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Many of the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences have as one of their principal tasks the analysis of bodies of language. These sets of utterances, especially when congealed into a fixed form that can become a common object of study for scholars, a text, provide unique insights into the human situation that no observation and measurement of mute behavior can duplicate. The text allows entry into the world of ideas. And we assume that that was the intent of the original utterances—to convey meaning to an audience, to make the speaker's or writer's thoughts accessible to another.

The scholar's task when faced with a text seems simple enough in its objectives. He tries to understand the meanings of that set of propositions, though of course the accomplishment of that objective is often far from simple. It seems obvious that texts are first and foremost to be analyzed and described in terms of their semantic content.

The Problem of Ritual Language

For students of religion, the texts that represent mythology or theology are those sets of propositions which serve as the preeminent embodiments of a tradition's belief system. But religion is not only a system of beliefs. It also involves human action towards the sacred and profane, namely, the element of ritual. While ritual has certainly not been ignored in religious studies, there has been a tendency to see it in terms of merely its actions—such as the classic studies of the structures of rites of passage by Van Gennep and of sacrifice by Hubert and Mauss. Or ritual is seen as merely an enactment of a tradition's beliefs, particularly, as the portrayal of a mythic narrative (as Eliade). But ritual is neither just speechless action nor concretized thought.

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It involves an inseparable combination of articulate speech and purposeful action. It is this liaison with language and the world of ideas that sets ritual activity apart from ordinary pragmatic behavior. Conversely, it is the embedding of utterances in the setting of ritual action that creates the problem of ritual language which this paper intends to explore.

A preliminary definition of "ritual language," then, would be that set of utterances which is intimately and essentially connected with the action context of a ritual. Ritual language is not just an instrument for conveying ideas, but is directly used in accomplishing the ends of the ritual operation. This basic fact gives ritual language a set of characteristics that distinguishes it from the discourses of mythology or theology.

First of all, and most notable on the surface, is the choppiness of liturgical texts in comparison with most other religious writings. From the ritual handbooks of the Vedic high cult to prayer books of the Jewish and Christian liturgies, what is immediately apparent is the multitude of short editorial divisions, quite unmistakably set off in the more contemporary printed editions by a variety of type sizes and conventions. Even ethnographic accounts of preliterate societies often choose to devote separate chapters to the verbal and manual components of a ritual because of the complexity involved in discussing their intricate interaction (as Lienhardt, chaps. 6, 7). The fundamental structure is the constant oscillation between citing the words to be spoken in the ritual and giving the directions for the actions to be performed. And in terms of content, liturgies seem by and large to lack the simple cohesiveness of treatises, with their logical movement through a topic, or of narratives, where settings, characters, and plot-progression both structure and unify the discourse. No liturgy that I have come across could be adequately described either in terms of a coherent argument on a topic or of a presentation of a connected story (though elements of both, particularly the latter, may figure prominently at some point). The type of thing or things said in a ritual appear to be much less neatly organized and thus harder to describe than the tightly knit set of utterances in the narrative or treatise. Or one is dealing with a different style of organization and internal coherence.

The most basic reason why language in ritual has such an apparently fractured character is its intimate connection with the context of ritual activity in which it is uttered. One of the first things that strikes one about liturgical utterances is the heavy usage of pronouns, adverbs, ellipses and the like that make reference to the immediate environment of the speaker and depend upon that context for their meaning. For example, the first-person pronouns "I" or "we" and the second-person pronoun "you" are commonly used in ritual discourse without introduction or explanation of their referents, since those would be the ritual participants themselves, who are sharing the same immediate situation as the speaker making the utterance. Such a cross-referencing to the contemporay context is in marked contrast to the

way narrative discourse predominantly relies on the third person and the past tense to present a situation removed in time and place from the speaker's and audience's shared present. To find the referent of a pronoun in a narrative, one looks for its antecedent in the text itself. The ritual utterance, as has been suggested, is more likely to make a coincident reference to something in the context.

Complicating the picture even more is the fact that the context to which ritual language frequently alludes is not just a set of meaningless acts and objects, but usually includes nonverbal symbol systems, such as gesture, movement, and the physical symbolism of ritual objects and their arrangement, which are also involved in expressing some message. This interaction with parallel symbol systems marks off ritual language as particularly distinct from other types of religious language. In ritual, the words spoken are not the only meaning-bearing elements. What this implies is that an examination of the words of the liturgy in isolation will reveal only part of the ritual's message. And this helps explain the lack of obvious coherence among the utterances of a ritual. The meaningful connecting link is often to be found only by looking to the "statement" being made in one of the nonverbal media. Simply to read and make sense, for example, of the Yajur Veda, the compendium of utterances spoken by one of the priests in a Vedic ritual, is virtually impossible without recourse to a set of notes supplied by an editor that explains the concurrent ritual activity and identifies the symbolic connotations of the objects being manipulated.

What all of this means for the person studying ritual language is that, unlike the case of mythological or theological discourses, semantic description and analysis of the content of the propositions are not sufficient. There must be a close examination of the complex sets of relationships that hold between a ritual utterance and its context of participants, objects, actions, and other symbols. The theory that informs the analysis of ritual language, therefore, must be one that recognizes and is capable of dealing with more than sentence meaning, but with sentence use in an action context as well.

