Speech acts are acts of communication that people perform by uttering sentences under conditions specified by the speech-act rules. If speech act theory is correct, the basic speech acts are illocution, reference and predication; and the sentences used in these acts must have syntactic or phonological potentials for being so used. (Alston, 1963 Searle, 1969) In uttering a sentence like (1) or (2), for example, a speaker characteristically performs all three basic speech acts, because the syntax and the phonology of the sentence permit him to do so.

(1) Nixon resigned.
(2) Did Nixon resign?

In uttering both (1) and (2), the speaker refers to a certain referent (Nixon) and predicates of him a certain property (having resigned). In uttering (1), however, he performs the illocutionary act of stating that the referent has that property while, in uttering (2), he performs the different illocutionary act of asking whether it has it. The illocutionary potentials of (1) and (2) reside in both their syntax—the declarative (subject + verb) syntax of (1), the interrogative (do + subject + verb) syntax of (2)—and their phonology (the different intonation contours). The referring and the predicating potentials reside only in the syntax however. Nixon is a referring phrase (that is, has a potential for use in referring to Nixon); and resigned in (1) and did resign in (2) are predicating phrases (have a potential for use in predicating the property of having resigned). A referring phrase is any phrase that has a potential for use in referring—that, under the intentional and contextual conditions specified by the speech-act rules of reference, a speaker may use to refer to (to pick out and identify) a referent. A predicating phrase is any phrase that has a potential for use in predicating a property of a referent or a relation of two or more referents.
In this paper, we focus upon reference and predication—assuming, not arguing, that speech-act theory is correct about them and about the sentences used in their performance, and assuming also that referring and predicating potentials reside in the syntax of these sentences (that is, that the referring phrase and the predicating phrase are syntactic categories). For a given language, then, the question is which phrases are referring phrases and which predicating. This question, we do not, however, attempt to answer, that is, we do not attempt to formulate, for English or any other language, the syntactic rules that generate all and only referring phrases and predicating phrases, i.e., rules of a form like

\[
\text{Referring Phrase} \rightarrow \text{Predicating Phrase}
\]

We attempt, rather, to answer another question whether these two categories coincide, in surface structure or deep, with the traditional categories—or categories-and-functions—of syntax. We argue that, surprisingly, they do not, at least for English. And we venture to suggest that perhaps this poor fit casts doubt upon the validity of the traditional categories and functions.

Our task, then, is the critical one of raising questions that, so far as we are aware, have never been raised, of rejecting some tempting answers to them, and, in the light of this, of questioning the validity of much traditional (and, for that matter, untraditional) syntax.

Perhaps the most tempting answer to the question of which phrases are referring and which predicating is to identify referring phrases with noun phrases and predicating phrases with verb phrases (or with the predicate-phrases in Chomsky's Aspects). We show that this answer won't do. Our most inclusive generalizations are

(a) that not all noun phrases are referring phrases,
(b) that not all referring phrases are noun phrases,
(c) that not all verb phrases are predicating phrases,
(d) that not all predicating phrases are verb phrases.
Let's look at some details.

First, the distinction between referring phrases and predicating phrases is not the distinction, in either surface structure or deep, between subjects and predicates (that is, between noun phrases functioning as subjects and verb phrases functioning as predicates). The subject of a sentence may be a referring phrase, and the predicate a predicating phrase as in (1) and (2), but they need not.

For one thing, the subject of an existential sentence—a sentence that, used in making a statement, affirms or denies the existence of something—is not a referring phrase.

(3) Unicorns exist
(4) Unicorns do not exist.

If it were, (3) as a statement would be a tautology—it would assume or presuppose, according to the speech-act rules for referring, the very thing it states (namely, that the noun phrase unicorns has a referent, that there are unicorns, that unicorns exist.) And (4) as a statement would be implicitly contradictory—it would assume or presuppose that unicorns exist (that the noun phrase unicorns has a referent) but then proceed to state exactly the opposite.

Nor is the predicate of an existential sentence a predicating phrase. The predicates of (3) and (4)—exist and do not exist—are only parts of predicating phrases. In both (3) and (4), the entire sentence is a predicating phrase; there are no referring phrases at all. (This, incidentally, is evidence that predication is more basic than reference; reference is sometimes dispensable. Much referring—at least that referring which does not depend upon deixis or mutual knowledge—is possible only because of previous predication. Once (3) is uttered, or assumed to be utterable, as a true statement, then the noun phrase unicorns in (5)—

(5) Unicorns like fudge.

—becomes a referring phrase.)
For another thing, an abstract subject as in (6)--

(6) Fatheadedness characterizes Bill

is not a referring phrase, nor is the predicate of such a sentence a predicating phrase. The subject is part of the predicating phrase (fatheadedness characterizes). If the deep structure of (6) is something like (7), and that it is, is debatable--

(7) Bill is fatheaded.

then the deep-structure subject of (6) is a referring phrase (Bill), and the deep-structure predicate is a predicating phrase (is fatheaded). In any case, (6) and (7) are surely synonymous, and the referring and predicating potentials must be identical.

Finally, in a sentence consisting of two definite noun phrases and a transitive verb--

(8) Mary hit Bill

the subject (Mary) is a referring phrase, the predicate, however, is not simply a predicating phrase, but a predicating phrase (hit) followed by a referring phrase (Bill). Used in making a statement, (8) refers to two referents (Mary and Bill) and predicates a certain relation of them (the hitter-hit relation).

