

4 Force, content and the varieties of unity

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4.0 Introduction

If it rains tonight, the streets will get wet. I have neither asserted just now that it rains, nor that the streets will get wet. So, isn't it obvious that conditionals do not contain assertions as their clauses, but rather something fundamentally different, something non-committal and forceless that can occur “asserted as well as unasserted and yet remain recognizably the same proposition”, as Peter Geach (1965: 449) put what came to be called the “Frege-Geach point” (FGP)? The FGP is also thought to apply to other logical operations such as disjoining and negating, to fictional contexts – the actor on stage expresses propositions, but does not assert anything – as well as to questions and perhaps also to reports of speech acts and intentional states and possibly yet other contexts.

The FGP is often used to justify what is generally known as the force-content distinction (FCD) between forceful acts such as judging, asserting, or directing on the one hand and the forceless propositions that form their content, that what is asserted to be true or directed to be made true, on the other. The FCD comprises such claims as that forceful acts are subjective, while propositions are objective, that the latter can be the content of theoretical acts like asserting as well as practical acts like directing, that force is non-conventional and non-representational, and that force and propositions belong to the different subject matters of pragmatics on the one hand and semantics

and logic on the other (see the introduction to this volume for a more extensive characterization). The traditional view of the relation between force and content can also be called a “plus account” (Schmitz 2018b): force has to be added to forceless propositions through separate acts such as asserting them or judging them to be true.

Recently, however, the FCD has been challenged by philosophers such as Peter Hanks (2015; 2019) and François Recanati (2019). Hanks’s argument is simple, but powerful: nothing can be a truth-value bearer that does not take a position regarding how things are and is in that sense forceful and committal. If it did not tell us how the world is, we also could not say whether it succeeds or fails in this endeavor and thus could not ascribe a truth value to it. So Hanks strikes at the heart of the FCD by asserting a conflict between two properties that it takes to be essential to propositions: that they are forceless and that they are truth-value bearers.

He also puts his point in terms of the traditional problem of the unity of the proposition. What turns a proposition into more than just a list of items such as e.g. “Frank, closing, door”? What unifies it, what ties its constituents together? Only a forceful act that takes a position regarding whether they hang together as they are represented can, according to Hanks. Truth-bearing or “predicative” propositions – which Hanks opposes to directive and interrogative ones as one of three basic types of propositions – are therefore assertoric by nature.

But how then to respond to the FGP? If only something unified through a forceful act can be a truth value bearer, how can e.g. the clauses of conditionals remain truth value bearers? Hanks proposes that in FGP contexts force gets cancelled. He also introduces a corresponding notation with a cancellation sign among others.

Cancellation means that the use of certain linguistic items such as conditional markers creates contexts in which “acts of predication do not have their usual requirements and consequences” (Hanks 2015: 95) – such as the obligation to provide justification for an assertion. For example, when putting forward the conditional above, I did not need to provide justification that it rains. Call this a “minus account” because it at least appears to say that force gets removed in FGP contexts.

But how can force still unify the proposition when it is cancelled? And does it really matter whether we think of forceless occurrences as arrived at by the addition of force to inherently forceless propositions, as on the plus account, or by subtracting force from inherently forceful ones, as on the minus account? A number of critics (e.g. Hom and Schwartz 2013; Reiland 2012; Green 2018; Recanati 2019; Bronzo 2021) have argued that it does not and that cancelled force can’t unify the proposition anymore. In a recent response to these critics, Hanks allows that terminologically “cancellation” is misleading, because FGP contexts actually contain more than others, not less (2019: 1389). He also says that non-committal occurrences are only extrinsically, not intrinsically, different from forceful ones (2019: 1393).

I believe that these remarks point us into the right direction and that the cancellation or minus account is an important advance over the plus account. It is right that committal occurrences are more basic (in a sense to be clarified) than non-committal ones, and that we need to resist the FGP, overcome the FCD and account for FGP contexts in terms of what these contexts contain more. But I also believe that the minus account still concedes too much to the FGP and that in some ways it only provides a mirror image of the plus account. If we go further into the direction Hanks

points us, I think we will leave the cancellation account behind and arrive at what I will call the higher-level act (HLA) account.

On the HLA account, FGP contexts can be entirely accounted for in terms of what they contain more, namely HLAs such as e.g. conditionalizing, disjoining and other logical acts, as well as interrogative acts and fictional acts such as e.g. joking and playacting. HLAs create corresponding higher-level unities such as conditionals, questions and jokes, which embed and present assertions – and directions – while often, though not always, suspending commitment to them. HLAs do not cancel the force of what they embed and operate on, but rather transfer the meaning of force indicators into the new dimensions they create.