From this perspective, how useful are some of the traditional categories used by scholars of religion to discuss ritual language? Not very, because of their oversimplified assumptions about the function and context of ritual utterances. A primary example is Friedrich Heiler, whose book *Prayer* begins with the premise that the spontaneous petitionary prayer of the individual to a deity is primary, all other forms of public religious expression being secondary (18 and 35, esp.). This unwarranted assumption biases an analysis of liturgy by defining ahead of time the expected context—a human in dialogue with a deity—and the essential function of the utterances—petition. Other scholars give a central place to such forms as the curse, the blessing, and the word of consecration, stressing the independent power attributed to ritual language, as opposed to its use in appealing to a willful deity. (An example is G. van der Leeuw: 403–10.) Each viewpoint does have

a fairly well-developed vocabulary for describing some of the variety of associated functions a ritual utterance may perform. On the one hand, there is recognition of such roles as the spell, the curse, the oath; or, associated with petition, categories such as praise, invocation, thanksgiving. However, those traditional terms are not precise in defining the way language functions in a particular ritual context, nor do they form an adequately comprehensive system. They have generally been accepted as self-explanatory, with very little critical discussion of the categories they are assumed to delineate. (The rather extensive literature on "religious language" unfortunately has very little to say about ritual language, concerning itself almost exclusively with how to assess the truth value of theological propositions.) Nor has their been an effort to scrutinize the range of those traditional vocabularies to insure that they are sufficient in breadth and detail to cover all possible types of ritual utterances, as well as truly capable of being generalized across the spectrum of religious traditions.

It is my conviction that the problem of adequately describing ritual language can be solved only by resorting to the most general categories used for the description of language itself. A theory of ritual language should be based on and grow out of the discussions in those disciplines involved in studying language at the most abstract level. And within the fields of linguistics and the philosophy of language, there is a growing consensus that the most basic way to talk about linguistic communication is in terms of the theory of speech acts.

The Theory of Speech Acts

The pioneering work in this area was done by the British philosopher J. L. Austin in his book *How To Do Things With Words*. His key insight was to recognize that utterances could be not only statements of fact but also the *doing* of something. Originally this was a distinction between utterances that acted to represent a situation ("constatives," e.g., statements, assertions) and those that acted to effect a situation by the mere fact of their being said ("performatives," e.g., promises, bets, such official pronouncements as a priest declaring a couple "husband and wife" or a judge rendering a person "guilty"). However, Austin came to the realization that all utterances have a performative aspect. To make any utterance is to accomplish an act. "Asserting" is an activity accomplished by language just as much as is "promising" (52, 91–93).

Austin discriminated a number of components and conditions involved in the performance of a speech act. Every speech act is seen as consisting of: (1) a "locutionary act"—the simple production of an utterance having certain phonetic, syntactic, and semantic characteristics; (2) an "illocutionary act"—the effect the speaker intends to produce in the hearer; and (3) a "perlocutionary act"—the actual effect the sentence has on a hearer (94–102). As an example, if someone were to yell, "Watch out!", the locutionary act is

just the yelling of those words; the illocutionary act is that of "warning"; and the perlocutionary act might be that a man ducked and looked around. The key concept here is that of the illocutionary act. It draws attention to the fact that the speaking of a sentence is, above all, *an act*, committed by the speaker with the purpose of producing a certain effect upon the hearer.

With this emphasis on an utterance as a purposeful act comes the requirement of looking beyond the mere words comprising it (the locutionary act) to the social setting and conditions under which it is spoken. Austin began an investigation of the set of conditions that must hold in order for there to be a successful (or, as he calls it, "felicitous" or "happy") performance of a particular speech act (15–19). An example will provide the readiest explanation. A successful performance of the command "Go home!" requires (among other conditions): (a) the proposal of some future act of the hearer (he is not presently at home); (b) the speaker believes that the hearer has a home and is capable of going there; (c) the speaker is in some position of authority over the hearer; (d) the speaker wants the hearer to go home. A violation of one of these conditions produces something other than a command, a "jest" being one possibility. The important implication is that one can develop a set of rules for a proper speech act, just as the study of syntax and semantics have attempted to do for well-formedness of sentences in terms of grammaticality and truth-value, respectively.

Some of the most sophisticated developments of Austin's original discussion have come in the recent work of John Searle. He begins by underscoring the absolute centrality of the concept of the speech act in the analysis of language. In unambiguous terms he proclaims, "The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, . . . but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act" (1968:16). And he reaffirms that it is the illocutionary force (the intended effect) of an utterance that is the most important concept for analyzing speech acts. It is the prime determinant of the kind of speech act an utterance represents and can be discussed independently of the utterance's "propositional content" (roughly equivalent to Austin's locutionary act) (1968:16, 23, 30). To cite one example, the sentences "John doesn't smoke" and "John, don't smoke!" have the same propositional content but different illocutionary forces (namely, that of a statement and that of a command, respectively). Finally, he develops a more systematic account of the set of conditions required for successfully accomplishing any particular speech act, the most important of these being rules governing (1) the propositional content of the utterance (as condition "a" in the example given above), (2) preparatory conditions, i.e., contextual features of the situation (as "b" and "c" above), and (3) the sincerity of the speaker's intention ("d" in the example) (1968:57–63).

The work of Searle, along with a growing number of other philosophers and linguists, has clearly placed the theory of speech acts among the leading

topics of discussion for anyone interested in understanding language. There is considerable disagreement over whether the illocutionary or the syntactic-semantic dimension of an utterance is primary, or even whether or not they can be made analytically distinct./1/ The majority viewpoint, however, seems to be that the competence to speak any language involves at least two distinct, though interacting, subsystems: a "syntacticosemantic" component and a "pragmatic" component, the latter dealing with how to use language in a social context./2/ And like the case of the syntactic and semantic aspects, this pragmatic side of language can be analyzed, according to many theoreticians, in terms of universally applicable categories and rules. That is, there is also a "grammar" with a finite set of criteria governing the ways one can acceptably use language in a social setting./3/ Our understanding of this grammar of pragmatics is, however, still in a state of relative infancy.

