

## IS THERE AN ILLOCUTIONARY ACT OF ASSERTION?

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### Abstract

This contribution analyzes Cappelen's No-Assertion view arguing that, although appealing, the No-Assertion view is based on a questionable premise, namely, that assertions are sayings. Austin's notions of locution and saying are examined, in order to show that illocutionary acts concern aspects not covered by either of the previous two terms. Following a reconstructed definition of illocutionary act from Austin's writings, I suggest that assertion is an illocutionary act, in that it takes effect after it is taken up by a hearer. I further suggest that in this respect the game analogy fails with regard to assertion, since no rules of the constitutive kind or norms can intrinsically define this act. This proposal is based on the idea that illocutionary act analysis should dispose of any preoccupations with propositions. It argues that expressing propositions was not originally and should not be at the core of speech act theoretic problematic.

**Key words:** assertion, illocutionary act, proposition

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Austin's theory, despite its fragmentary nature, influenced research in pragmatics by its emphasis on the action character intrinsic to some cases of language use. Partly due to the incompleteness of Austin's notes, and partly due to the numerous alternative explanations of the nature of the phenomenon he was interested in (and the fact that subsequent attempts at elaborating a complete theory of speech acts came to be better known than the original theory, e.g. Searle's, 1969, 1979), the taxonomy of these speech acts still provokes heated debates. Although the terminology remains virtually unchanged, opinions vary about whether or not a particular phenomenon is an instance of a particular type. In the last decade or so, there have been numerous attempts at providing a satisfying account of asserting; normative accounts being the most popular (be it knowledge, belief or truth norms).

Exemplified typically by the utterance of a declarative sentence ( used here in the syntactic sense), this particular act is puzzling, in that it can contain a proposition which can be informative (in the preferred sense of Brandom, 1983). Regardless of the perspective adopted by various accounts of assertion, the informative proposition appears to be at their core. Accounts of assertion typically involve propositions in their description: knowledge that  $p$  (Williamson, 2000), belief that  $p$  (Lackey, 2008), that  $p$  is true (Jäger, 1970). Even Stalnaker (1979, 1998) in his purely pragmatic approach states that assertion adds a certain content  $p$  to context. In Searle's view on speech acts assertion changes a lot, the most widely known description being the "undertaking to the effect that  $p$  is true" (Searle 1969). Jary (2010) in his combined approach of blending different perspectives (philosophical, linguistic and psychological) suggests an account of assertion which focuses on the role of the declarative mood in utterance interpretation, according to which assertions depict the proposition contained therein as 'relevant in its own right' (p.4).

In an article, Cappelen (2011) takes a No-Assertion view by arguing primarily against normative accounts of assertion. According to Cappelen, the difficulty of providing a correct characterization of assertion lies in the different explanations yielded by different theoretical needs. What remains stable is the expressing of the proposition which is liable to various contextual requirements and norms. Such a view is certainly appealing in more than one respect: it has the advantage of being based on a purely pragmatic theory of context providing the interpretative environment for utterances. It also accounts for those thorny cases in which either the belief usually

associated with asserting or other requirements (e.g. for knowledge) are suspended. I find Cappelen's objections to the norm accounts valid. However, I do not believe that these objections succeed in arguing the case in favor of the proposed No-Assertion view. In particular, the No-Assertion view is said to be based on Austin's notion of saying, which I find to be a very questionable premise. Further, the No-Assertion view stipulates that assertions are not illocutionary acts, since the act of expressing propositions paired with the contextually variable requirements is all that is needed to account for them. In this contribution I wish to argue that the very premise that assertions are sayings is a misinterpretation of Austin's theory. The No-Assertion view is based on notions and claims which are incorrectly attributed to Austin, whereas they are views proposed by Searle. The main focus of this article is not to correct an insignificant point in Cappelen's argumentation; it is to put forth the suggestion that there are substantial contributions in Austin's original ideas which are worth salvaging from the all-pervasive Searlean brand of what came to be known as Speech Act Theory. As a corollary, I further suggest that if we follow Austin's definitions of saying and illocutionary act, the conclusions of the No-Assertion view cannot be defended.

