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# Speech act metaphor in theatre

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## Abstract

Theoretically, the existence of speech act metaphor would appear to be impossible, in that it would necessitate combining the principle of speech activity which, as a specific kind of action, is a referential entity, and the principle of metaphor, which is a standard form of predication and description of referential entities, including actions. The term 'speech act metaphor', however, denotes not a verbal metaphor in the propositional content (p) of a speech act, either assertive or other but, rather, a speech act in which the performative component, either verbally indicated or otherwise, is metaphorical in itself. Speech act theory has contemplated the possible explanation of verbal metaphor as a specific kind of speech act, combining literal and non-literal elements, but not the possibility of a performative metaphor. In the theatre, however, and in the so called *Theatre of the Absurd* in particular, there are many cases that can only be understood if it is assumed that such a combination of principles has materialized. I intend to illustrate this peculiar type of stage metaphor by speech acts in Ionesco's *Exit the King*. © 2000 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

*Keywords*: Speech act; Metaphor; Theatre of the Absurd; Stage metaphor; Iconic; Indexical

## 1. Introduction

Theoretically, the existence of speech act metaphor would appear to be impossible, in that it would necessitate combining the principle of speech activity which, as a specific kind of action, is a referential entity, and the principle of metaphor, which is a standard form of predication and description of referential entities, including actions. The term 'speech act metaphor', however, denotes not a verbal metaphor in the propositional content (p) of a speech act, either assertive or other but, rather, a speech act in which the performative component, either verbally indicated or otherwise, is metaphorical in itself.

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Speech act theory has contemplated the possible explanation of metaphor as a specific kind of speech act, combining proper (literal) and improper (non-literal) elements (Searle, 1988). A word is 'improper' if it is used in a non-literal capacity.[1] Any improper term is potentially metaphorical. Indeed, there is no problem in having a metaphor in the propositional content (p) of a speech act, as currently integrated in theories of both metaphor and speech activity.[2] However, speech act theory has not considered the possibility of a kind of speech act which is metaphorical in itself. The difficulty resides in integrating both an object of description and a kind of description of such an object. Seemingly, such a combination entails blurring the existential boundaries between a referential world and a description of such a world or, in other words, between the extra-linguistic and the linguistic/semiotic spheres. In the theatre, however, and in the so-called *Theater of the Absurd* in particular, there are many cases that can only be understood if it is assumed that such a combination of principles has materialized.

If we accept that speech act metaphors do exist, they require a theoretical explanation. I intend to show that speech act metaphor in theater (a) is conceivable; (b) is a particular case of (nonverbal) stage metaphor; and (c) is a frequent form in certain theatrical styles. Moreover, such an account will not only eliminate the paradox of integrating the descriptive nature of metaphor and the referential nature of action, but will also provide an indispensable tool for interpretation and performance. I intend to illustrate this peculiar type of stage metaphor by speech acts in Ionesco's *Exit the King*.[3]

For those who are not familiar with the play, the following remarks may help to clarify the examples provided throughout the article. The central theme of *Exit the King* is that of the human propensity to suppress both the idea of death and its metaphysical meaning. The play portrays the last hours of a dying King of a fictional country. King Bérenger's denial of death is manifested against the background of his two wives, the two Queens, who are allegorical representations of two fundamental human attitudes to life: Queen Mary personifies the hedonistic principle and Queen Margaret the epistemological one. Whereas the former is characterized as supporting and complacent, the latter is rather cruel in her constant demand for awareness of death. Against this background the King himself is revealed as an allegorical representation of everyman in facing death. Indeed, the action of the play follows the same path as the main character of the medieval play *Everyman*, from the moment the certainty of death dawns upon the King to his actual death on stage. However, in contrast to *Everyman,* which teaches the 'art of dying', Ionesco's play precludes the Christian solace, with its optimistic approach to life after death. Death in *Exit the King*, is the final station in the human journey, and so there is nothing to prepare for.

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[1] I use the terms 'proper and 'improper' in the vein of Quintilian (1959:: VIII,vi). In my view, a word is 'improper' if it is used in breach of the convention which underlies the association between such a term and a given set of referents.

[2] John R. Searle's analysis of metaphor focuses on the propositional content of speech acts and is conducted in terms of speech act theory (Searle, 1988).

