying* is, after all, a prerogative of humans, whereas door-slamming (and such actions as giving information and mimicking human speech) can be carried out by automata. But what are we to make of utterances like

57 "What the thunder said"

58 "It says you mustn't walk on the grass"

59 "What time does your watch say?"

Perhaps, if we consider that the watch or the public notice has an "inner state" from which an authoritative utterance originates, we can see how the power to *say* — specific to humans — can by analogy be extended to inani-

mate subjects. Humans, however, differ from watches and public notices in that their inner states emerge in the consciousness as knowledge and belief. A *saying* human being, therefore, is articulating his inner state to others with parallel states. This linguistic articulation of beliefs is an act, because it is voluntary. It is an ethical act, because in it, language is employed not instrumentally (seen, for example, as "conveyance of the intentions of the speaker"), but for purposes of reciprocal articulation between human sayers who are original, answerable and free. Much as we would like to, we cannot avoid the *ought* which lurks in much contemporary speech-act theory; it is already instinct, I think, in Austin's characteristic conjunction of the true with the free. Perhaps we should openly acknowledge — with Habermas (1970) — that verbal acting is an exercise of responsibility, and that the operator *say* is the signal that its user is answerable. Put in other words, *saying* signals that we are exercising our responsibility linguistically rather than in the form of some other class of acts. Perhaps some Skinner of the eighties will write a book on "Verbal conduct".

Drawing a distinction between *say* and *tell* which is analogous to mine, Georgia Green (1974 : 174) quotes the sentences

1) A said to B that the air was polluted

and

2) A told B that the air was polluted

and comments that in sentence 2), A directly and intentionally affects B; whereas in sentence 1), "A presents B with something which B is free to accept or reject". Green's focus is on person B; mine is on person A. Her notion of the freedom of the person to whom something is *said*, however, entails the notion of a relationship which is far removed from the exchange in which A *tells* X to B.

The following notes briefly consider the relevance that a study of *saying* may have for three separate fields of inquiry: the linguistic description of English, the methodology of language teaching, and the understanding of the nature of literature.

I think that it is possible to regard *say*, not as something linguistically *sui generis* but on the contrary as just one member of an important but barely recognised functional language class. In his 1974 paper "*Be+ing* revisited", Adamczewski looks at the notorious "simple-continuous" contrast that runs through the English verb system. He rejects descriptions based on notions of duration, and finds the notion of "aspect" vague and unhelpful. He proposes instead that

la valeur centrale de *be+ing* est intimement liée à l'énonciation, que *be+ing* est en fait la trace en surface de la présence d'un énonciateur (Adamczewski 1974:46).

He compares the following two sentences:

- 60 He is always smoking cigars  
 61 He always smokes a cigar after lunch

and remarks

Dans [60] il s'agit d'un *always* issu directement de l'énonciateur qui porte un jugement sur le fumeur. Dans [61], *always* porte sur *after lunch*, et est simplement la constatation d'une régularité. Le polonais possède deux mots pour *always*: *wciąż* dans le sens de [60], et *zawsze* dans le sens de [61] (1974 : 49)

Sentence 60, then, offers an assertion (in this case, a judgment), issuing from the speaker; sentence 61 offers a message mediated by the speaker. If we were to report these utterances, I think that the concordant forms would be:

- 62 He said that Bill was always smoking cigars  
 63 He told me that Bill always smoked a cigar after lunch

One might therefore propose that one, at least, of the functions of the continuous forms of the English verb is to signal the engagement of the speaker, while the use of the simple forms does not do this. Whereas sentence 61 expresses a proposition of establishable truth or falsity, sentence 60 is the linguistic form of an act by the speaker.