Focusing on propositions shifts the investigative effort to meaning (however broadly one wishes to construe the term) and away from illocutionary acts. In order to create an account of assertion, we need to be sure what class of phenomena assertion belongs to. Austin held assertion to be an illocutionary act. This view was not challenged throughout the subsequent developments on speech act theory, though Pagin (2004) comes close. If we maintain assertion to be an illocutionary act, we need to specify what an illocutionary act is. Further, the vast array of accounts of assertion is due to two often overlooked problems. The first problem is the ambiguity of the notion of assertion. Cappelen is aware of this problem. The difficulty for him is in the artificial nature of the term, coined for philosophical purposes, and the low frequency of use of the verb 'assert'. I would add the later illocutionary nuance to the term 'assertion' and the later sense of assertion as an umbrella term for all acts of the class of assertives (or representatives) following Searle's taxonomy. The second problem lies in the fact that researchers often use the term 'illocutionary acts' in a self-evident way, implying that we all somehow have exactly the same understanding of the phenomenon and its characteristics. The lack of a definition in Austin's lectures of illocutionary act as well as in subsequent developments of the theory of speech acts is the reason for the different

interpretations of the term by different researchers. I suggest a definition of illocutionary acts reconstituted from Austin (also Dörge, 2004 and Sbisà, 2007) and I posit that proposition-expressing cannot be included in the problematic of illocutionary acts.

### **No-Assertion view and Austinian sayings**

Cappelen proposes an engaging argument against normative accounts of assertion. To this end he intends to provide a blueprint by arguing against the other three kinds of accounts - the commitment, effect and cause accounts - to defend what he terms a No-Assertion view. It is presented in the following way:

*No-Assertion view:* Sayings are governed by variable norms, come with variable commitments and have variable causes and effects. The term 'assertion' is a philosophical invention and it fails to pick out an act-type that we engage in and is not a category we need in order to explain any significant component of our linguistic practice. (Cappelen, 2011, p. 21)

The main components of the No-Assertion view are:

1. There are sayings.
2. Sayings are governed by various norms that are neither essential nor constitutive to the act of saying.
3. We do not play the assertion game.

What is not explicitly spelled out in this claim is the following premise: first, assertions are sayings.

I believe that it is trivially true that sayings come with variable commitments, causes and effects and are governed (however misleading the term may be) by variable norms. It is equally undisputed that there are sayings. I also tend to agree that we do not play the assertion game, but for different reasons which I shall come back to later. I only object to the implicit claim that what we call (the illocutionary act of) assertion is equal to what we call saying. This claim is explained by referring to Austin's notion of locutionary act together with a Gricean view of sayings. The act of saying is very important to any view on assertion marking as it does a shared common-ground notion between No- and Pro-Assertion views. Cappelen claims that regardless of the view one supports, one still needs the neutral notion of saying because even in Pro-Assertion views the performance of the act of saying is part of the performance of the illocutionary act (Cappelen, 2011, p. 24).

The locutionary act – the act of saying in the full sense – is introduced to help distinguish this act from the phenomenon dubbed by Austin as an illocutionary act (Austin, 1962, p. 94). Austin’s notion of locutionary act comprises three components: the phonetic act, the phatic act and the rhetic act<sup>1</sup>. The phonetic act consists of the (physical) production of sounds. The phatic act consists in the production of sounds as a part of a language. The rhetic act consists in using these sounds with a certain sense and reference, in other words what is said in the full sense. The locutionary act is in a way the words that we utter. Unequivocally, Austin’s notion of locutionary act does not contain any reference to propositions. In fact, the entire doctrine of illocutionary acts (together with locutionary acts and perlocutionary acts) made a special point of avoiding propositions, since to concentrate on propositions would be to commit the declarative fallacy. In his pursuit of performativity, Austin has no use of propositions since they can only divert the analysis. The few mentions of proposition in the lectures include the following idea which firmly establishes the desire to escape the traditional proposition-centered preoccupations:

In conclusion, we see that in order to explain what can go wrong with statements we cannot just concentrate on the proposition involved (*whatever that is*) as has been done traditionally. (Austin, 1962, p. 52, emphasis mine)

What is more, it would appear that ‘proposition’ is not something which Austin would have used in his discussion, since the term does not seem suitable for his purpose. A case can be made to support the idea that Austin found fault with propositions, just as he did with concepts (see Rajagopalan, 2000, p. 379). Propositions were introduced to speech act theory by Searle (1968, 1969), with the  $F(p)$  distinction, replacing the locutionary act by a propositional act, or the act of expressing a proposition. Searle presented this distinction as being common and found under many various forms in philosophy and that it contained an act of expressing propositions which is neutral as to its illocutionary force (1968, p. 420). Cappelen does not make any explicit reference to Searle. He only cites Austin’s description of the act of saying something in the full sense, but the following claim makes an almost casual slip to the act of expressing a proposition as introduced by Searle:

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<sup>1</sup>Austin was criticized mainly for the blurred boundaries between the locutionary and the illocutionary act on the one hand, and between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary act on the other hand. The present discussion does not attempt to vindicate the term ‘locutionary act’; it is only relevant in that it helps to show that proposition was not meant to play any role in the speech act doctrine.

With this as a starting point, think of an Austinian saying of  $p$  as very close, if not identical, to the act of expressing the proposition that  $p$ . (Cappelen, 2011, p. 23)

In this casual remark, Cappelen imputes to Austin the view that the locutionary act is an act of saying of  $p$ , which is later referred to in a footnote as expressing a proposition “in the thin Austinian sense” (footnote 2, p. 23) This description certainly does not correspond to Austin’s idea on what the act of saying is and it would not have been endorsed by him. Identifying sayings with acts of expressing propositions would exclude other sentences qualified as being acts of saying in the full sense such as “Get out!” and “Is it in Oxford or Cambridge?” These sentences do not express propositions in the way in which Cappelen describes the term. The notion of saying used by Cappelen is reminiscent of the sign of subscription in the use of Hare (1989) and Frege: the utterance of a sentence containing a complete proposition which is non-embedded and is not merely supposed, entertained, but minus the subscription, as no commitments are allowed in the No-Assertion view on sayings. Another requirement for the saying in Cappelen’s sense is to know the meaning of the sentence. Unless one knows the meaning of the sentence which one is uttering, one cannot count as having said it. The act of saying in Cappelen’s use is thus identical to the propositional act introduced by Searle.

Cappelen’s statement of the No-Assertion view (at least the first part of it) is trivially true for any utterance of any language: in order to speak and understand a language, contextual requirements coupled with the proposition expressed are enough. The core of the No-Assertion view is that the additional category of assertion (understood in the illocutionary sense) is unnecessary. Cappelen does not provide an explanation of what he takes illocutionary acts to be, which in a way weakens his arguments for the No-Assertion view. I will assume it must be what Austin meant by the notion of illocutionary act following the reference to Austin made in relation to locutionary act.

### **Austin’s illocutionary acts**

The mere uttering of the words is not the doing which Austin had in mind. The entire speech act would normally consist of a locutionary act and of an illocutionary act. Since it is about the things we do in words, I will first explore what it is that illocutionary acts do.

Acts which interested Austin were the act of betting, christening ships and children, appointing, and ordering. The common denominator in all of these cases is that

upon their successful or felicitous performance, these acts alter our reality. In the case of betting, the participants are considered to be in a special contract which grants the winner the right to collect the stake. In the case of christening ships, the participants are to refer to it by its given name. In the case of appointing, the participants are to acknowledge the changed status of the appointee. A successful order creates an obligation to obey with all the sanctions that can carry. Therefore, by means of proposing a pre-theoretical summary of these observations, it seems to me that the following generalizations can be made:

1. Since these are acts, there must be an external manifestation which will allow us to judge whether they occurred;
2. These acts are not material in the sense that they do not involve any physical action (if we do not count the uttering of the words);
3. They alter the situation in which they occur; they have consequences which are non-natural (*qua* Grice) in the sense that sets them apart from the kind of consequence we have when we pull the trigger: pulling the trigger fires the gun, firing the gun kills the donkey (Austin, 1962, p. 111);
4. Being non-material and having non-natural consequences means that these acts need to have a target (or an audience) in order to come into existence.