[3] All quotations from Eugene Ionesco, 1970 [1963], *Exit the King*. In: *Plays*, vol. V. Translation by Donald Watson. London: Calder and Boyars. For this article, I used the original: Eugène Ionesco, 1966, *Le Roi se meurt*, Vol. II. In: *Théâtre*. Paris: Gallimard.

It is the death of a universe. *Exit the King* is a secular morality play. Its mood is grotesque, in the sense of using comic devices to depict the saddest part of human life. Effectively demonstrating the subject of this article, the King alternatively behaves like a god, a king, a regular family man, a child and an animal. Although such inconsistency appears to explain the sense of absurdity often induced by the play, I believe, rather, that the principle of speech act metaphor is capable of dispelling it: by explaining this type of complex characterization as a kind of mixed stage metaphor, and restoring thereby the consistency of the King's characterization. The following speech act from *Exit the King* provides an example of a verbal metaphor in the propositional content of a speech act:

(1) Marguerite: [...] Now the kingdom's full of holes as a gigantic Gruyere cheese. (pp. 16–17)

This speech act (in a series of speech acts of blame) features an improper term (Gruyere cheese) in the predicate of its propositional content which conveys a description of the kingdom's state of affairs reflecting Queen Marguerite's viewpoint. In contrast, the following speech act serves as a good example of a speech act metaphor:

(2) King: I order trees to sprout from the floor. (Pause) I order the roof to disappear. (Pause) What? Nothing? I order rain to fall. [...] I order a thunderbolt, one I can hold in my hand. (p. 34)

King Bérenger produces speech acts of command which are improper to his characterization as king, being more appropriate to the behavior of a divine being because they presuppose jurisdiction over the elements. However, analysis of the play reveals that the intention was not to characterize the king as impersonating a god, but to describe him literally as a king and metaphorically as reflecting both divine nature and exhibiting diminishing power as he approaches death. In other words his failure does not contradict the nature of these speech acts and his characterization as king. Such speech acts can be described as 'the divine (or godlike) commands of the king'. In this sense, a speech act metaphor regards the performative aspect of a speech act which is metaphorical in itself.

A description of the structure and explanation of the function of speech act metaphor involves three theoretical domains: speech act, metaphor, and iconic signification and communication, with the theater being a particular instance of the latter. I have expanded on these matters in previous works, so shall confine myself here to the features most relevant to speech act metaphor.

In order to provide an effective description and explanation for such an unusual form of metaphor, a set of truth conditions must be satisfied. In the following I shall elucidate these conditions and suggest how speech act metaphor satisfies them.

## 2. The predicate 'is a metaphor'

What are the truth conditions of the predicate 'is a metaphor' or, in other words, under what conditions can the description of an expression in any language or

medium in terms of 'metaphor' be said to be literal and true? I suggest the following:

a. If and only if it is a description produced within a system of signification and communication, whether verbal or nonverbal.
b. If and only if it features a predicative structure which reflects its descriptive function.
c. If and only if the actual predicate is improper and by the same token both makes sense as a literal description and is essentially different from and alternative to it, with the specific difference being of the same kind for verbal and nonverbal metaphor.

### 2.1. *A metaphor is a description produced within a system of signification and communication, whether verbal or nonverbal*

Since metaphor is conceived as a standard form of description of a world, alternative to the literal one, it presupposes a language or medium (a system of signification and communication). Fundamentally, however, speech acts are not descriptions but referents in a world, i.e., objects of description and, consequently, their possible use in a metaphorical capacity would appear to be precluded.

A speech act is a manifestation of an action or, in Peircian terms, an index, on the grounds of a part-whole relationship; i.e., an act is the perceptible aspect (the part) of an action (the whole).[4] I have suggested elsewhere that, since by definition an action aims at changing a state of affairs in a world (van Dijk, 1977: 168), a speech act – albeit through verbal means – is a referential entity, i.e., a non-descriptive, or 'nonverbal' phenomenon in the sense that the performative components ('I', 'you' and the performative verb) indicate an action, and that even the descriptive elements in (p) are subordinated to the nature of such an action (Rozik, 1989a,1992a,1993). Moreover, being essentially similar, nonverbal acts and speech acts can interchange (e.g., a nonverbal threat can be substituted by an equivalent verbal one and *vice versa*); and nonverbal acts can be adequate responses to speech acts and *vice versa*, thereby creating mixed chains of interaction (e.g., a verbal threat can be responded to by a bodily assault). Dialogue – the exchange of speech acts between people – is, therefore, a particular form of interaction.

