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**Lectures and Method-Guides for Seminars  
on the Course for Choice**

# **BASIC PROBLEMS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY**

*for the students of the English Department  
of the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology  
Uzhhorod National University*

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# CONTENTS

## *Lecture 1.*

<b>INTRODUCTION TO SPEECH ACT THEORY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1. Preliminary Remarks.....	6
2. Philosophical Background.....	8
3. Identifying Speech Acts .....	11
4. Locution, Illocution, Perlocution .....	13
5. Illocutionary, Perlocutionary and Propositional Acts .....	14
6. Performative Utterances .....	16
7. Reference as a Speech Act.....	19
8. Expressions and Kinds of Speech Acts.....	20
Check Yourself Test.....	22
Literature .....	23

## *Lecture 2.*

<b>CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF PERFORMATIVES .....</b>	<b>24</b>
1. Performative Hypothesis .....	24
2. Metalinguistic Performatives .....	26
3. Ritual Performatives .....	28
4. Collaborative Performatives.....	29
5. Group Performatives.....	29
6. Overlap of Categories.....	30
7. Explicit and Implicit Performatives .....	31
Check Yourself Test.....	32
Literature .....	32

*Lecture 3.*

<b>TYPES OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND CONDITIONS OF THEIR PERFORMING</b> .....	33
1. Types of Illocutionary Acts .....	33
2. Conditions of Illocutionary Acts .....	38
3. Performing Illocutionary Acts .....	39
Check Yourself Test .....	42
Literature .....	42

*Lecture 4.*

<b>CONDITIONS OF PROMISES AND GENERAL HYPOTHESES CONCERNING ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS</b> .....	44
1. How to Promise: a Complicated Way .....	44
2. Insincere Promises .....	48
3. General Hypotheses Concerning Illocutionary Acts .....	48
Check Yourself Test .....	52
Literature .....	52

*Lecture 5.*

<b>A TAXONOMY OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS</b> .....	53
1. Criteria for Distinguishing Illocutionary Acts .....	53
2. Basic Categories of Illocutionary Acts .....	58
Check Yourself Test .....	62
Literature .....	62

*Lecture 6.*

<b>METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS ON SPEECH ACT THEORY</b> .....	63
1. Propositional Content and the Illocutionary Force (Point) .....	64
2. Speech Acts and Units of their Activity .....	65
3. Primary (Natural) and Secondary (Institutional) Speech Acts .....	67
4. Speech Act Classification .....	68
5. General Rules for Inferring Non-Literal from Literal Meaning .....	69
Check Yourself Test .....	70
Literature .....	70

*Lecture 7.*

<b>INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS AND TYPES OF COMPETENCE .....</b>	<b>71</b>
1. Preliminary Remarks .....	71
2. Searle's Point of View on the Problem .....	74
3. Labov and Fanshel's Rule for Indirect Requests .....	76
4. Communicative Competence: Women, Sex and Gender .....	78
Check Yourself Test .....	80
Literature .....	80

*Lecture 8.*

<b>THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE OF SPEECH ACTS .....</b>	<b>81</b>
1. Grice's Conversational Maxims .....	81
2. The Interconnection between the Cooperative Principle, Maxims and Conversational Implicature .....	84
3. Examples of Conversational Implicature .....	85
Check Yourself Test .....	88
Literature .....	88

*Lecture 9.*

<b>PRAGMATICS AS THE THEORY OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION .....</b>	<b>89</b>
1. Preliminary Remarks .....	89
2. Saying Something .....	91
3. Rules of Speaking .....	93
4. Sociolinguistic interests .....	94
Check Yourself Test .....	95
Literature .....	95

<b>METHOD-GUIDES AND PLANS FOR SEMINARS ON THE COURSE FOR CHOICE .....</b>	<b>96</b>
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## Lecture 1

### INTRODUCTION TO SPEECH ACT THEORY

1. Preliminary remarks.
2. Philosophical background.
3. Identifying speech acts.
4. Locution, illocution, perlocution.
5. Illocutionary, perlocutionary and propositional acts.
6. Performative utterances.
7. Reference as a speech act.
8. Expressions and kinds of speech acts.