To understand how this works, we first need to understand the unity of the lower-level acts of assertion and direction and the meaning of force indicators. In section 4.1 I argue that satisfaction-evaluable entities cannot be mere representations of states of affairs (SOAs). They are rather unified by the forceful acts through which the reality of a SOA is affirmed as a fact from a theoretical position, or as a goal from a practical position. In section 4.2 I suggest that basic force indicators such as intonation and mood nonconceptually present positions of theoretical and practical knowledge. I thus propose to overcome the FCD by ascribing content to force indicators. In section 4.3 I argue that interrogative acts are HLAs which operate on either assertions or directions to create theoretical questions like “Is the door closed?” or practical questions like “Close the door?”. Interrogative markers are higher-level force indicators through which subjects indicate positions of wondering. They do not cancel assertoric and directive force, but rather transfer the meanings of these force indicators into the new

unity they create. They now indicate positions of theoretical or practical knowledge the subject is seeking rather than ones it occupies or claims. In section 4.4 I sketch how the HLA account can be extended to logical unities like disjunctions or conditionals. These are created by logical acts such as disjoining or conditionalizing. In contrast, the notion of asserting or directing a logical compound is at best redundant. In section 4.5 I very briefly sketch the extension of the HLA account to fictional contexts. In section 4.6 I explain how the HLA account allows us to dispel the FGP. It is based on a conflation of different varieties of force. We only need markers for assertoric vs. directive acts and for HLAs. We neither need Frege's assertion sign, nor Hare's neustic, nor the cancellation sign, as these signs could only redundantly emphasize the absence or presence of an HLA. Section 4.7 concludes the paper by proposing to turn the traditional notion of a proposition on its head: propositions are not forceless contents that subjects commit to by forceful acts, but forceful acts as put forward by HLAs, through which subjects may suspend commitment to them.

This paper is meant to give an overview of an argument that has many different parts, so I hope the reader will forgive me for sometimes being brief and referring to some of my other writings on this. At the same time, there is one topic that I don't discuss even though it is important, namely the question to what extent force indication is conventional. I think that this is justified though because before we can address this question, we must first get clear about what force indicators mean – and in the process address some confusions which affect arguments about their conventionality.

4.1 The unity of assertions and directions

Consider these examples of the kind often used to introduce speech act theory:

(1) Close the door, Frank!

(2) Frank closed the door.

(1) is standardly used to direct somebody to close the door, (2) to assert that somebody has closed it. In a given context (1) and (2) might represent the same relation or SOA, the relation of Frank closing the door. On at least one version of the traditional view, this same SOA is represented by the same proposition, while assertion and direction are different acts performed on that same truth-evaluable content. Accordingly, these acts are thought to have a structure of the form $F(p)$: DIR (p) for (1) and AS (p) for (2).

However, the role of representing this identical relation is naturally ascribed to the verb stem (Collins 2018: 3537ff), which still needs to be marked for mood (as well as tense and aspect, but I will leave these to the side here like other writers on the subject). The shared part might be rendered as something like “Frank close the door” and this is essentially incomplete. It is not yet “a move in the language game”, as Wittgenstein put it (PI: §22). “What are you trying to say”, one might ask, “are you telling me to close the door or that the door is closed?”.

The point is that a mere representation of an SOA like our relation is not yet a satisfaction-evaluable act. To complete the act, to get a satisfaction-evaluable move in

the language game, the subject's practical or theoretical position towards the SOA in question must be included. The subject must affirm the reality of this SOA of Frank closing the door either as the thing to do, as a goal, or as a done deal, a fact, something that is the case. Hanks's point was that only something that takes a position regarding how things are can bear a truth value. In parallel fashion, we can say that only something that takes a position regarding what to do can bear a satisfaction value like being fulfilled or realized.

But doesn't my talk of an act of representing a relation (or other SOA) that is not yet truth-evaluable commit me to a "controversial notion of 'representation' that is completely divorced from truth and falsity" (Bronzo 2021: fn. 27)? I don't think so. I agree with the notion, famously enshrined in Frege's context principle, that representation only makes sense as part of larger, satisfaction-evaluable units. My point is just that the meaning or content of all expressions, including relational expressions such as "close", is not *only* determined through the contribution they make to truth-evaluable sentences and acts, as the still influential tradition of truth-conditional semantics has it, but also to the contribution they make to practical, satisfaction-evaluable, sentences and acts. Representing individuals, the properties they have and the relations they bear to others, are subacts of such acts as asserting and directing, which unify satisfaction-evaluable acts at their highest level of organization and make them the moves in the language game that they are.