Whether speech activity is grasped in terms of pragmatics (Austin, 1962: 117; Searle, 1986 [1979]: 34, 43; Lyons, 1988 [1977]: 733; Levinson, 1987 [1983]: 196),[5] which emphasizes its linguistic elements, or in terms of action theory (van Dijk, 1977: 167), which emphasizes its effect on the world, it is widely accepted that it is not a descriptive use of language (Austin, 1962: 6).[6] There is thus no point in

[4] On the indexical nature of speech acts see Rozik (1989a, 1992a, 1993).

[5] This is also reflected in the use of the following terms: 'uptake' (Austin, 1962: 117), 'understanding' (Searle, 1986 [1979]: 34, 43; Lyons, 1988 [1977]: 733 and Levinson, 1983 [1983]: 196) and 'interpretation' (Elam, 1980: 164).

[6] In my approach to the theory of speech acts I mostly follow Teun van Dijk (1976, 1977).

contending that a speech act could satisfy the condition of being a description. Moreover, a theory of speech act metaphor should respect both the descriptive nature of metaphor and the referential status of speech activity. Therefore, only in a frame different from the usual performance accounted for in current theory, can a speech act possibly count as a metaphor.

Because of its iconic nature (Pavis, 1976; Ubersfeld, 1977, 1981: 51–83; Elam, 1980: 21–27; Fischer-Lichte, 1992: 129–141; Carlson, 1990: 3–9; Kowzan, 1992: 63–74; Rozik, 1992b, 1996a), the medium of theatre provides the grounds for viewing speech acts produced by actors as descriptions made within a system of signification and communication. Actors create descriptions of actions by producing iconic replicas of acts; e.g., an actor describes a nonverbal threat made by a character in a fictional world by iconically brandishing a fist in the face of another actor. At the other end of the communication axis, the spectator understands this gesture by relying on its elements of similarity to a real index. An iconic sign is a replica of an index, and thus combines (Serpieri, 1978: 163–200) the principle of similarity which defines 'icon' (Sebeok, 1975: 242–245; Pavis, 1996: 165–166) and the principle of contiguity which defines 'index' (Sebeok, 1975: 245–247; Pavis, 1996: 171). On the same grounds, an actor can produce a description of a fictional threat by imitating a speech act of threat, such as 'I will smash your face', while the spectator will equally rely on its elements of similarity in order to decode it. The iconic principle implies that anything which is an object of description in the real world is transmuted on stage into a description. Moreover, the iconic replica of a speech act on stage features exactly the same elements as a real speech act and only differs from the latter in being an iconic description of a speech act in a (usually fictional) world. The iconic speech act thus satisfies the essential condition of being a description produced within a system of signification and communication.

Following this logic, three types of speech act can be distinguished: (a) a real speech act (or model for an iconic speech act); (b) an iconic speech act, which is a description of a fictional act/action; and (c) a described speech act, which is attributed to a character in a world. Since metaphor presupposes a medium, whether a particular speech act is employed in a literal or a metaphorical capacity can only be asked with regard to type (b).

### 2.2. *A metaphor features a predicative structure which reflects a descriptive function*

Verbal metaphor embodies a predicative structure (Black, 1962: 218–235, 1988: 19–43; Beardsley, 1979: 134–144; Sadock, 1988: 47). In contrast, real speech acts only seem to feature a predicative structure.

The structure of a speech act encompasses four elements: a performer of the act (I, we), an addressee (you), a performative verb, and a propositional content (p). Although the combination of an 'I' and a performative verb appears to reflect a predicative structure, it does not: since the latter is not used in the capacity of a predicate but conventionally in the capacity of an act, i.e., as an index of an action, it is not a description of the speaker's state of affairs but a phenomenon of it (van Dijk, 1977: 182).