Further, illocutionary acts are subject to different kinds of infelicities, or ways in which they could go wrong. There is a set of extra-linguistic features which have a role to play in the performance of these acts: in order to appoint somebody, I have to be the right person to do so; christening and marrying rely on the existence of an extra-linguistic institution, issuing a verdict is related to the institution of the court of law, etc. For acts such as apologizing, ordering and asserting, no extra-linguistic *institution* exists, so that it is often argued that those are purely communicative (linguistic) acts which rely on the institution of language (Strawson, 1964; Bach and Harnish, 1979; partly Searle, 1969). In the generalizations above, I referred to the way in which the act is perceived by calling it a manifestation for a reason: Austin did not want to restrict the trait of performativity to linguistic acts only. It is quite clear from his discussion that acts can be performed non-verbally or by a gesture (conventional or not). Regardless of the means of performing the act, the act itself possesses the following characteristics: it is conventional and it has a conventional effect. Since space limitations prevent me from expounding the entire explanation, I will briefly sketch what I mean by those terms. The

illocutionary act is conventional in the sense that it constitutes a social contract between the participants since it serves to regulate, re-define and influence social and interpersonal relations. This interpretation of the term 'conventional' stems from the requirement that in his or her performance of an illocutionary act the speaker must secure uptake – ensure that the utterance is understood to be the performance of that particular illocutionary act. Unless uptake is achieved, the illocutionary act is not successfully performed. Upon uptake, the act takes effect; the effect of the act is conventionally associated with the successful performance of the illocutionary act. The effect of the act is the essence of what those acts do as it exemplifies the change they operate on the (social) environment. The effect (or the change) itself is social in the sense that it is socially conditioned by the fact that participants abide by that effect. Similar definitions are provided by Dörge (2004) and also by Sbisà (2001) who notably argues that the effects of the illocutionary acts can be described using the terminology of deontic modality due to the conventional character of assigning and removing obligations (2001, p. 1797). Performing illocutionary acts is not merely speaking a language; it is acting on one's environment. One may even argue that performing illocutionary acts is not merely communicating (communicating would certainly comprise performing illocutionary acts, but also much more) and is certainly much more than a 'linguistic practice'.

Another misrepresentation of Austin's views by Cappelen can be seen in the following claim:

It is important to note that, according to Austin, all *illocutionary* acts (e.g. assertions) are *also* locutionary acts: whenever you make an assertion or ask a question, you are also performing a locutionary act, i.e. you say something. The various illocutionary speech acts are, so to speak, built on top of locutionary acts, or sayings. (Cappelen, 2011, p. 22, emphasis in the original)

It is certainly not the case that Austin held all illocutionary acts to be also locutionary acts: such a view could be imputed to Searle, or to Bach and Harnish's communicative acts. It is a very common misrepresentation of Austin's view and it is most probably due to a largely quoted remark:

To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary* act, as I propose to call it. (Austin, 1962, p. 98, emphasis in the original)



This remark is not intended to provide a description of what an illocutionary act is. To perform an illocutionary act is not to utter some words with a particular sense and reference in a language. This remark does not give any grounds for the generalization that all illocutionary acts are locutionary acts. However, given that other conditions are satisfied, it is generally the case that locutionary acts are used to perform illocutionary acts. It is impossible to say that locutionary acts are illocutionary acts because they pick out different realities that cannot be equated; the locutionary act consists in the words uttered with their sense and reference, whereas the illocutionary act is the particular social contract attempted by the speaker.

It is hardly this notion of illocutionary act that was meant by Cappelen, for a consideration of the illocutionary act of assertion would certainly not involve the act of expressing a proposition: illocutionary acts are not consequences of locutionary acts (Austin, 1962, p. 113). It can only be concluded that however Cappelen construes the term 'illocutionary act', it seems to be incompatible with Austin's notion of illocutionary act. The introduction of proposition in the discussion of illocutionary acts gave rise to a great many redefinitions of the notion of illocutionary act which took the notion away from the action-centered preoccupations. In Searle (1969) to perform an illocutionary act is to utter a meaningful sentence seriously and literally, which is the realization of underlying constitutive rules for the type of act being performed. In Bach and Harnish (1979) the communicative illocutionary act is to express a propositional attitude. Searle (1986) proposes that to perform an illocutionary act is to realize an intention to represent a particular intentional state with a particular propositional content<sup>2</sup>.<sup>[5]</sup> Curiously, if we take the term 'illocutionary act' in Cappelen's discussion to refer to the Searlean notion of illocutionary act, his claim that such an upgrade is unnecessary can be duly motivated since no rules or norms can be said to govern sayings in the sense of being constitutive of that behavior.