There is nothing wrong then with speaking of shared content in examples like ours. The mistake is only to think that this content is already truth-evaluable. As the "F (p)"-notation embodies this mistake, it should be rejected. Its inadequacy can also

be brought out by noting that there is no reason to think that a practical act like direction should contain something that, as a truth-value bearer, must be connected to the theoretical position towards the world. If truth-value bearers are contained in theoretical and practical acts, why do we only ascribe truth-values to assertions and beliefs, but not to directions and intentions? Conversely, we might also ask why we ascribe truth values both to forceful acts such as assertion and to supposedly forceless propositions. The argument of this paper is of course that we do not because propositions are not actually forceless and could not be because only acts that contain force indicators can bear satisfaction values.

4.2 The content of force

If we want a term for the content that can be shared between acts with different forces or modes, we can call it “SOA-content” (Schmitz 2018a). The argument of the last section has been that force indicators and the subject’s position must be added to SOA content to complete a satisfaction-evaluable act. But how? In this section I want to suggest a straightforward answer: the subject has a sense of its theoretical or practical position vis-à-vis the relevant SOA and indicates and presents this position in its speech. I thus propose to overcome the FCD by ascribing representational, or more precisely: presentational content to force indicators. Through basic indicators of assertoric or directive force such as intonation contour, word order and grammatical mood, the subject nonconceptually presents itself as possessing theoretical or practical knowledge, as knowing what is the case or what to do.

Having a sense of something is different from having a concept of it, and it could

be argued in detail that intonation contour, word order and grammatical mood – listed in ascending order of cognitive complexity / level – all qualify as nonconceptual according to standard criteria. Suffice it to note here that they are a) holistic – intonation contour in particular envelops the speech act as a whole; b) non-reflective – even the ability to use grammatical mood does not necessarily bring such abilities with it like e.g. to reflect on whether one really knows; and c) inaccessible to logical operations such as negation, which cannot focus on them – to negate the force indicator in what is known as illocutionary negation one needs to use a conceptual level / lexical force indicator such as in “I don’t assert that it rains.” (Schmitz 2019).

Having a sense of one’s position is not a form of introspective awareness. It is not that one observes oneself and is aware of one’s position as a fact, as something that is the case. This could not be so because something can only be represented as a fact from a theoretical position. What I am trying to get at is the kind of awareness of one’s position in virtue of which one can be aware of the same SOA as a fact as when one asserts that Frank closed the door and as a goal when one directs him to close it.

I think it is plausible that subjects, including even small children, have a sense of taking up theoretical positions in contradistinction to practical ones. This does not require elaborate intellectual or linguistic skills. In fact, it does not require any linguistic skills, narrowly conceived, as it is already manifest in the ability to point declaratively vs. imperatively. One has a sense of drawing attention to something already present vs. trying to bring something about. Or one has a sense of one’s position as being based on perception or testimony, as opposed to a desire or a sense of obligation to perform an action.

There are also many examples of such claims as that asserting subjects represent themselves as knowing in the philosophical literature (e.g. Unger (1975: 256); for overviews see Engel (2008) and van Elswyk (2021)). In discussions of Moore's paradox it has often been noted that utterances like "It is raining, but I don't know that it is." are defective. Utterances like "Close the door, but I don't know (whether) to close it." seem defective in essentially the same way.

Representationalism about force is therefore not an ad hoc suggestion to support a response to the FGP. I think it is rather that allegiance to the FCD stands in the way of the natural suggestion that force indicators present the speaker's position. Ascribing representational content to them is, however, crucial to explaining how they can embed, as it seems clear that something contentful can embed unproblematically. But the proposal has further theoretical advantages as well that should at least be mentioned briefly. It harmonizes well with knowledge accounts of assertion (Williamson 2000), allowing a straightforward answer to the question why assertion is subject to the knowledge norm, including when it is being flouted: because its subject presents itself as knowing. It can also explain how causal elements of satisfaction conditions are determined without misplacing what is really determined by force or mode in the SOA-content, as Searle's (1983) account in terms of causal self-referentiality arguably does (see Recanati 2007; Schmitz 2018a). And it opens up the prospect of a satisfactory response to Moore's paradox, because the claim that nonconceptual force indicators present the subject's knowledge position can explain both why "It is raining." and "I don't know that it is raining." as said by the same subject conflict and why they are not outright contradictory (see Schmitz 2019).

The present proposal is a non-reductionist representationalism about force in contradistinction to accounts which understand indicators of force (or of components of force) in terms of “mood-setting” sentences like “This is a question.” (Davidson 1979) or of performatives like “I hereby order...” (Lewis 1970). These accounts treat all sentences as being equivalent to one or more declarative sentences, all of which are truth-evaluable. They reduce all meaning to truth-conditional meaning while leaving the declarative mood unexplained, treating it as an unexplained explainer. The theoretical position is both privileged and taken for granted and force is treated as part of what is the case, of what is being represented from the theoretical position.