One area that is particularly crucial for developing a grammar of pragmatics is the delineation of a comprehensive but manageable list of the types of possible speech acts./4/ One of the first and still widely mentioned classificatory schemes was proposed by Austin at the end of *How To Do Things With Words* (148–62), though it is important to note the admitted tentativeness with which it was put forth. Perhaps the most significant advance over Austin's primitive classification has come in one of Searle's most recent works, "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts" (1975, and in the collected essays of 1979:1–29), where he explicitly criticizes Austin's categories. By factoring out the sets of common conditions governing various speech acts and based primarily on the criterion of "illocutionary point" (an abstract conception of the intended effect of an utterance which represents a genus in contrast to the specific "illocutionary force" characterizing any given utterance), he develops a classificatory scheme that puts all speech acts into five major divisions: (1) assertives (called "representatives" in the earlier edition of this work), whose function is to commit the speaker to the truth of an expressed proposition; (2) directives, which aim at getting the hearer to do something; (3) commissives, whose point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action; (4) expressives, which express some psychological attitude toward a state of affairs specified in the proposition; (5) declarations (a "performative" in Austin's earlier and narrrower use of the term), whose function is to bring about the state of affairs indicated in the proposition by the mere fact of their being said. To the best of my knowledge, this classificatory scheme represents the most advanced and comprehensive statement to date on what can be done with language./5/ It will serve as a touchstone and fundamental framework for the investigation of ritual language.

To summarize, the purpose for turning to the theory of speech acts is twofold. First, it is at the very least an essential, if not the most basic, perspective for understanding linguistic communication. Second, it gives emphatic and sophisticated consideration to the action context in which an utterance is involved. As Holdcroft notes, what illocutionary act an utterance

represents cannot be determined exclusively by examining its meaning (propositional content) but necessarily requires looking at the contextual features as well (169). In the previous section, I tried to show the particular necessity in the case of ritual for examining the details of the utterance's involvement with its nonlinguistic setting. The developments in the discussion of speech acts are, then, uniquely suited to aid in the understanding of ritual language.

But before simply appropriating these categories for our discussion, there is the need to face the problem that the theory of speech acts, though appearing to be applicable to all language in the most general and universal terms, does in fact spring from and largely confine itself to the domain of *ordinary language*. In the next section I will discuss how ritual language differs decidedly from what has been assumed as the norm of language use and will, therefore, demand some new theoretical constructs before it can be accommodated to a speech-acts analysis.

"Extraordinary" Characteristics of Ritual Speech Acts

The fundamental paradigm of the speech act in ordinary language, which most theoreticians have taken for granted, involves a simple set of components. One linguist, Roman Jakobson, has provided, in his words, "a concise survey of the constitutive factors in any speech event, in any act of verbal communication": "The Addresser sends a Message to the Addressee. To be operative the message requires a Context referred to . . . ; a Code fully, or at least partially common to the addresser and addressee . . . ; and finally, a Contact, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee" (353)./6/

A further standard assumption is that the message transmitted in an ordinary communication contains information, something which the speaker believes that the hearer does not already know. "To set up communication [between an addresser and an addressee], the signals must have at least some surprise value . . . or it is a waste of time to transmit them. . . . In this mathematical sense, information is measured in terms of the statistical rarity of signs" (Cherry:14).

Finally, the globalized set of rules or tacit agreement on the use of language which seems to be implicit in any ordinary conversation has been given explicit formulation by H. Paul Grice under the heading of the "Cooperative Principle." Conversations in usual circumstances are supposed to pay attention to the categories and heed the maxims that follow: with regard to (a) quantity—give as much and no more than necessary; (b) quality—speak the truth; (c) relation—be relevant; (d) manner—be perspicuous (45–50). (One might view these as a very generalized set of constraints on the felicitous performance of any ordinary speech act, thus representing a further abstraction of the kinds of conditions outlined by Austin and Searle, discussed above.)

An examination of the ways language typically functions in ritual shows a picture of the speech-act situation that differs at each point from the one sketched above. To begin with Grice's criteria, the maxim of quantity is immediately and constantly violated. The language of ritual is most often a fixed and known text repeated verbatim for each performance, and the constituents of the immediate ritual setting, to which the language of the liturgy will make frequent reference, are generally standardized and thus familiar to the participants, not needing any verbal explication. Therefore, practically every utterance of a ritual is superfluous from the perspective of ordinary conversational principles.

This would seem to be a universal characteristic of ritual even in preliterate societies, where the fixed "text" of the liturgy is not a written document, but a memorized set of recitations to be utilized in a precisely prescribed, standardized context of actions and objects. Even where there is not verbatim repetition of a fixed text, the general form of things said and done must necessarily conform closely to an established pattern—otherwise one could no longer speak of a "ritual." For a *sine qua non* of ritual recognized by most contemporary writers is *stereotyped behavior*, including linguistic behavior. That is, those who engage in a ritual are not entering a situation that is new or unfamiliar or indeterminate. Rather, they recreate in words and action an established, predetermined and paradigmatic situation. As Margaret Mead notes, this makes the creation of new rituals very difficult "because it is of the essence of ritual that those who participate in it have participated before" (90). Thus the rest of the discussion of ritual language will assume that it represents a fixed set or pattern of utterances (a "text" in both a strict and loose sense of the term), repeatedly associated in an intimate and essential way with the action context of a ritual, this context itself being standardized and familiar to the participants./7/

With regard to Grice's second criterion, it does seem that ritual discourse adheres to the criterion of speaking the truth (though every tradition seems to eventually produce critics who assail the emptiness, insincerity, or hypocrisy of ritualized pronouncements). However, its expression of the truth often takes a form that violates the principle of perspicuity. Ritual language is frequently couched in metaphorical phrases and relies on an understanding of the symbolic connotations of objects in the ritual context to which it makes reference. Ritual language, then, does not generally function to give the most lucid possible exposition to an untutored audience, but, quite the reverse, often assumes detailed prior knowledge of the matter presented. As one example, the Christian liturgy of the Eucharist, with its highly symbolic declarations of the mysterious identity of the consecrated bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ, like the central rituals of many religious traditions, is meant for the responsible participation of initiates who have already been taught its essential meaning.

An even more extreme instance of the lack of concern for lucidity in ritual discourse is its prominent employment of a sacred or priestly language which has become far removed from the vernacular (e.g., Latin, Hebrew, Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic). In discussing this phenomenon, the anthropologist Stanley Tambiah concludes that "in ritual, language appears to be used in ways that violate the communication function" (1968:179).