The performative verb is a verbal category that normally describes the kind of act/action which is performed and, therefore, a speech act such as 'I promise to buy you a [bike]' can be categorized as 'a promise' and genuinely predicated on the I who made the promise ('He made a promise'), describing a phenomenon in a world. In other words, the verb 'promise' can be used both in the capacity of verbal category and, in particular cases and by convention, for performing the act itself, i.e., in a non-descriptive/indexical capacity (cf. Leech, 1983: 181, 196). Accordingly, speech acts falling under the same verbal category can be performed without the performative verb itself: a promise can be performed without an explicit performative verb, e.g., by uttering the propositional content with a typical intonation (e.g., 'I'll buy you a [bike]') or by a non verbal gesture symbolizing 'trust me', such as putting the palm of the right hand on the heart (Austin, 1962: 73–76).

A speech act in the real world is also an index of its doer and, therefore, following the syntactic analogy, it is self-referential and can be described only by a sentence that makes reference to the producer of the act himself, and to the spatial and temporal circumstances of its utterance (deixis) (Serpieri, 1978: 163–200). This suits its nature as the perceptible aspect of an action. In contrast, a speech act uttered on stage cannot be attributed to the actor who produces it, but is eventually attributed to the character described by it, for example:

(3) King: [I order] Off with that Guard's head, off with his head! (p. 32)
In French: 'Que la tête du Garde tombe! (p. 27) – (that the head of the Guard fall!)

Despite the fact that the actor produces an image of a speech act of command and imprints it on his own body, the speech act is understood not as an index of himself, but of the fictional king; i.e., the (implied) 'I' does not refer to the actor but to the king. I have elsewhere termed this principle, which characterizes acting, 'deflection of reference' (Rozik, 1992b: 42–45). It is typical of drama to feature implicitly the 'I', 'you' and performative verb which, apart from the propositional content, are usually conveyed by nonverbal indexes or self-understood.

Deflection of reference is achieved by producing signs that identify a character other than the actor, in the capacity of subject signs, and signs/sentences that describe it, such as non-verbal or speech acts, in the capacity of predicate signs. When an iconic speech act is perceived as predicated on a character (the referent of the subject signs), it resumes its indexical nature, as if the character had produced it himself. In other words, whereas a real speech act is not predicative/descriptive in nature, an enacted speech act, by deflection of reference, is. In this sense, iconic speech acts satisfy the condition of featuring a predicative structure which reflects their descriptive function.

### 2.3. *A metaphor features a predicate which is improper and by the same token both makes sense as a literal description and is essentially different from and alternative to it, the specific difference being of the same kind for both verbal and nonverbal metaphor*

Metaphor is characterized by the use of an improper predicate. A word is linked to a set of objects – assumedly having a set of common features – by convention (the signifier) and by abstraction (the signified). A word thus constitutes a 'proper' (or 'literal') predicate, if employed in accordance with convention and abstraction, or an 'improper' (or potentially metaphorical) predicate, if its use breaches these conditions. Properness or improperness is thus determined by the nature of the referent; i.e., no sentence is literal or metaphorical in itself.

According to the interaction theory of verbal metaphor, the function of the improper predicate (the focus) is to evoke a set of verbal associations (modifiers) which eventually make sense with the subject of the sentence (the frame) on the literal level (Black, 1962: 233ff., 1988: 28; cf. Beardsley, 1979: 134–144). In other words, in both literal and metaphorical predications the actual predicate is a modifier which is used in a literal capacity. I believe this to be true whether the actual modifier is explicit or evoked associatively; i.e., elliptically present,[7] as demonstrated by the following sentences:

John is a snake
John is dangerous, dreadful [as] a snake

However, if a metaphor eventually makes sense on the literal level, why should one need, or choose, a metaphorical predicate? Not only has interaction theory made no attempt to solve this problem, but it is not even aware of it. If there is no difference on the verbal level between a straightforward literal predicate (e.g., 'dangerous' in 'John is dangerous') and the indirect literal predicate arrived at by an associative process (e.g., 'dangerous' in 'John is a snake'), then the difference must reside, as I have suggested elsewhere, in the capacity of the same literal predicate to evoke different and alternative referential associations that originate either in the context of the literal subject or in the context of the improper term of the metaphor (Rozik, 1994).

Referential associations are non-verbal in nature and originate in direct experience of a world, real or fictional, and are of a nonverbal (perceptual, emotive, ethic and/or aesthetic) nature.[8] These are most conspicuous when the same literal predicate is connected to different sources of referential associations. For example:

John is a snake = dreadful + referential associations 'x'

[7] My own approach to poetic metaphor is amply presented in Rozik (1994).