I propose instead to try out an account that explains the declarative and the imperative mood and stops privileging the theoretical position and taking it for granted, instead treating it as one of two basic ways of relating to the world.

4.3 The unity of questions

What about questions then? Are questions a subspecies of directive acts – a request for an answer – as Frege held, or are they a third type of basic act, irreducible to directive or assertoric acts, but on all fours with them, as Hanks (2015) proposes. In this section I will argue against both views that questions are HLAs that can operate on either assertions or directions.

The argument that questions are HLAs is straightforward as soon as practical questions – which, like other practical phenomena, have been much neglected – are taken into account. We can not only ask whether the door is closed, but also whether to close it – there are practical as well as theoretical yes-no questions. And we can not

only ask where, when, why and how it was closed, but also where, when, why and how to close it – there are practical as well as theoretical wh-questions.

Any directive performed with an imperative sentence can be turned into a practical yes-no question simply by uttering it with a rising intonation: “Close the door?”, “Go for a walk?”, “Have a drink?”, and so on. Any assertion performed with a declarative sentence can accordingly be turned into a theoretical yes-no question by uttering it with a rising question intonation. Intonational interrogative marking is thus superimposed on directive and assertoric force as marked through word order and mood. On the level of meaning, the argument that questions must contain assertoric or directive force indicators is simply that it must be determined whether a theoretical or a practical question is being asked, whether the speaker wants to know what is the case or what to do.

Consider the dialogues in (3) and (4):

(3) Is the door closed? – Yes. ? AS (dC) – AS (dC)

(4) Close the door? – Yes. ? DIR (dC) – DIR (dC)

An affirmative answer to a theoretical question like in (3) is tantamount to an assertion, while an affirmative answer to a practical question like in (4) is tantamount to a direction. “Yes” (and its counterpart “no”) are sometimes characterized as “prosentences” which refer anaphorically to an antecedent – and we might accordingly also speak of “proacts”. The point is now simply that just like an anaphoric pronoun like “he” can only refer to different people on different occasions

of use because its antecedents refer to different people, “yes” can only express agreement with an assertion rather than a direction because the antecedent sentence or act is marked as assertoric or directive, that is, contains a force indicator.

A corresponding argument can also be made for wh-questions. For example, one might answer “Paris” in response both to a question like “Where are we?” and to a question like “Where to go for the weekend?”, expressing an assertion in the first case and a direction in the second. So there must be something in these questions that marks them as theoretical or practical, assertoric or directive.

I propose to think of interrogative acts as higher-level illocutionary acts which operate on either assertoric or directive acts and should accordingly be represented as in our examples above, with the interrogative marker “?” as a higher-level force indicator operating on the lower-level force indicators “AS” and “DIR”. What does “?” mean? The obvious suggestion is that with “?” a subject indicates and presents a position of wondering. It is wondering whether something is the case or what to do. It is wondering where, when, why and how it is the case, or where, when, why and how to do something. It is seeking theoretical or practical knowledge. This is what unifies the question at its highest level of organization, what gives it its point and makes it the move in the language game that it is.

These suggestions are supported by the fact that questions are naturally glossed by phrases of the form “I wonder whether / where / when etc. this is the case / to do this.” or of the form “Do you know whether / where / when etc. this is the case / to do this?”. The naturalness of these glosses supports the claims that interrogative force indicators present positions of wondering and that assertoric and directive force

indicators present positions of knowing.

We can now explain how interrogative force indicators transfer or shift the meaning of assertoric and directive force indicators into the new dimension they create: they now indicate the position of theoretical or practical knowledge that the subject is seeking rather than one it occupies or claims. We can also express this by saying that by performing an interrogative act on an assertion or direction, a subject puts this theoretical or practical act forward for consideration: to elicit a yes-no response to it in the case of yes-no questions, or a completion or supplementation of it in various ways in the case of wh-questions. The subject is not committed to the act it puts forward, because the very point of the interrogative act is to indicate the lack of the knowledge the assertion or direction presents. The content of assertions and directions is now used in a new way, to indicate the kind of knowledge the subject is seeking.

While the existence of practical questions allows us to make the argument that questions are HLAs in a very straightforward way, that argument does not depend on their existence. Even if for some reason people did not apply the question operation to directions, this would be true because they had only applied it to assertions. Questions could not operate on something completely force-neutral. Just like merely representing an SOA like “Frank close door” is not yet a satisfaction-evaluable act, merely adding a question mark like in “Frank close door?”, is not sufficient to ask a proper question either. “Are you asking whether Frank closed the door or are you asking him whether to close it?” would be the appropriate response. The question must determine whether the questioner is seeking theoretical or practical knowledge.