The criterion of relevance at work in ritual discourse is also markedly different from ordinary language. This can be seen in terms of the dynamic of relationships among the speakers in a ritual. In ordinary conversation, discussion proceeds when the hearer is motivated to give a relevant reply to the speaker's preceding remark. Relevance is an open-ended chain of *sequiturs* produced by the speakers within the immediacy of the conversation. Ritual discourse, however, proceeds according to the form dictated by the text or the traditional pattern. Relevance is a prearranged, closed system of connections imposed externally upon the speakers, who may, therefore, not themselves understand the logic of the liturgical sequences.

It is also often the case that the person who speaks is not the one to whom the preceding remarks were addressed. Since the language of religious ritual is frequently directed toward spiritual entities who do not themselves speak back, the discourse has very little of the characteristics of a dialogue. Instead, one finds something that looks more like a chorus or orchestra—a succession (or even a simultaneity) of phrases that follow the cues of form (not content) and are directed to a nonspeaking "audience" (not to the prior speaker). This characteristic pattern of ritual discourse might well be called "orchestrated," as opposed to the "responsive" pattern of ordinary language conversation. The pattern of relevance in a ritual differs from ordinary language, therefore, in that it is consciously prearranged and held in common by the participants—proceeding from a prior act of "orchestration" whose "score" the members of the ritual "orchestra" follow together in the ritual performance—as opposed to being guided only by the immediate responses of one individual after another.

Turning to the constitutive factors of a speech event outlined by Jakobson, we see that the ritual speech act differs first of all in that its code and medium of contact—for example, Church Latin and the medium of sound—are not the unique, nor often even the primary, means of conveying the ritual's message. There are codes other than the spoken language, such as the particular tradition's set of key symbols or the "language" of bodily gestures and postures. And media besides the sonic are used, for example, in the visual presentation of symbols, the kinesthetic experience of participating in the bodily movements, or even through such olfactory symbolism as burning incense. So it is not a simple case of language's being augmented by accompanying gestures or facial expressions which serve to convey some message of mood or emphasis that explicates the verbal message. The situation is often just the reverse, with the verbal message being used to clarify and augment the independent symbolic expressions in the other media.

In terms of the context to which ordinary conversation will make reference, there is the assumption that it is given, something logically prior to the language which will passively reflect it. However, in the case of ritual language what comes first is the *text* of the ritual, the speaking of which will *create* the context. That is, the components of a ritual situation with their particular identities and characteristics do not become manifest until the liturgy is uttered. When the utterances of a Vedic priest, for example, identify parts of his body with those of a deity ("I look at you with the eye of Mitra") or equate the sacrificial objects with cosmic forces ("You [butter] are light; you are truth"), they are not responding to cues from the context as in ordinary indicative phrases, but are themselves defining the identity of those elements of the ritual context (more examples can be found in Wheelock: 356–60). As another illustration of the way ritual language produces its own context, there is the use of the words of consecration in the Christian Mass to turn the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The words, "This is my body. . . . This is my blood," are, however, also the affirmation of what one believes to be the identity of the bread and wine at this moment. In general, then, ritual utterances serve both to engender a particular state of affairs, and at the same time express recognition of its reality. Text and context become manifest simultaneously.

The very basic requirement that an ordinary speech event involves a speaker and a hearer is one that is often lacking in ritual speech acts. Frequently one finds ritual utterances that are said by oneself (as by a priest isolated in one portion of the ritual arena), or to oneself (said silently or in a low, inaudible tone). The Yajur Veda, to cite one example, is a compendium composed almost entirely of short formulas that are to be muttered in a low voice during a Vedic sacrifice. While much of this could be interpreted as intended for the ears of invisible spiritual beings, a close scrutiny of the language of specific liturgies (my own familiarity with Vedic rituals in particular bears out this point) shows that just as often no second-person addressee is given or implied in such instances. Perhaps more typical is the case where all the participants in the ritual form a global first-person plural, a "we" that speaks in unison to itself and not to any audience—for example, the recitation of the creed in the Mass, where all references to the Trinity are in the third person with no indication of any second-person addressee. Such features of ritual language, along with its already mentioned "orchestrated" character, indicate that it follows a very different model of language use from that of a speaker-hearer dialogue, with its constantly alternating exchange of information between the two parties. This leads to a final point.

The most essential distinguishing feature of ritual utterances is that they are speech acts that convey little or no information. Because the language of ritual is based on a fixed text (meaning a written document, memorized set of utterances, or traditionally prescribed pattern) that is known or accessible to the participants before they engage in the performance of the rite, the

actual uttering of the words tells no one anything they did not already know. The often repeated texts of rituals that recur at short intervals are, in fact, quite likely to be memorized by lay people and priests alike. Quite obviously, then, from the standpoint of information theory, which says that the amount of information carried by an utterance declines in direct proportion to the predictability of its content, such completely predictable utterances of memorized rituals carry no information at all. The anthropologist A. F. C. Wallace reaches the same conclusion about ritual, generally, in his discussion of "stereotyped communication" as the "essential nature of the ritual process." In summary he says, "Ritual may, perhaps, most succinctly be classified as communication without information" (233–36). The fact that it is not possible to abbreviate or summarize the verbal content of a ritual and have that count as a legitimate performance also shows that imparting of information is not the central task of ritual language.