[8] Henle suggested a similar principle: difference in 'feeling tone'. His principle, however, restricts referential associations only to feelings (Henle, 1958: 190). Both feeling tones and referential associations explain why metaphor changes meaning by simple inversion (the improper term becoming the literal subject), although the literal modifier is shared by the literal subject and the improper noun.

John is a dragon = dreadful + referential associations 'y'
John is a wolf = dreadful + referential associations 'z'

Since, an otherwise abstract modifier can evoke given referential associations only in a modifying relationship with a noun, and since it is the improper term that affords such an alternative source of referential associations, in contrast to a literal predicate, a metaphorical predicate requires two verbal components: a literal modifier – in Lyons' terms, a literal adnominal (a verb or an adjective), and an improper nominal (a noun or functional equivalent) (Lyons, 1969: 327ff.).

Because the eventual literal modifier – explicit or implicit – can be predicated on both the literal subject of the sentence and the improper term of the metaphor, metaphor structurally determines preference of those referential associations originating in its combination with the improper term, which thus becomes not only an essential component of metaphor, but also its marker. I have suggested elsewhere that the marker of preference is a word such as 'like' or 'as', whether it is explicit or not (Rozik, 1994).

The deep structure of verbal metaphor includes five verbal components: (1) a subject–predicate syntactic pattern, (2) a literal subject, (3) an improper predicate (noun or modifier), (4) a common literal predicate, and (5) an optional preference marker. In addition, it includes one nonverbal component: the referential associations originating in the improper term.

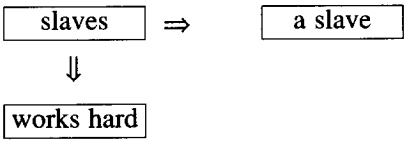
For most verbal components of a metaphor it is immaterial whether they are explicit or evoked associatively. I have suggested elsewhere that ellipsis is not a component of the deep structure of metaphor and that surface structures that are affected by this principle can be reconstituted to explicit fullness by means of various associative processes on the grounds of knowledge of this deep structure and the semantic context (see Rozik, 1998). For example, from the viewpoint of producing a certain kind of predicate (which evokes improper referential associations), there is no difference between 'New York is tempting, enjoyable and sinful as a big apple' and 'New York is a big apple', since modifiers such as 'tempting', 'sinful' and 'enjoyable' are easily evoked by syntagmatic associations of 'apple' and should be seen as elliptically present. This applies also to pictorial metaphors in which New York is actually represented by the image of an apple. The surface structure of metaphor can thus be reduced even to a single term, with the only indispensable component being the improper term, necessary to supply the alternative source of referential associations.

In current theory, speech acts are dealt with as if they invariably reflect the nature of their performers; e.g., if a king performs an order, it is assumed that it certainly reflects regal characterization. This is a natural assumption, such an order being an index of a king. If such a speech act were a description, it would have been equivalent to a literal one. However, a king can also be described as giving an order that is improper to his own characterization and constitutes an alternative source of referential associations. Potentially, if such a speech act were a description, it would be a speech act metaphor. In general, because an iconic speech act is a description of a character performing a speech act, I suggest that if the source of referential associa-

tions is the source's own characterization, it is literal, and, if it is an alternative source, it is potentially a speech act metaphor. This principle also applies to non-verbal metaphors, including non-human sources of referential associations. Detecting alternative sources of referential associations presupposes both knowledge of the qualities of the doer or, in other words, his characterization, and knowledge of the qualities of the alternative source, which presupposes a different characterization, improper to the former.

An iconic speech act should be seen as a description of an act predicated on a fictional character by deflection of reference, and thus should be conceived as equivalent to a performative verb used in a literal capacity. For example, the iconic speech act 'I warn you not to leave the house' – produced by an actor on stage and attributed to a character 'x' – is a 'warning' and is equivalent to the verbal sentence 'He (x) is warning him'.[9] A verb such as 'warn' can be seen as a literal modifier which can serve both in a literal or a metaphorical description. In order for it to become part of a metaphorical predicate, it requires complementation by an improper nominal that can evoke alternative referential associations; for example, 'I warn you [as a mother]' or '[as a police officer]' (on condition that 'I' is not a mother or a police officer).