Hanks (2015: 196f) argues that the three basic types of acts can be distinguished in terms of their direction of fit, their type of satisfaction condition and how they are reported. Assertoric (or “predicative”) acts have mind-to-world direction of fit, truth conditions and are reported by that-clauses. Directive acts have world-to-mind direction of fit, fulfillment conditions and are reported by to-clauses. Interrogative acts have mind-to-mind direction of fit, answerhood conditions and are reported by whether-clauses.

This is a useful, if simplified (see Moltmann, this volume) schema, to which we can add that assertoric and directive acts can also be distinguished in terms of their objects: assertoric acts are directed at facts and directive acts at goals. But Hanks neglects practical questions and overlooks that there are two kinds of whether-reports: whether + finite clause for theoretical and whether + to-clause for practical questions. We ask whether the door *is* closed, but whether *to* close it. This pattern makes perfect sense because theoretical questions ask whether something is the case and practical questions what to do. Practical attitudes in general are directed at as yet unfinished actions because one can obviously only intend or direct yet unfinished actions.

Hanks’s interesting proposal that questions have mind-to-mind direction of fit and acts of assertion (and, as I have argued: direction) as their answers and satisfaction conditions on reflection supports the HLA account rather than the idea that questions are on all fours with assertions and directions. That an assertion (direction) is satisfied by the world, but as a linguistic and mental act can satisfy a question, strongly suggests that the question is on a higher level than the assertion (direction). Similarly, the practice in formal semantic accounts of questions to assign sets of propositions to

them as their denotation rather than the truth values or sets of possible worlds that are assigned to propositions, also suggests that they are higher-level relative to propositions. These theoretical moves are consonant at least with the spirit of the HLA account even though the accounts that make them are incompatible with it in other respects.

In which sense(s) then do questions belong to a higher level than assertions and directions? First, as was argued, questions are only intelligible as operating on something that is already marked for assertoric or directive force. Second, they are also cognitively more demanding. One needs to understand assertions and directions before one can understand an act that asks for them as answers and operates on them. One also needs to understand that there are things one does not know, but that one might learn later, or find out from others who do know it. Third, as we have just noted, the very fact that they have assertions and directions as their answers and satisfaction conditions also means that they are on a higher level relative to them.

4.4 The unity of logical acts

A logical act such as negating, conditionalizing, disjoining or conjoining also creates a higher-level unity that is only intelligible as an operation on forceful acts such as assertions or directions – I'll leave questions to the side here – but may suspend commitment to these acts, though it does not do so necessarily: think about the difference between the conditional and the conjunction. By performing a logical act, a subject does not immediately commit to the acts it operates on, but rather to one of their truth-, satisfaction- or – my preferred way of thinking – affirmation-functions.

That is, by e.g. conditionalizing it does not commit to the clauses of the conditional, but it does commit to affirming the consequent should it also affirm the antecedent, and to negating the antecedent should it negate the consequent.

As logical operations are truth-, satisfaction- or affirmation-functional, one argument for the claim that they must operate on forceful acts is the by now familiar one that only forceful acts can bear truth or satisfaction values. Another argument already familiar from our discussion of questions is that HLAs can operate on either assertoric or directive acts, which must therefore be marked accordingly. This also applies to logical acts: there are not only purely theoretical conditionals (and disjunctions etc.) like our original example (5), but also mixed ones like (6) and even, contrary to what many philosophers have supposed, purely practical ones like (7):

(5) If it rains, the streets will get wet. $AS \rightarrow AS$

(6) If it rains, close the door! $AS \rightarrow DIR$

(7) To close the door, turn the knob! $DIR \rightarrow DIR$

In the clauses, the SOAs are still represented from theoretical vs. practical positions even though the subject has not (yet) committed to these positions. This is also why e.g. the antecedent of (5) cannot be detached by the directive to make it rain, even though, if it were executed, it would be true that it rains. But this still needs to be determined as a fact, from the theoretical position. Conversely, the assertion that the door is closed cannot detach the antecedent of our purely practical conditional (7) either.

But how is it possible for a conditional to contain assertions or directions even though it would not be correct to say, at least not without further ado, that its speaker asserted that it rains or directed somebody to close the door? And shouldn't we rather say that what is asserted (or directed) is the conditional as a whole? These are of course the crucial questions raised by the FGP, which will soon be discussed extensively. But in a nutshell, the proposal is simply that the intuition that the clauses cannot be forceful acts can be reduced to the fact that the conditional does not entail its clauses, so that by conditionalizing the subject does not commit to them. And on reflection it is also at best unclear what purpose the notion of asserting (or directing) a logical compound serves. Both points can be supported by considering conjunctions.