It may be a distorted representation of Austin's views on saying (locutionary act) and illocutionary act that they are at the base of the No-Assertion view. It is plausible that Searle's theory (and not Austin's) gave rise to the position expressed by the No-Assertion view. In order to place Cappelen's discussion in a relation with Austin's

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<sup>2</sup> I do not know whether or not those authors would endorse the descriptions the way they are formulated here because those are reconstructions: no explicit definition of illocutionary act can be found in those works.

notions of both locutionary and illocutionary act, two possibilities can be pursued: either assertion is an illocutionary act in Austin's sense (that is, it is a social contract that implements a conventional effect), or assertion is not an illocutionary act (there is no non-natural change in the social environment produced by the utterance). Without Austin's notion of illocutionary act, speaking of assertion becomes speaking about something which is not.

### **Assertion and games**

This subpart offers some ideas for a description of the illocutionary act of assertion. An important condition of adequacy would be that thinking of asserting as an illocutionary act does not include focusing on propositions. In fact, the cognitive dimension evoked in any proposition-centered view of asserting is so strong that it makes it pointless to consider what it is that asserting does, as long as there is a string of transmitted information.. Sbisà formulates this in the following terms:

Once a propositional content is specified, a truly minimal force indicator (indicative mood) is sufficient to yield assertion. No role is left to play to felicity conditions, to the corresponding possible infelicities, or to illocutionary effect in Austin's sense. Felicity conditions, as matters of pragmatic appropriateness, are viewed as inessential to the core of assertion, which is (like in Frege) the recognition of a proposition as true. So the assertion cannot be a real action – rather, it is a *cognitive gesture* (or its linguistic manifestation). Speaking of assertive speech acts or calling assertion a speech act become simply ways of speaking. (Sbisà, 2006, p. 166-167, emphasis mine)

This is especially true of Searle's notion of illocutionary acts and his description of assertion. Based on that description, the No-Assertion view is easily understood. In his exposition, Austin does not attempt a consideration of what the illocutionary act of assertion would be. His notes on the possible infelicities which may arise from the the act of assertion provide us with some directions about the extra-linguistic features involved. Although our linguistic competence is what accounts for our understanding linguistic utterances, those other features outside of language account for our understanding of the kind of illocutionary act performed. As a speaker of English, I understand the utterance "Take out the garbage" as an imperative sentence relating to me the action of taking the garbage. However, I take it as an order only if I admit the speaker's authority to order me to. Or, being a speaker of French, I understand the utterance of "Pourquoi ne l'as-tu pas empêché d'y aller?" as an interrogative sentence

meaning roughly 'why did you not prevent him from going there'. But due to the circumstances and the identity of the speaker I can take it to be a reproach or a question or I can take the speaker to be blaming me. In order to understand an utterance as being an assertion, says Pagin (2004, p. 834), it does not need to be marked for the social actors or participants involved in the exchange. In other words, what I understand when hearing the utterance "The grass is green" is that the grass is green and that regardless of the identity of the speaker. As I already pointed out, this is trivially true for any utterance: I understand the utterances "Take out the garbage" and "Pourquoi ne l'as-tu pas empêché d'y aller?" regardless of the identity of the speaker. What does change, however, with the circumstances and the identity of the speaker (and her relation to me, the hearer) is what those utterances can be used to do. I believe it is the same with declarative sentences (those that contain propositions in the sense discussed).

Following Austin's definition of illocutionary act, assertion would be an act which requires the uptake of a hearer upon which a conventional effect is implemented. Performing illocutionary acts binds the speaker and the hearer to a certain course of action; it engages the responsibility of the speaker. So I can only be taken to be asserting if I make it clear (the circumstances, the overall speech situation, the previous exchange and other contextual features help make that clear) to the hearer that I am engaging my responsibility for my uttering those words. This responsibility is at the heart of the conventional effect of asserting. Brandom (1983, p. 642) would call it justificatory responsibility. MacFarlane (2005, p. 334) suggests a threefold commitment to withdraw the assertion when it is proved untrue, to justify it if challenged, and to be held responsible if someone acts on it and it proves to have been untrue. However one wishes to formulate the responsibility, one thing should be borne in mind: the effect of the illocutionary act is defeasible (as Sbisà uses the term) and it does not constitute a norm or rule of any kind. The former trait is supposed to capture the fact that the conventional effect is a product of social agreement and that it can be made null and void (if the act is retracted, for example). The latter trait captures the insight that the effect of the illocutionary act is not a rule which regulates behavior. It redefines commitments and obligations and accounts for the way in which the hearers hold the speakers responsible. The effect is not supposed to be regulatory of the performance of the act of assertion; it is not meant as a restrictive rule that one should assert only if one can in fact justify the assertion, or if one is committed to it. This way of construing assertion does not rule out

asserting something one does not believe, or asserting something one knows is false, as the act would have the same effect of engaging the responsibility of the speaker. The act itself would not be cheating, nor would it break any rule or norm; what it would do is jeopardize the asserter's reliability: the social role we build up by engaging in illocutionary acts would be endangered.