But how can a speech act – as an equivalent of a single term – be a metaphorical predicate which requires at least two terms, a proper (an adnominal) and an improper one (a nominal)? I suggest that the answer lies in a particular surface structure of metaphor which features a single improper (adnominal) modifier which is able to evoke both a shared literal modifier (by paradigmatic association), and an improper nominal (by syntagmatic association). An example of such a surface structure in verbal metaphor is 'The king slaves all day long'. The verb 'slave' – if used for somebody who is not a slave – can evoke associatively both the common literal modifier 'works hard' and the improper nominal 'slave'. The following diagram reflects the structure of such a metaphor in both verbal and nonverbal systems:




This structure is also reflected in speech act metaphors, in which the speech act itself already reflects the characterization of an improper source of referential associations. The following example shows how an actor can produce such a metaphor:

(4) King: I thought I'd banished the clouds. *Clouds! We've had enough rain. Enough, I said!* (p. 21)

[9] Deflection of reference transforms an apparent 'I' speech act into a description of such an act, performed by another person; i.e., into a 'He' sentence.

These are two speech acts of 'command' which are echoed by the guard's verbal description in terms of 'order': 'The sky is overcast and the clouds don't seem to want to break up. The sun's late. And yet I heard the King order him to come out' (p. 11). These speech acts are not commands that reflect a typical royal character, since the elements are beyond human jurisdiction; rather, they evoke the possible behavior of a god. This particular example should be seen not as an infelicitous speech act because of lack of authority (Austin, 1962: 12ff.; Searle, 1985 [1969]: 60; Lyons, 1981: 191), but as a metaphorical description of a crucial aspect of the complex image of King Bérenger. An actor in the role would probably enact such an order with the typical majesty usually attributed to divine beings. The combination of 'command' and 'god' produces referential associations which are alternative to those evoked by that of 'command' and 'king'. The king's failure, which aims at producing a grotesque image of himself or, rather, of everyman metaphorically represented by him, does not contradict the metaphorical nature of this speech act, whose structure is 'I [a king] command [as a god] the clouds to disappear'.

Another example:

(5) Marie: Poor little chap, poor child!
King: Child! A child! Then I can make a fresh start! I want to start again! (to Marie) I want to be a baby and you can be my mother. Then they won't come for me. I still don't know my reading, writing and arithmetic. [I want to go back to school and be with my playmates.] What do two and two make? (p. 47)

Marie employs the verbal metaphor 'child' in the propositional content of her speech act and the king accepts it first as a literal expression and as a solution to his predicament. However, he gradually starts behaving like a young boy. The last speech act 'What do two and two make?' is in fact a speech act of question which should be enacted in the typical intonation of a child. If the actor enacting the king indeed produces this sentence in a childlike manner, assuming that 'child' is an improper predicate of 'king' (+adult), it is an iconic speech act metaphor: he [+king, +adult] asks a question like a child [–adult, –king]. This metaphor (the childlike behavior of the king) is also used to foster a grotesque impression of the dying king (Rozik, 1996b).

Marie's verbal metaphor would appear to be a fitting description of the iconic metaphor. She conceives the king's behavior in terms of a metaphorical predicate ([behaves] as a child) which reflects both her own viewpoint and something in the king's behavior which elicits such a description. Ionesco implies that the Queen's sensitivity should be matched by the behavior of the King which should indeed reflect that of a child. During rehearsals, the director would probably ask the actor to match the stage direction implied in the Queen's words. However, in drama, verbal descriptions uttered by characters do not describe what happens on stage but what happens in a fictional world, while the same principle applies to iconic descriptions of speech acts. It can be concluded, therefore, that the verbal metaphor is not a fitting description of the nonverbal metaphor, but that both aim independently and equivalently at describing the same fictional behavior.

On the other hand, a verbal metaphor in a stage direction usually is a description, embedded in a directive speech act and meant to guide actors and other practitioners in performing the script, as for example, in the following speech act of invocation and entreaty:

(6) *(The following dialogue should be spoken and acted as though it were a ritual, with solemnity, almost chanted, [...])*
King: You suicides, teach me how to feel disgust for life! (p. 54)

According to the usual function of stage directions, this one ('spoken and acted as though it were a ritual') should have described how this speech act metaphor was to be performed on stage. However, since a verbal metaphor can hardly constitute a literal description of a nonverbal metaphor, it could be inferred that stage directions are vague enough also to allow reference to a fictional world. In the case of such parallel metaphorical descriptions, therefore, it is most plausible that reference is indeed also being made to a fictional world.