This *engaging* : *non-engaging* contrast, represented at the syntactic level by sentences 60 and 61, is at the lexical level signalled not only by *say/tell*, but by a number of other pairs, in English. Testing a few sentences for concordance, we find:

- 64A He said that the trains would therefore be delayed  
 B \*He said that the reaction would thus be easy to foresee  
 65A He said that the cost of living, moreover, was rising fast  
 B \*He said that the students, besides, lacked interest  
 66A He said that Grant won the battle because he was a great general  
 B \*He said that Grant won the battle, for he was a great general

and, once more

- 36B He said that he had regretfully decided to resign  
 37B \*He said that Dixon had regrettably left his work unfinished  
 38B He said that they would certainly get help before nightfall  
 39B \*He said that they would surely get help before nightfall

Similar distinctions have quite often been drawn by linguists and philoso-



phers of language. Schwayder, for example, proposes that "there are regularized, conventional instrumentalities, often words, by which speakers systematically mean more than they say", and goes on to suggest that there is a class of "amphibolous" language items that specifically perform this function; a class exemplified by the modal *can*:

I claim that the very meaning of *can* routinely incorporates a kind of "amphiboly", according to which sentences which contain the word can be used to mean different things... The availability of words which are "amphibolous", in the manner of *can*, systematically enables us to better find our way through a world of unlimited variety with a finite vocabulary — and there is no other kind. These words provide a kind of cool and calculated alternative to figurative usage; they forestall the need for imagination because they systematically anticipate varieties still unmet (Schwayder 1972, *passim*).

Bar-Hillel (1970) invites us to distinguish between "type-sentences" whose token actualisations always refer to the same proposition, which has a logical truth-value; and type-sentences whose tokens refer to different propositions, having a truth-value whose status is controversial, to say the least. He compares

67A Ice floats on water

B The ice is floating on the water

The truth of 67A can confidently be stated as a dyadic relation between sentence and proposition; the truth-status of 67B emerges as a triadic relation between sentence, proposition and something mysterious which Bar-Hillel — and others — call "context".

I should like now to sketch three ways in which the present discussion may have a bearing upon language pedagogy. In the first place, it seems — in the light of the work of Adamczewski and others — that there is a dimension of used language that is refractory to structuralist presentation; items that exist in this dimension are inadequately described and therefore inadequately learned. This class of linguistic item is typified by *say*.

In the second place, our discussion may have implications for the validity of teaching materials. It raises the pedagogically crucial question: are learners (and especially young learners) responsive to sincerity and authenticity of utterance? And if they "switch off", may it be because they cannot hear anybody *saying* anything?

Thirdly, our notion of *say* supplies us with a possible definition of the teacher: the teacher institutionalises the activity of *saying*, as opposed to *telling* (the province of the trainer and instructor). A person may well repose belief in what he is authoritatively *told*; but, as a learner, his knowledge comes — if at all — from his inward consideration of what is *said* to him.

The territory which McIntosh (1965) attempts to open up, in characteristic solitude, is, I think, the same territory that I have tried to explore in the present paper. A brief examination of McIntosh's ideas will suggest a few very tentative thoughts about the nature of literary language.

McIntosh takes issue with a conception of language that is rooted in Malinowski and Firth, and still appears to thrive: "situation determines utterance". In fact, he argues, it is wrong to suppose that an utterance is simply a sort of "linguistic tail wagged by a situational dog". Practically always, it is the other way round: we infer situation from text. Even in so-called routine situations, we try to deck out the computerisable, *told*, message with all sorts of additional features that signal the unrepeatability of what we *say*. Sociolinguistics offers a model of language as a socially and situationally determined set of rituals, assessed in terms of "appropriacy". But the user of language knows that what he *says* is determined by his own assessment of a "situation" in terms of his own ends; seen in this light, linguistic behaviour is more or less "adequate", i.e. consonant with the utterer's inner states. (For the contrast between *appropriacy* and *adequacy*, see McIntosh 1966). For McIntosh, adequacy is the hallmark of literature. Explicitly, one might assert that the creation of *said* utterances is a necessary — though doubtless not a sufficient — function of the maker of literature. As we move along a spectrum from ordering a meal to writing a poem, appropriacy rapidly loses its fragile grip on our descriptive apparatus; as the identifiability of "situation" fades, so the figure of the *sayer* emerges; creating, at one level of analysis, new sentences; and, at another, authentic texts.