In my view, it is a quite trivial observation that performing illocutionary acts is not like making a move in a game. The contractual character of illocutions make performing illocutionary acts like participating in a negotiation about the kind of change in the obligations, commitments, etc. the participants are willing to take upon themselves. No norms or rules govern that behavior and we do not accuse each other of cheating or breaking the rules of assertion, of order or of pronouncing somebody guilty.

The view of assertion being an illocutionary act in Austin's sense is fully compatible with situations of misunderstanding, as when the speaker merely suggested something, but the hearer takes him to have asserted it. It is fully compatible with cases where the speaker is not sincere (i.e. he or she does not have the corresponding belief) or where the speaker is aware that he or she is uttering a falsehood. Although comparing illocutionary acts to making moves in a language game has influenced many accounts of assertion, this is not the rule-regulated move that is meant. The game analogy fails for illocutionary acts (and for asserting) in that there are no rules that can make saying *p* count as something else (namely, an assertion) in the 'language game'. The game formula is another idea of Searle's early formulation of the theory of speech acts, where performing illocutionary acts was roughly '(saying) *X* counts as *Y* in context *Z*'. Constitutive rules that Searle introduced for illocutionary acts (Searle, 1969) determine new forms of behavior in that violating a constitutive rule becomes destructive of the action itself (Nicoloff, 1986, p. 560). If we take chess as an example, at the beginning of the game moving the pawn from e-2 to e-5 does not count as opening, it is not a valid opening move. If asserting is simply uttering seriously and literally a meaningful sentence which expresses a proposition in the sense explained above, then there is nothing that can be described as violating the assertion rule and without that talking of playing the assertion game becomes pointless, as Cappelen argues. However, since the game analogy fails, we cannot conclude that there is no assertion without taking into consideration the notion of illocutionary act.

### Conclusion

The following question was the main preoccupation of this paper: Is there an illocutionary act of assertion? Answering that question presupposes that we have an idea about what illocutionary acts are. Indeed, as I have tried to show, the answer to that question would depend on how exactly we understand the notion of illocutionary act. Although the term is widely used in speech act theory, researchers do not explicitly define the way they understand the notion, either assuming that everybody understood what kind of phenomenon the notion is supposed name, or assuming the correct understanding of the notion of illocutionary act is secured by vaguely referring to Austin. To complicate matters, not only is the researcher's task made difficult by the fact that there is no explicit definition of illocutionary act in Austin's exposition of the theory, but also in subsequent developments of the theory of speech acts a fully explicit definition of illocutionary act is not found. Very often, misunderstanding can arise precisely because researchers have different or even incompatible conceptions of illocutionary act. Another misunderstanding arises from the fact that Searlean brand of theory came to be widely although mistakenly accepted as following, perfecting and systematizing Austin's insights on speech acts. This results in a frequent misattribution of Searle's views and additions to the theory to Austin, even though there is enough evidence that those views are in fact incompatible with Austin's ideas on illocutionary acts. I tried to show that this is what transpired in Cappelen's discussion of the No-Assertion view: both the notion of saying as being roughly the act of expressing a proposition and the supposed illocutionary upgrade can be traced to Searle's theory, not Austin's.

My suggestion is that if we apply Searle's notions, then the conclusions made by Cappelen are valid. If we follow Austin's definition of saying and illocutionary act, then Cappelen's conclusions do not apply. In Austin's sense, asserting would be a conventional (in the sense of social) contract which comes about if taken up by a hearer and which has a conventional effect. It may turn out that the illocutionary act of assertion is quite infrequent (which validates an observation of Cappelen's of the infrequency of assertion attributions). Thus, the frequency of issuances of declarative sentences containing propositions in the sense explained above is by no means an indicator of the illocutionary act performance. As it is, the doctrine of illocutionary acts devised by Austin is not meant to account for every bit of our linguistic production.

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