An additional source of improper associations relates to the nature of the situation in which a speech act is uttered. In addition to characterization, a speech act also reflects the fictional circumstances of utterance and may evoke a definition of the situation which is either proper or improper to it. For example, if in a wedding ceremony the groom-character says 'Let's shake on it!' which is the conventional speech act for concluding a commercial deal, instead of 'Yes, I do'. which is the conventional speech act for accepting the bonds of matrimony, his response should be understood as a metaphorical description of a wedding in terms of business. Since these are ritualized forms of speech acts, any deviation is easily detected and construed either as a mistake (which invalidates the action) or as a potential metaphor. For example, when the old lady in Ionesco's *The chairs* offers (a speech act) chocolate icecream for sale:

(7) Old Woman: [...] Programme, would you like a programme, choc ices? (p. 68)[10]

Her behavior clearly deviates both from her characterization and particularly from the nature of the situation (which she herself has defined as a 'scientific lecture'), because it is more appropriate to entertainment of a lower kind, such as a soccer game or a circus performance. This is done in order to cast irony on the scientific pretensions of the old man.

Since on stage, an iconic nonverbal act, which evokes an alternative source of referential associations, is conceived as a 'stage metaphor', such an iconic speech act should be seen as a particular case of stage metaphor as well (Rozik, 1989b). Speech act metaphor is thus an iconic metaphorical description which affects our view of a

[10] All quotations from Eugene Ionesco, 1958, *The chairs*. In: *Plays*, vol. I. Translation by Donald Watson. London: Calder. For this article I used the original: Eugène Ionesco, 1954, *Les Chaises*, vol. I. In: *Théâtre*. Paris: Gallimard.

fictional referent, by means of a specific kind of categorization, sharing with literal predication the same set of literal modifiers and differing from it in evoking referential associations originating in an improper term. Speech act metaphor thus satisfies the condition of featuring a predicate which is improper and by the same token both makes sense as a literal description and is essentially different from it, with the specific difference being of the same kind as in verbal metaphor.

## 3. Speech act metaphors in allegorical theatre

Because an allegorical play features an expanded stage metaphor which both substitutes for the literal subject (or set of subjects) and tends to pervade the entire text, any speech act by virtue of being proper to the allegorical characterization is already a metaphor, and any speech act which activates an alternative source of referential associations (provided that it does not revert to literal description) is a metaphor on top of a metaphor, i.e., results in a mixed metaphor. For example, the actor who enacts the King in *Exit the King* basically and consistently enacts the behavior of a dying king, which in itself is a stage metaphor of dying everyman. In this sense, every speech act in the play that is produced 'in character' (as a king) is a speech act metaphor. Therefore, in producing orders which recall a divine being (as a god) the King behaves in a way which is improper to his basic characterization (king) and creates thereby a metaphor on top of a metaphor. The following is an example of a literal speech act of the king as king:

(8) King: Let us send for all our Ministers. (*Juliette appears*) Go and fetch the Ministers. (p. 25)

and the following of a speech act metaphor of the King as god:

(9) King: I order leaves to grow again. (p. 34)

Since metaphors do not affect the literal meaning of sentences and only regard alternative sources of referential associations, this two-layered structure has no crucial effect on the allegorical level, and speech act metaphors on both levels operate like regular mixed verbal metaphors: they equally provide alternative referential associations. It may affect other functions, however, such as ironic or aesthetic, as we shall see below.

It would appear that a clear distinction should be made between speech act metaphors produced against an allegorical and those produced against a literal background, i.e., a play featuring a regular fictional world. I have suggested elsewhere, however, that any play featuring a fictional world is potentially a metaphorical description of the spectator's psychical state of affairs, because only the principle of metaphor can combine description and extreme difference (improperness) to the spectator's world, while being essentially referential and meaningful to it (Rozik, 1988). If the fictional principle is defined by personification (expression by means of

a world of human characters and their actions), then what distinguishes allegorical drama from regular (praxical) drama is not its being an expanded substitutional stage metaphor, but its being a metaphorical description of an abstract idea which mediates between a fictional world and a spectator. Furthermore, in allegorical theater, what appears to be a literal speech act is a metaphorical one and, what is detected as a speech act metaphor against an apparent literal background is a metaphor on top of a metaphor.