The listing of factors in this section that distinguish ritual language indicates, finally, that the conditions governing the proper performance of a ritual speech act differ significantly from those associated with an ordinary speech act. This leads to the necessary conclusion that the general *purpose* or illocutionary force of ritual utterances must be different from those of ordinary language utterances. And all of the factors discussed have pointed to *one*, most basic, underlying difference in purpose. *My proposal is that one must make a broad distinction between all those speech acts whose fundamental intention is the communication of* information *between a speaker and a hearer, and those speech acts whose intention is to create and allow the participation in a known and repeatable* situation. *This thesis implies that the language of any ritual must be primarily understood and described as "situating" rather than as "informing" speech.*

Situating Speech

In explicating this concept, the first thing that needs to be said is that I regard situating and informing speech as two major genera of illocutionary point. (Whether there are other such genera, I am not certain, though I do think that there would not be a great number more.) Subsumed under these two major headings would be the more specific illocutionary points, asserting, directing, and so on, associated with Searle's five classes of illocutionary acts. (As to whether or not this taxonomy will be superseded, I am also in doubt. But for now, given my additions to it, I still find it paradigmatic.) From this perspective, then, one is dealing not with distinct "languages" (situating versus informing), but with two of the basic functions of which language generally is capable. The utterances of rituals would represent one major class of situating speech acts. (Rituals could, however, certainly contain some elements of informing speech—as the Vedic "wish-offerings," rituals altered for a particular desire, or the special prayers for the sick read

during the Mass. Note that even these will nonetheless conform to an established pattern.) Other cases of situating speech could be found in the realms of drama, where well-known works are still heard with appreciation time after time, or civil ceremonies, or the "interaction rituals" of everyday conversation, with their standardized phrases about one's health or the weather./8/

If one accepts the analysis to this point and will grant the division between informing and situating speech, the next question might be, what would be the taxonomy of situating speech acts? Obviously, ritual utterances will *look* like ordinary language assertives, directives, and so on. And it seems only natural to assume that the classes of illocutionary acts under situating speech will be analogous to those delineated by Searle for informing speech. The problem is to be able to say what the illocutionary point is, for example, of a third-person present indicative utterance in a ritual. One cannot say, as in the ordinary language case, that the speaker's intention in uttering such a sentence is to represent a state of affairs to some hearer, because the other participants in the ritual, since they are familiar with the ritual text from prior repetitions, already know of that state of affairs (and the speaker knows they know).

Because the text precedes the actual enactment of a ritual situation (the text of what to say next being in the performer's head—or hand, if there is use of a written text), an indicative utterance does not represent the speaker's perception of a past or present state of affairs. The speaking of the text *presents* the situation. It facilitates recognition of the situation (thus reversing the normal relation of an assertive to its context), it expresses this recognition (like an assertive), and it actually helps to create the situation (the function of a declaration). For example, when the priest in a Vedic sacrifice picks up a bundle of grass, he says, "I pick you up with the arms of Indra." From one point of view, this utterance has been used like a declaration to alter the status of the subject, to create an identity between parts of the priest's body and those of a deity—just as the statement, "I now pronounce you husband and wife," when uttered by an appropriate authority in the context of a marriage ceremony, alters the status of the principal participants. However, from another perspective, the ritual reality of the priest's identity with Indra at that point in the rite is a well-established fact to which the utterance gives expression. It seems that in situating speech, the functions of informing speech assertives and declarations have collapsed into one category.

But the basic function of a declaration—bringing about the state of affairs it describes by the mere fact of its utterance—would seem to characterize the situating speech versions of directives, commissives, and expressives, as well. Thus the uttering of an expressive—as when the patron of a Vedic sacrifice says, "By the sacrifice to the gods for Agni may I be food-eating," or in the frequent "[May] the Lord be with you" of the Mass—does not *reflect* an attitude that has spontaneously arisen in the speaker, but rather *presents* this attitude to him as that which is appropriate in the situation because

called for by the text of the ritual. The uttering of those wishes will indicate to the speakers what they, as pious performers of that ritual, should hope for—and it will also be a true statement of what the performers do in fact wish, if they are sincere and have faith in the ritual's efficacy. The utterance has indeed brought about the state of affairs it describes by the mere fact of its being spoken.

Previous writers (most notably, Tambiah, 1973) have made the observation that the belief among many preliterate societies that words uttered in ritual can really change the status of the involved objects—the so-called "magical power of words" (see Tambiah, 1968)—should be seen, quite simply, as an instance of language being used "performatively," that is, with the function of a declaration. (See also the article by Gill.) This is an important insight, which has provided an impetus for many of the ideas developed in my discussion. There are some problems, however, in insisting, as does Tambiah, that since the key words in a ritual (in combination with certain deeds) function as performatives (declarations), their claim to produce some real change in the state of affairs can only be judged normatively according to criteria of felicity appropriate to speech acts—that is, whether the words were uttered and the ritual acts performed according to that society's conventionally defined rules for a proper performance. Criteria of scientific verification of the changes in status purportedly effected by the ritual utterances, he says, would be inappropriate for us to apply (1973:224).

Here I must agree with the analysis by Skorupski, who insists, instead, that one must distinguish between the efficacy attributed to declarations/performatives (which he places under the broader label of "operative acts") and causal agency. "Operative acts are produced, then, by being *said* to be produced (the 'saying' need not be verbal, of course); to bring about natural effects, on the other hand, is more than a matter of laying down that they should hold" (103). He goes on to claim that traditional societies fail to make such a distinction and thus believe that operative acts do effect an ontological change (108). Searle makes the same kind of distinction between what he calls "institutional" and "brute" facts. The former are conventionally agreed upon social states of affairs that can be brought about by the action of a declaration; the latter are the facts of nature which are not capable of alteration by mere social convention (1969:33–42, 50–53)./9/

My proposal, that the efficacy of ritual language be seen in terms of its ability to create a situation, can avoid blurring the distinction between conventional and natural effects by interpreting the situation engendered as only a *conventional, linguistic reality—from the viewpoint of the scholarly observer.* The additional question of the *participants'* belief in the reality of the effect generated by the ritual can be addressed separately and should be open to judgments of its validity.

The concept of situating speech differs further from the existing discussions of ritual utterances as performatives/declarations in that it emphasizes

that *all* the repeated utterances of the fixed ritual text are acting as declarations in a very specific fashion. There is not just the global effect upon the ritual subject brought about by the cumulative action of the component words and deeds of the rite. Rather, each utterance is seen as presenting or bringing into being some element of the predetermined situation that the ritual re-enacts.