It is obvious, but important to note, that the FGP is made by appealing to negation, to conditionals and to disjunctions, but not to conjunctions. This is because the conjunction does not generate the FGP intuition. If I say that it rained and the streets got wet, the untutored mind will have no resistance to accepting that I asserted both these things. (We are leaving lack of seriousness etc. to the side for now.) It also seems clear that this is because the conjunction, unlike the other logical operations, does entail what it operates on. And the intuition that the whole must be asserted here immediately leads to counterintuitive consequences. Defenders of the plus account typically say that only one thing – the conjunction – was asserted (e.g. Dummett 1973), while Hanks (2015: 104) ends up claiming that three things were asserted – the conjunction as a whole and the conjuncts. But both claims are counterintuitive: the intuitively correct claim is that two assertions were made. As John Stuart Mill (1884: 52) put it, a team of horses is not another horse. Logical acts are different in kind from

acts such as asserting or directing. And since all logical operations should be treated in essentially the same way, with all differences deriving from differences in the kind of logical operations they are, it would also not be plausible to claim that only conditionals, but not conjunctions, are asserted.

Where does the intuition that the compound must be asserted come from? First, I suppose, because one wants to express that the commitment is to the whole rather than to what it connects. This is quite right, but already captured by the proposal that I commit through the act of conditionalizing which creates the whole. I conditionalize and thereby commit to the conditional. Second, one may feel that an extra indication of commitment is still required because one might also e.g. be joking, or the conditional might be the antecedent of another conditional. But, as I will soon argue in detail, the committal case is the default one, and a sign marking the absence of further commitment-suspending acts is at best redundant. Third, isn't it necessary to mark whether one takes a theoretical or practical position towards the whole? For example, one might think one knows that if it rains, the streets will get wet. But does this really add anything to saying that if you know that it rains, you know the streets will get wet? Moreover, if one considers a mixed conditional like (6), should the attitude be theoretical or practical? I can know that it rains, and I can know to close the door, but the question whether the connection between these attitudes is theoretical or practical has no clear meaning. Wittgenstein's point that the logical constants do not represent (TLP 4.0312) explains why this is so and why compounds can't be asserted or directed. Since e.g. the conditional marker does not represent a conditional relation in the world, I can neither assert the presence of such a relation, nor can I direct it to be

brought about.

It therefore seems to me that the acts by which we affirm compounds are acts of conditionalizing, conjoining, and so on, rather than assertoric or directive acts. Through such acts we commit to satisfaction or affirmation functions of assertions and directions. In the new contexts created by these acts, assertoric and directive force indicators do not necessarily indicate a position the subject takes. They are, for example, rather used to indicate which positions the subject negates or denies, or which it conditionalizes on. And this in turn is done to anticipate or simulate certain facts or goals to determine what else might be the case then or what to do.

4.5 The unity of fictional contexts

I can only sketch in the broadest outline how fictional contexts may be integrated into the HLA account. I take fiction in a wide sense which includes all forms of non-seriousness from playacting and novels to jokes and irony. The crucial point I want to make is that just like words like “close” or “door”, force indicators do not have special meanings in fictional contexts. Fictional markers rather shift the meanings of all these expressions into the new dimensions they create: they are now used to indicate which acts the subject is playing or otherwise pretending to perform and which acts the character performs in the fictional world that is being created.

4.6 The varieties of force

We can now return to the FGP to show how the HLA account can respond to it. So far, I have argued that by means of assertoric and directive force indicators a subject

presents its theoretical or practical position vis-à-vis the reality of an SOA, and that HLAs from questions to logical and fictional acts, transfer the meaning of these indicators into the higher-level unities that they create. While doing so, we have already noted that assertoric and directive force indicators, properly understood, do not operate on truth or satisfaction value bearers as on the traditional conception, but complete them. I now want to continue this line of argument and further support the claim that ordinary force indicators are different from Frege's assertion sign, Hare's neustic and also from Hanks's cancellation sign. And while ordinary force indicators are indispensable, the latter signs are at best redundant. We only really need markers for the following dimensions:

- 1) Assertoric vs. directive
- 2) Non-interrogative vs. interrogative
- 3) Free-standing vs. occurrences in logical contexts
- 4) Serious vs. non-serious

Note that here and elsewhere in this paper I discuss assertoric vs. directive acts by focusing on assertions vs. directions proper – as opposed to e.g. mere guesses or suggestions regarding what may be the case or what to do – since I only need to consider these basic cases to make the basic points I want to make.

We can think of all these distinctions as distinctions of force in a broad sense. Surely whether one asserts something seriously or jokingly, or whether the assertion occurs free-standing or as a disjunct is a difference in force in some sense. But it

should also be clear that we are dealing with different varieties of force here that must be kept apart. The FGP conflates these different varieties of force when it concludes from the fact that something is a question, an antecedent, or a joke, that it could not be assertoric. This conflates force in the sense of 2)-4) with force in the sense of 1).