Even if this thesis is not accepted, the fact remains that in allegorical theater, metaphor applies on two levels: basic characterization and departure from it. At the basic level, improperness is established against the background of an implied substituted literal subject (the idea), while at the second level, improperness is established against the background of a basic and consistent characterization, as if it was a literal description.

Because improperness is reciprocal, it may lead from a literal term to a metaphorical one (e.g., everyman ⇒ king), from one metaphor to another (e.g., king ⇒ god), or from a metaphorical term back to the implied literal subject of the allegory (e.g., god/king ⇒ everyman). In such a case, there is a phenomenon of inversion: what seems to be improper to the improper term (king) may be a literal modifier (of everyman). The latter should be read, therefore, not as a source of alternative referential associations, but as a clue to the substituted and missing literal subject of the overall metaphor, as in the following example:

(10) King: (*to Juliette*) [...] Have you sewn those buttons on my pyjamas? Have you had my shoes re-soled? (p. 59)

The sudden departure from regal to domestic behavior may create the impression of a metaphor on top of a metaphor but, in fact, it reverts to the literal sphere of regular everyman in his eternal denial of death.

## 4. Stylistic implications

The use of speech act metaphors has far-reaching stylistic implications: for the non-initiated, they may create the impression of a chaotic or, rather, an absurd fictional world (Esslin, 1961: xixff.). Such an impression arises not only from an exuberant mixture of improper terms in drama,[11] but also in most cases of mixed metaphor, particularly in poetry.[12] As I have just shown, however, such an impression of absurdity is not the intent of stage metaphor and is fundamentally erroneous, unless the description of the fictional world itself aims at producing an image of absurdity.

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[11] For example, *Exit the King* features mixed metaphor not only of the one-on-top-of-the-other kind but also of parallel metaphors, such as god, king and animal. (See Rozik, 1996).

[12] I believe that this is what led Martin Esslin to the conclusion that the *Theater of the Absurd* creates an absurd image of the world.

An initial sense of disorientation and confusion may stem from the very nature of iconic stage metaphor, in which the improper terms of the predicate enjoy concrete presence on stage. However, if speech act metaphor is conceived as a feature of a stage-text, i.e., of a description of a fictional world, and not of the fictional world itself, and if the text is decoded correctly, any sense of absurdity should vanish. After providing the expected set of associations, verbal and nonverbal, the improper terms should be disregarded. Although the same applies to verbal metaphor, it is possibly easier to discard an improper word than an improper image. An impression of absurdity will persist only for those who confuse the stage reality with the fictional world.

The way to decode a stage metaphor, including a speech act metaphor, is first to evoke the referential associations originating in the improper term, then, to link these associations to the literal modifier in order to describe the fictional referent, and finally, to disregard the improper source of associations, despite its concrete presence on stage. Only after the speech act metaphor has been decoded should its descriptive elements be attributed to the fictional world. Speech act metaphor may be responsible for initial obscurity, but not for absurdity.

If decoded correctly, therefore, speech act metaphor is not absurd in itself, although it may be intentionally used for such a purpose, as in comic or grotesque drama. There is a clear tendency to absurd speech act metaphor in modernist drama, particularly in the Theatre of the Absurd. However, this is not of recent invention; in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (479-492), for example, Dionysus, scared to death, craps in his pants like a human being. The main innovation of modernist drama was probably in introducing and operating mixed stage metaphors, speech act metaphors in particular, in handling comically serious themes, such as human frustration and death, with the aim of producing a grotesque image of the world. Although grotesque overtones are not a necessary result, the proliferous use of mixed stage metaphor certainly creates a distinct type of theatrical style.

## 5. Conclusions

The theatrical frame transmutes the self-referential nature of an act into an iconic description of an act, enabling speech act metaphor. This solves the paradox of integrating the descriptive nature of metaphor and the referential nature of action. Speech act metaphor is in fact a particular form of stage metaphor, which operates either in sentence units or by expanding to pervade an entire text. Stage metaphor is a particular case of nonverbal metaphor, whose existence reflects the semiotic rather than verbal nature of metaphor.

The proliferation of (single or mixed) stage metaphor in modernist and post-modernist drama has reached such a degree that, for the first time in the history of theatre theory, there is a need for a sound description of its deep structure, generation of surface structures, and method of interpretation, in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of its uses and effects.

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