Another point differentiating situating speech from ordinary language declarations is the capacity of the former—in fact, its prime distinguishing intention—to constantly repeat the transformations it brings about. It would be very strange to think of ordinary declarations as being periodically reperformed, e.g., a weekly uttering of the marriage pronouncement, or a monthly gathering to repeat a judge's guilty verdict. Ordinary language declarations do intend to convey some information, namely, the change in conventional status of the subject, even if this is only making official a state of affairs about which there is little doubt. And the changes effected are usually one-time transformations that do not need continual re-enactment. (Even to call a base-runner "out" several times in one game is not repetition, but a series of new declarations responding to different situations.)

To sum up, the categories within the genus of situating speech will look like ordinary language assertives, directives, commissives, and expressives; but all will have something of the nature of a declaration, though, as I have just argued, the exact illocutionary point being distinctive of situating speech. The illocutionary force of the situating speech acts can be characterized as presenting some constituent of an already known, and repeatable, situation. The complete taxonomy of situating speech acts that I would propose (giving in parentheses the grammatical form most typically associated with each category)/10/ is as follows:

1. Presentation of Characteristics (indicative)
2. Presentation of Requests (imperative, interrogative)
3. Presentation of Intentions (first-person future indicative)
4. Presentation of Attitudes (optative)

These correlate with Searle's categories of assertives, directives, commissives, and expressives, respectively.

I have already given examples of how indicative utterances can define the characteristics of some of the actors and objects involved in a ritual; and the function of optative expressions in presenting the attitudes of the performers has also been demonstrated. In a similar fashion, the uttering of an imperative in a ritual (like the request of the patron of a Vedic sacrifice, "Impell towards us [O Agni] vigor and refreshment") is not intended to convey information to a hearer about what the speaker wants the hearer to do. Even in requests directed to spiritual beings, the assumption must be that they, too, are regarded as being completely familiar with the fixed liturgy. Instead, the imperative utterance presents to the ritual performer a request deemed suitable by the tradition and establishes him in a petitionary relationship with

the divine power. Finally, the element of the proper intention that should characterize the ritual actors is provided by first-person future utterances, such as the Vedic patron's commitment at the start of a sacrifice, "O Agni, Lord of the Vow, I will perform the vow." This taxonomy, then, provides a comprehensive inventory of the kinds of functions that can be performed with situating speech.

The idea of ritual language creating and allowing participation in a situation, rather than conveying information, came about primarily in answer to the question, what activity *can* be accomplished repeatedly in language? While exchange of information decreases with repetition, situations are endlessly repeatable. Communication of information is a dynamic process of transformation with a marked directionality, difficult to reverse (that is, to erase and replace information, as in "brain-washing"), and thus yields diminishing returns with repetition. And because communication of information involves the process of *knowing*, it can be abbreviated or summarized. Situations, on the other hand, because they also represent *being* or *action* rather than just knowing, must and can be concretely realized at every repetition. In a situation, a set of existing physical entities come together in a delimited space and time and interact in accordance with a culturally predefined set of roles and relationships. The repeatability of the situation has a double foundation. First, the physical entities involved—the human participants, the various objects—have an ongoing existence, enabling them to be repeatedly brought together in time and space. Secondly, the roles and relationships which govern and define the interaction of the assembled entities also have an ongoing existence. They are existing elements of the culture that can be repeatedly used to give order to an aggregate of objects collected at a particular time and place. The utterances of a ritual can be repeated because they are the chief means by which the physical and the cultural entities unite in the production of a situation. In sum, this is not to say that situating speech is noncognitive, only that the cognitive aspect does not exhaust its function. In ritual, there must occur the fact of the concrete articulation of the liturgical utterances despite the fact that their content is already known.

The necessity of using language to create a situation seems to be particularly acute in the case of religious ritual. In everyday social settings, the overt physical stimuli are usually adequate clues to the nature of the situation in which one is involved. The context, objects, and human participants are, for the most part, identifiable from their tangible characteristics before any words are spoken. Religious ritual, on the other hand, produces situations that are difficult to recognize from their mere appearance for two reasons: first, the common role of invisible "spiritual" beings or abstract forces, which of course have no perceptible presence in the situation; and, second, the tendency to give many of the objects or actions comprising the situation a "symbolic" import. In the former case, one could say that the

variety of spiritual and sacred principles with which interaction is posited in the ritual are solely creations of the language uttered. That is, for an outside observer, they possess only a linguistic reality. And in terms of symbols used in a ritual, there is certainly the implication that they represent or refer to something other than what they as objects or actions ordinarily and obviously mean. Language is often necessary to make explicit or even to confer this nonobvious, symbolic identity./11/

Since ritual makes use of a fixed text, the situation being enacted through the liturgical utterances is not something new, but a repetition. Therefore, the language involved is not being used by the participants to communicate their individual perceptions of a novel and potentially ambiguous situation and thereby to attempt to control its definition. On the contrary, the use of a repeated text shows that there is a pre-existing mutual agreement as to the nature of the situation. The "orchestrated" discourse pattern (discussed above) further attests to this. The goal of each speaker's utterance is not to reply in some relevant fashion to the content uttered by the previous speaker, but to complete a shared, predetermined sketch of the entire situation.

The use of language to enact a well known and agreed upon situation has received some prior comment from social scientists. Some particularly insightful observations with potentially broad ramifications have come from Basil Bernstein, as reported and discussed in Mary Douglas's *Natural Symbols*. Bernstein distinguishes two types of speech: (1) that which is characteristic of small-scale, very local social settings where all members have access to and share the same fundamental assumptions; the purpose of utterances in this case becomes the affirming of the social order; (2) speech employed in social settings where the participants do not necessarily accept or even know one another's basic assumptions; utterances here serve primarily to make explicit unique individual perceptions (in Douglas:42). Douglas goes on to show how groups of the former sort will generally tend to value and maximize ritual activity, while the latter type will be more antiritual in orientation. The key contribution made by Bernstein and Douglas is to emphasize that ritualized forms of human intercourse are not deviations from a norm (descriptively or even prescriptively conceived) of spontaneous interaction; and, particularly important for this study, a ritualized form of discourse is not really extraordinary, to be explained as a parasitic offshoot of "ordinary" language. The model of linguistic communication, I would conclude, needs to include both the informing and the situating functions of language, giving equal recognition to the role of language in distributing information among individuals to increase their common understanding and its role in repeatedly re-enacting a situation that is understood in common by a group.