Frege only formalized assertoric sentences and did not really need an indicator of assertoric force proper in his logical notation, and so it is not surprising that he took force in this sense (of 1)) for granted and used his assertion sign for a different purpose. In contrast, R. M. Hare (1971), as somebody keenly interested in practical inference, insightfully noted that the question whether e.g. a consequent was assertoric or directive, was a different question than whether its subject subscribed to it. He labelled force in the first sense the “tropic” and in the second sense the “neustic”. Frege’s assertion sign and Hare’s neustic both embody the plus account, as they symbolize an act of commitment – only to something truth-evaluable in Frege’s case, or also to something not truth-, but satisfaction-evaluable in Hare’s. By contrast, Hanks’s cancellation sign indicates the removal of commitment that defines the minus account.

The basic problem with all these signs is that at best they only repeat what has already been expressed by other signs, respectively their absence. The most the Fregean assertion sign or the neustic could do is in effect to say something like “This is not merely an antecedent or disjunct and I am not joking either, nor am I asking a question!”. In other words, they could only indicate the *absence* of an HLA. But such a sign is redundant because a sign that indicates the absence of such an act could never say more than its actual absence. And as Donald Davidson argued, it cannot

prevent an HLA either, because “every joker and storyteller will immediately take advantage” of it (1979: 13).

As the minus account is like a mirror image of the plus account, the cancellation sign is redundant in the opposite way. While the Fregean assertion sign or the neustic can only indicate that no HLA was performed, the cancellation sign can only indicate that *some* HLA was performed. While the former does not add anything to the absence of an HLA marker, the latter does not add anything to the specific HLA marker that is used. For example, the conditional marker already indicates a lack of commitment to antecedent and consequent. Putting cancellation signs in front of them can only emphasize this.

The point can also be put into the form of a dilemma argument (Schmitz 2018b). I will show this for the cancellation sign, but it equally applies to the other signs. Either the cancellation sign is logically significant and makes a difference to the validity of deductive arguments, or it does not. Embracing the first horn of the dilemma will invalidate modus ponens and other deductively valid arguments. If cancellation really changed the antecedent – for that is what one is tempted to think – it would not anymore be identical to the uncanceled proposition, which therefore could not detach it in a modus ponens argument. It is therefore unsurprising that Hanks (2019), who confronts this problem, chooses the second horn of the dilemma, namely that the cancellation sign makes no difference to modus ponens and deductive validity. The problem with the second horn is that if the cancellation sign has no effect on the antecedent, this just highlights that it is redundant. At best it emphasizes that the conditional marker suspends commitment to the antecedent. But it adds nothing to it.

In contrast, ordinary force indicators do make a difference to deductive validity. For example, as we noted already, a direction to make it rain cannot detach the assertoric antecedent of our conditional (5) and the assertion that the door is closed cannot detach the directive antecedent of our conditional (7).

That we only need ordinary force indicators and the various HLA markers is also supported by the fact that commitment is normally actually expressed by *removing* the HLA markers – rather than by adding a neustic or removing a cancellation sign. For example, detaching the antecedent is expressed by repeating it while removing the conditional marker. Likewise, an answer to a question removes the interrogative marker. For example, questions like (3) are often answered by something like “Yes, the door is closed.”. In contrast, “Yes?” or “Paris?” are not proper answers, but only suggestions.

This makes vivid how non-committal contexts literally contain more than committal contexts. It is not to deny that committal contexts can contain more in other respects. They can. For example, my assertion that it rains will often be based on a perceptual experience I didn't yet have when affirming the conditional. The point is just that, as far as speech acts are concerned, the difference between the antecedent and its detaching repetition is that commitment to the former is suspended by the additional act of conditionalizing. And this difference is purely extrinsic. Both acts contain force markers and these force marker must match for the inference to be valid.

Conversely, this also explains why it would not be correct for somebody to say without further ado that by affirming our conditional above I had asserted that it rains. Likewise if I had asked whether it rains, or had jokingly asserted that it does. I could

rightly complain by saying things like:

“I only said ‘if!’”

“I was only asking a question!”

“I was only joking!”

The reports were wrong because a report that leaves out the HLA is not merely incomplete but misrepresents by leaving out essential context. The HLA cannot be understood as a mere addition of information or the like, but, as I have argued, shifts the pre-existing meanings, including those of the force indicators, into the new dimension of the higher-level unity of the conditional, question or joke. This is why, even though it would be wrong to simply say I had asserted, what I actually did can't be understood without using notions of assertoric force: I was conditionalizing on an assertion, I was asking whether this assertion was true, or I was jokingly asserting or pretending to assert. And note that this is how we actually talk: we do speak of ironically or jokingly asserting and directing things and also e.g. of conditional assertion, though we should not if the FGP were valid.