It is here, perhaps, that the difference between *say* and *tell* appears most profoundly. Language can be used to endorse the world; it can be used to interpret the world. We can *tell* things — transmit them, unrefracted; we can also *say* things, and, in the words of Zola, "un coin de la nature est vu à travers un tempérament". We may even be tempted by the stronger claim of Steiner: "Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is" (Steiner 1975 : 217). By *saying*, it seems, we can gainsay the actual world.

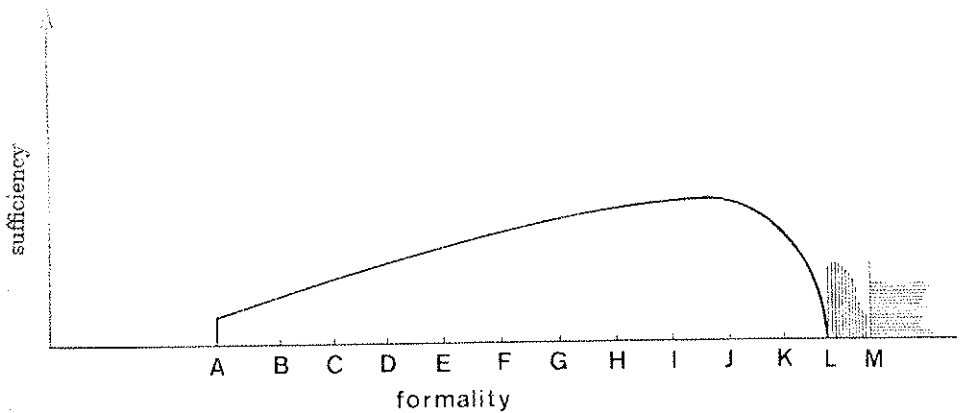
A word is dead  
When it is said  
Some say.  
I say it just  
Begins to live  
That day

(Emily Dickinson)\*

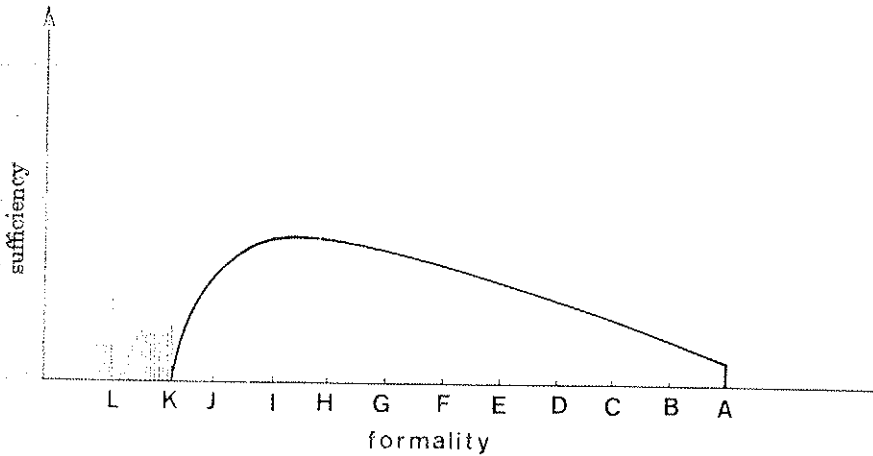
\* From: *Emily Dickinson: Poems*, No. lxxxix, p. 42 (ed. by Bianchi and Hamps, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1937).

## APPENDIX

## WRITTEN ENGLISH



## SPOKEN ENGLISH\*



\* The lower diagram is to be read as an exact reflection of the upper one.

Suggested instantiations of the positions on the axes of formality:

<i>Written English</i>	<i>Spoken English</i>
A chatty letter, graffiti	A rituals, performatives
B greeting card	B formal lecture
C ordinary letter	CD speech, public talk
D popular newspaper article	E explanation, lesson
E 'quality' newspaper article	FG debate, discussion
F recipes, instruction manuals	GH "conversation"
GH "literature"	I joke, anecdote, "story"
I legal, theological	J "phatic" chat
JK philosophical, scientific	K quarrel
LM symbolism	LM exclamations, etc.
M... iconography	M... gesture

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