And why should the situations of religious ritual be constantly repeated? It must be because the tradition finds meaning and value in them. Various scholars of religion have recognized that basic to ritual is the repetition of a

paradigm or archetype that expresses the fundamental values and most important lessons of a religious tradition./12/ This may be the gods' mythic deeds of creation that gave man an ordered world, which are rehearsed and celebrated in the Vedic sacrifice; or the example of divine concern for man and human response to the divine, commemorated in the Christian Mass.

Such ritual situations are not viewed as something isolated from the rest of one's life, valued only for the experience produced in the participants during its performance. Certainly, most traditions look upon their rituals as efficacious actions whose influence extends outward in time and space. For the patron of a Vedic sacrifice, this would mean a belief that the gods would reward the pious sacrificer by once again performing those deeds that would insure the world's order and bounty. One of the effects some contemporary Christian writers see (potentially) coming from participation in the church's liturgy is a moral social order. As one author says of Christian ritual, it is a "characterizing activity. . . . [It] both forms and expresses persons in the beliefs, the emotions, and the attitudes appropriate to the religious life" (Saliers:175). While this author is arguing for the power of ritual to extend beyond the limits of its performance and influence the total moral life of an individual, notice that his statement aptly describes the effect and purpose of situating language, as I have been presenting it. That is, *within* the context of the ritual, language has the active capacity to "characterize" the participants.

It is this power of language in ritual to engender an idealized situation that has been the focus of this paper, and it is clear that the creation and participation in that situation precedes whatever external effects the ritual is believed to have. This ritual situation is seen as having value in its own right. For example, among the Navajo, their curing ceremonies are viewed as re-enactments of the healing of a mythical hero by spiritual beings (the "Holy People") (Gill:145). Participation in this idealized situation is believed to bring health to the patient. However, commenting on this procedure, Gill says, "Navajo ceremonials must be considered as religious events in which Navajos participate in the meaningful way of life revealed to them by the Holy People at the beginning of time. . . . It is meaningful to those who perform it not simply because it cures physical ailments, but because it performs the acts which institute and maintain a particular way of life" (153).

It is largely through the utterances of the liturgy that the ritual participants can create and enact the roles and relationships of an idealized situation and partake of the value traditionally assigned to them. The actual utterance of the words of the liturgy, which will include such very personal elements as expressions of attitudes and intentions, causes one to take on the identity of a cultural ideal. The formalized role is put into your mouth to speak and comes out as your own responsible perception of and involvement in the situation. The first person of the ritual text comes to life as the "I" or "we" of the participants who speak the liturgy and who then proceed to fashion around themselves a whole world made of language.

Conclusions

The concept of ritual language as situating speech has some important implications for the analysis of specific liturgies. First of all, it prevents the category mistake of regarding utterances simply as conveyors of information. One would, then, avoid such fallacious perspectives as interpreting ritual discourse to be primarily a dialogue with supernatural beings, with its misleading use of an ordinary, conversational model of language use. Even the contemporary discussion of ritual as a communication system whose primary purpose is to transmit culturally valued information would appear, then, to be a misinterpretation of the real force behind the production of meaningful statements in ritual—either in verbal or other symbolizing media. (One example would be Turner, esp. pp. 1–2, where he analyzes ritual symbols as "storehouses of information.") As I have argued, the information content of the ritual message has usually been already mastered by the participants. The "message" of the ritual is less an idea to be taught and more a reality to be repeatedly experienced.

Secondly, by deriving the idea of situating speech from theoretical discussions of ordinary language speech acts, I was able to devise a taxonomy that represents a comprehensive and universally applicable inventory of the types of things one can accomplish with ritual language. The entire set of utterances of any liturgy can be completely catalogued using the same set of general terms, implying, therefore, the ability to compare liturgies of different traditions./13/

Furthermore, the idea of the situations as being created with speech can be analytically useful. The different categories of the taxonomy in effect stand for the basic elements used in this process of linguistic construction—from the static characteristics of the involved constituents, to the delineation of the more dynamic relationships between participants based on requests, and finally to the intimate components of the speakers' personal intentions and attitudes. Beyond these broad categories, the situations can be sketched in even greater specificity by following the structures inherent in every speech act—e.g., the grammatical person of the subject (first, second, or third person) and the major syntactic constituents of a sentence (subject, verb, and objects) which outline the primary components of the situation and their relationship./14/ The process is like that of chemical analysis, beginning with the most elementary and common subatomic units, then identifying the more complex and variegated atomic forms, and finally specifying the set of molecular components comprising the particular substance under scrutiny. The result is the decomposition of the liturgy into its basic constituents with the precision to view them at varying levels of generality or specificity. One will have discovered the building blocks which the text of the liturgy blends together in differing proportions to manufacture the complex religious situation continually re-enacted in the ritual.

NOTES

/1/ This can be expressed as a debate between those who take communication (pragmatics) as fundamental, encompassing theories of meaning, and those who see meaning as wholly determined by syntactic and semantic rules, independently of the context of communication. A good overview of the issues on both sides can be found in D. Holdcroft (1–13) and Lyons (778–79).

/2/ This formulation I have taken from J. Morgan (289). While still maintaining the primacy of the syntactic component, Noam Chomsky in one of his latest books admits that he sees a system of "pragmatic competence" interacting with the grammatical competence in the mature cognitive state of knowing how to speak a language (3). It seems clear, then, that hardly any philosopher of language or linguist is today willing to ignore the centrality of a theory of speech acts.

/3/ Searle goes to great lengths to emphasize that the study of speech acts is concerned with *langue* (the abstract language system) not with *parole* (the actual speech uttered by some speaker) (1969:17). Holdcroft also argues that this is the case despite the fact that a speech-acts account necessarily involves looking at the concrete context of each utterance. This is because, in his view, the contextual features relevant to determining the illocutionary act represented by a given utterance are finite, fairly objective, and probably universal (163).