A principle that suggests itself here is that the act must always be reported at the level of the highest-level act, with lower-level acts embedded in it: I reject the assertion, I pretend to assert etc.. The highest level is also the level where we take responsibility and are assessed normatively. When I assert jokingly, I will be judged on whether the joke was good, not on whether the assertion was true. And that the antecedent of my conditional might turn out to be false, does not mean I made a

mistake.

A distinction that is helpful here is that between commitment *in* and commitment *to* an act. Assertions and directions contain commitment in the sense that they contain content (re)presenting a position that affirms the reality of an SOA. But commitment to the HLA may suspend commitment to the act(s) it embeds.

Why is cancellation talk inappropriate? Joking or conditionalizing is not like when a meeting or flight is cancelled. It's more like it has been rescheduled, or, moving even closer to the target phenomenon, when it is merely being anticipated. We still anticipate either meeting or flying and so the requirements and consequences of meeting vs. flying remain connected to their respective anticipations or simulations. Accordingly, the requirements and consequences of asserting vs. directing are not removed but transferred into the context of the HLA. As conditionalizing does not commit to the antecedent, I was not required to justify the assertion that it rains. But detaching the antecedent of the theoretical conditional would have to be warranted and warranted in the way that assertions can be warranted, while detaching the antecedent of our practical conditional (7) would have to be warranted in the way that directives can be warranted.

In which sense are committal contexts more basic or lower-level? It is not an arbitrary linguistic convention. HLAs are cognitively and developmentally dependent on lower-level ones. Just like non-serious contexts are 'parasitic' or dependent on serious ones, so interrogative contexts are dependent on non-interrogative ones and logical contexts on non-logical ones. The point deserves more discussion than I can give it here, but the basic idea is straightforward (see also Recanati, this volume, for

more discussion of the claim and its history). Linguistic expressions first get their meaning in situations where they are used to establish joint attention to objects, including certain situations or actions (Tomasello 2016). Only when connections to objects in the world have been established and subjects' linguistic and intellectual abilities have become more independent of the immediate perceptual context, can they now use language to e.g. ask whether a certain situation obtains or what to do; to deny that it obtains; or to pretend that it does. The point also applies to force indicators: we can only deny assertions or directives, question them, or pretend to assert or direct, after we have learned to use and understand assertoric and directive force indicators in the basic, committal contexts.

4.7 The force and unity of the proposition

What then is a proposition and how can we account for its force and unity? I want to conclude this paper by drawing out the consequences of its argument for the notion of the proposition. I propose to turn the traditional notion on its head:

Plus account: proposition + forceful act = assertion / direction

HLA account: assertion / direction + HLA = proposition

On the HLA account, being a proposition is a role. It is a role both assertions and directions can have in virtue of being put forward for consideration by HLAs. This is supported by common sense, which readily accepts that what is put forward is forceful and can be either theoretical or practical. Google dictionary defines the first sense of

“proposition” as: “a statement or assertion that expresses a judgement or opinion” and its second sense as: “a suggested scheme or plan of action”.

“Proposition” functions somewhat like “exhibit”. It is fine to introduce a term to highlight the fact that an item is put forward for consideration. The mistake of the FGP is to think that being a proposition is incompatible with being an assertion (direction). That is like thinking an exhibit could not be a painting or a sculpture.

Following Hanks, our argument has been that it is not only possible, but even necessary for satisfaction value bearers to be forceful. A mere SOA representation cannot be a truth value bearer. The reality of this SOA must be affirmed as a fact from a theoretical position, or as a goal from a practical position. I have further proposed that the function of force indicators is to indicate and present the position the subject takes, and that for basic, nonconceptual force indicators like intonation, word order and mood, this position is either theoretical or practical knowledge. Force indicators do not operate on propositions as on the traditional view, but complete and unify them, make them satisfaction-evaluable theoretical or practical positions towards the reality of SOAs.

Overcoming the FCD by ascribing content to force indicators is an important first step in overcoming the FGP because content can unproblematically embed. The next step is to see that the higher-level unities of questions, logical and fictional acts may suspend commitment to lower-level acts, but do not cancel their force, but rather transfer the meaning of force indicators into the new dimension they create. They now indicate positions the subject seeks, anticipates or just pretends to take. And since force does not get cancelled, all worries that a cancelled act cannot unify the

proposition anymore should also be put to rest.

The final step is to see that the FGP conflates different varieties of force when it e.g. concludes from the fact that something is a consequent or a joke that it could not be an assertion, direction, or question.

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