Second, the distinction between referring phrases and predicating phrases is not the distinction between topic and comment, theme and rheme or other components of sentential "Information Structure."

(9) Salami, I like

the topic (salami) is indeed a referring phrase, however, the comment (I like) is not simply a predicating phrase, but a referring phrase (I) followed by a predicating phrase (like). Used in making a statement, (9) refers to two referents (the speaker and salami) and predicates a certain relation of them (the liker-liked relation).
Third, as a general rule, though definite noun phrases are referring, indefinite noun phrases are not. In (10) and (11), for instance--

(10) Bill is the fathead.
(11) Mary hit the fathead.

—the definite noun phrase the fathead is referring. In both cases the verb is a predicating phrase with a potential for predicating a relation between the referent of the subject and that of the fathead. In (10), the identity relation, in (11) the hitter/hit relation. In (12) and (13), however--

(12) Bill is a fathead.
(13) Mary hit a fathead.

—the indefinite noun phrase a fathead is not referring. In (12), which is synonymous with (6) and (7), the noun phrase a fathead is part of the predicating phrase is a fathead. Compare the Black Vernacular English version given in (14).

(14) Bill a fathead.

Here, in the surface structure at least, a fathead alone is the predicating phrase. As for (13), the indefinite noun phrase cannot be a referring phrase; in authentic language use, it would not select out and uniquely identify any particular fathead which Mary hit. Rather, it seems to be an existential predication. Like (3) and (4), the entire sentence is a predicating phrase; however, this predicating phrase has what we might call a subordinate referring phrase embedded within it. Thus (13) is synonymous with (15).

(15) A fathead such that Mary hit him exists.

Perhaps an exception to the general rule that indefinite noun phrases are not referring is any indefinite subject interpreted as universally or generically quantified, an elephant in (16), for example.
An elephant (i.e. every elephant, all elephants) can be hypnotized.

Further, since some referring phrases are locative adverbs, as in (17)--

(17) Bill is here

--not all referring phrases are noun phrases. In (17) is is a predicating phrase with a potential for use in predicating a relation (the being-at relation) of the referent of Bill and the referent of the locative adverb here.

We promised to venture to suggest that the poor fit between the syntactic/semantic categories "referring phrase" and "predicating phrase," and traditional syntactic categories or categories-and-functions casts doubt upon the validity of the latter. Three points.

First, it is a curious fact that the main features of traditional syntactic analysis—the binary immediate-constituent analysis of the sentence into subject and predicate or into noun phrase and verb phrase (or predicative phrase), for example—have survived intact from Plato in the Greco-Roman tradition and Panini in the Indian, through structural linguistics to generative-transformational linguistics. From this fact, we might argue that the traditional analysis is correct. Otherwise it would not have withstood nearly 2500 years of change in linguistic fashions. In particular, it would not have withstood the last 50, certainly not the last 20. But we might also argue that only the dead hand of tradition has kept it alive—that no one has really questioned it (subjected it to empirical confirmation, say) and that in the light of speech-act theory, it is high time that someone question it.

Second, if speech-act theory is correct about illocution, reference and predication being the basic speech acts and about the potentials that sentences used in the performance of these acts must have, and if the traditional syntactic analysis is also right, then every language—English, at least—has a dual syntactic structure. One part of this dual structure—let's call it
the speech act structure--has as its basic syntactic categories the referring phrase and the predicating phrase (together with declarative, interrogative, imperative and other forms marking illocutionary potential). The other part--traditional structure--has as its basic categories the noun phrase and the verb or predicate phrase. The speech act structure is closely related to the semantic or meaning structure of the sentence; the traditional structure--even in deep structure--is less closely related. This (admittedly rather implausible) dual syntactic structure would seem to be evidence that the principle of least effort--maximum semantic ends with minimum syntactic and phonetic means--does not operate in language.

Third, if speech-act theory is right and the traditional syntactic analysis wrong, then the grammar of a language can, it would seem, be vastly simplified. It can postulate fewer entities and fewer rules (thereby pleasing Occam's Razor). In particular, it can eliminate, at least in deep structure, the basic categories of traditional syntactic analysis, and some of the rules relating semantic structure (very close to speech-act structure) to traditional syntactic structure. The duty of a grammar--or of any other theory--is to explain the phenomena by (among other things) postulating as few entities as possible. In linguistics, however, it is not always easy to say just what the phenomena are. Are speaker's intuitions about syntactic surface structures among the phenomena? If so, what are they? Is there evidence, for instance, that (18) (or any of the many variants of it) represents their intuitions about the structure of (19) which is surely closer to their intuitions about its semantic structure?

\[
\begin{align*}
(18) & \quad S \\
\quad & \quad NP \\
\quad & \quad Nprop \\
\quad & \quad V \\
\quad & \quad Det \\
\quad & \quad N \\
\quad & \quad Mary \quad hit \quad the \quad fathead
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(19) & \quad S \\
\quad & \quad Ref. \quad Pred. \quad Ref. \quad Ph. \\
\quad & \quad Nprop \\
\quad & \quad Ph. \\
\quad & \quad Nprop \\
\quad & \quad U \\
\quad & \quad Det \\
\quad & \quad N \\
\quad & \quad Mary \quad hit \quad the \quad fathead
\end{align*}
\]
There is some evidence (e.g., Bach 1968, Fillmore, 1971, McCawley, 1971, Steinmann, 1974) that (19) or something like it, is closer to the semantic structure of (11). Is there any evidence that (18) is the syntactic structure of it?

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