/4/ Few people working on this problem would still agree with Wittgenstein's emphasis on the sheer multiplicity of language uses ("games") and the claim that they were irreducible to a few fundamental categories with a hierarchy of common properties. Wittgenstein's position is put forth throughout his *Philosophical Investigations* (esp. 1–13, 31–32, 102). Lyons gives a linguist's criticism when he says, "There are some hundreds of basic performative verbs in English; and it is clearly unsatisfactory to have a theory which leaves all the acts denoted by these verbs distinct and unrelated" (736).

/5/ I will comment below (n. 6) on one other frequently encountered scheme of language functions and why I feel it does not supersede Searle's.

/6/ From this model Jakobson has developed a very influential outline of language functions. Based on which of the six factors in a speech event is being emphasized, he delineates the following functions: referential, emotive, conative (imperative), phatic, metalingual, and poetic (353–57). The first three correspond to Searle's categories of assertives, expressives, and directives. The last three derive, respectively, from a concern for establishing and maintaining contact, for discussing the code itself, and for the aesthetic form of the message. Note that these functions, however, are not generated from a speech-acts perspective. That is, they do not take illocutionary force, the speaker's intended effect on the hearer, as the primary criterion. Rather, what distinguishes most of these categories is their propositional content—whether they are utterances about the speaker, or the context, or the code, etc. A short history of the influences on Jakobson's classification is given by Lyons (50–55).

/7/ The best representative of the fixed nature of rituals would be that kind which recurs at periodic intervals. In such cases, the heart of the ritual is its invariant, predictable character, despite possible changes in the environment in which it is performed. But even the occasional rituals that are staged in response to environmental changes will show a fixity of form that encompasses the particularities of the

situation. For example, illness among the Navajo is traditionally treated by the performance of a particularly suited healing ceremony. This will consist of a fixed set of actions and recitations led by a special "singer" who has memorized the complex proceedings (see the description by Gill). There certainly are cases where such occasional rituals do not utilize a fixed liturgy that is repeated verbatim. But the language of such rituals will nonetheless fall within the boundaries of a set pattern. Among the Dinka, for example, Lienhardt asked the priests ("masters of the fishing-spear") to recite for him hypothetical invocations for various problems that might call for a sacrifice. He observed that these invocations, "composed without the stimulus of a specific occasion, show[ed] the general structure of an invocation and the pattern according to which those made on specific occasions are constructed" (231). Within the framework of a particular Dinka sacrifice, the criterion of quantity is certainly violated by having each new phrase of the principals' speeches repeated over and over again in a rhythmic chant by the gathered audience (219).

/8/ A future project will be trying to characterize the difference between the situating speech acts of religious ritual and such other forms of repeated discourse as drama and civil ceremonial. I would suggest a first step toward that end would be to distinguish ritual language and drama on the dimension of the *reality* accorded to the engendered situations by the participants. Useful concepts in this regard come from Douglas in talking about the "efficacy" attributed to ritual action (26); and Searle's discussion of fiction as "pretending" to perform various illocutionary acts (1979:65–70).

The kind of repetitive, noninformative use of language in routine encounters between people Malinowski called its "phatic" function (309–16). By this he means the use of language simply to keep open the channels of communication between members of a group, with no real concern for the content of what is being said. A more recent discussion of such "interaction code behavior," however, emphasizes its importance in establishing a "mutual agreement among the people involved in an interaction as to their relative standing or roles, and their reciprocal commitments and obligations" (Skorupski:77). One might say, then, that such standardized phrases of greeting are repetitions of the valorized situation of concern and civility that should characterize social life.

/9/ It is worth noting that the article by Ruth Finnegan ("How To Do Things With Words: Performative Utterances Among the Limba of Sierra Leone"), which represents perhaps the first application of Austin's speech-acts concepts to ritual activity, and which was an explicit influence on Tambiah, demonstrated rather clearly the social and conventional limits appropriate to a characterization of the power of performatives. She gives as examples of typical Limba performatives such pronouncements as "I accept," "I announce," "I plead," all of which are used in formal negotiations of a quasi-legal nature (538). Generally she argues for including under the heading of performatives those sets of words that show recognition and confirmation of certain social relationships (549). There is no implication given that the "magical power of words" should also be subsumed under a simple performative model.

/10/ The mood of the verb (a much more transparent feature in such highly inflected languages as Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin than in English) is one of the most important "illocutionary force indicators," along with such other characteristics as word order, stress, and explicit performative prefixes (Searle, 1969:30). However,

these built-in features of the utterance are hardly ever sufficient determinants of the exact illocutionary force, that depending upon the context of utterances as well.

/11/ Roland Barthes notes that "many semiological systems (objects, gestures, pictorial images) have a substance of expression whose essence is not to signify; often they are objects of everyday use, used by a society in a derivative way to signify something." And he stresses the absolute primacy of audible speech among all semiological systems (41, 10).

/12/ Some of the writers who express this view are M. Eliade on the ritual repetition of "archetypes" (1–47); V. Turner, who says that in ritual behavior one must stay in "the channels marked out by custom, through which collective action should flow" (269); M. Douglas, noting that rituals serve to encode a culture's "cosmology" (9–10).

/13/ A necessary item on the agenda for a comparative analysis of liturgies will be the systematic collection and discussion of religious illocutionary verbs in different traditions (e.g., "to consecrate," "to invoke," "to pray," or a similar list in Sanskrit from Hindu ritual texts).

/14/ Many of these features of an utterance are "indexical" (or "deictic"), tying it to the specific context of utterance. The category of person, for example, shows the relation between the grammatical subject and the speaker of the utterance; or the tense of the verb indicates temporal position in relation to the moment of utterance. (See the discussion by Searle, 1979:79.) The type of analysis suggested here has been performed by me for a Vedic ritual in "A Taxonomy of the Mantras in the New- and Full-Moon Sacrifice."

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