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

Speaking a language is performing speech acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making remarks, requests and so on, and more abstractly, acts such as referring and predicating and that these acts are in general made possible by and are performed in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguistic elements.

The reason for concentrating on the study of speech acts is simply this: all speech communication involves linguistic acts. The unit of linguistic communication is not the symbol, word, or sentence but rather the production or issuance of the symbol, word, or sentence in the performance of the speech act. **Speech acts are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication.**

A theory of language is part of a theory of action, simply because speaking is a rule-governed form of behaviour. A great deal can be said in the study of language without studying speech acts, but any such purely formed theory is necessarily incomplete.

The speech act performed in the utterance of a sentence is in general a function of the meaning of the sentence. The meaning of the sentence does not in all cases uniquely determine what speech act is performed in a given utterance of that sentence, because a speaker may mean more than what he actually says, but it is always in principle possible for him to say exactly what (s)he means.

Of all the issues in the general theory of language usage speech act theory has probably aroused the widest interest as it orients scientific endeavours towards studying the function of language in human communication. The hypothesis that the speech act is the basic unit of communication together with the principle of expressibility suggests that there are a series of analytic connections between the notion of speech acts, what the speaker means, what the sentence (or other linguistic units) uttered means, what the speaker intends, what the hearer understands, and what the rules governing the linguistic elements are.

Psychologists have suggested that the acquisition of the concepts underlying speech acts may be a prerequisite for the acquisition of language in general. Literary critics have looked to speech act theory for an illumination of textual subtleties or for an understanding of the nature of literary genres. Anthropologists have hoped to find in the theory some account of the nature of magical spells and ritual in general. Philosophers have seen potential applications too, among other things, the status of ethical statements, while **linguists have seen the notions of speech act theory as variously applicable to problems in syntax, semantics, second language learning and elsewhere.** Meanwhile in linguistic pragmatics speech acts remain along with presupposition and implicature in particular, one of the central phenomena that any general pragmatic theory must account for.

#### 2. Philosophical Background

Historically, speech act studies originate in the philosophy of language. The basic insights offered by the work of philosophers Austin, Searle, Grice, Bierwisch are based on the assumption that the minimal units of human communication are not linguistic expressions, but rather the performance of

certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving directions, apologizing, thanking, etc.

Issues of truth and falsity have been of central interest since 1930 when the doctrine of logical positivism flourished. A central tenet of this doctrine was that unless a sentence can be verified (i.e. tested for its truth or falsity), it was strictly speaking meaningless. Of course, it followed that most ethical, aesthetic and literary discourses, not to mention everyday utterances were simply meaningless. Such a conclusion was viewed by proponents of logical positivism as a delightful result. It was this movement that Wittgenstein was actively attacking with the well known slogan “meaning is use” [Philosophical Investigations. Oxford: Blackwell, 1958] and the insistence that utterances are only explicable in relation to the activities, or language-games, in which they play a role.

It was in this same period that a British philosopher J. Austin launched his theory of speech acts. There are strong parallels between the later Wittgenstein’s emphasis on language usage and language games and Austin’s insistence that the total speech act situation is the only actual phenomenon which is the last resort we are engaged in elucidating.

In his lectures that were posthumously published under the title “How to Do Things with Words” (1962) Austin set about demolishing the view of language that would place truth conditions as central to language understanding. His method was this:

First, he noted that some ordinary declarative sentences, contrary to logical positivist assumption, are not apparently used with any intention of making true or false statements. These seem to form a speech class and are illustrated below:

*I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow*  
*I hereby christen this ship “Queen Elizabeth”*  
*I declare war on Zanzibar*  
*I apologize*  
*I dub thee Sir Walter*  
*I object*  
*I sentence you to 10 years of hard labour*  
*I bequeath you my property*  
*I give you my word*  
*I warn you that trespassers will be prosecuted*

The peculiar thing about these sentences, according to Austin, is that they are not used just to say things, i.e. describe states of affairs **but rather actively to do things**. After you have declared war on Zanzibar, or dubbed Sir Walter, or raised an objection, the world has changed in substantial ways. Further, you cannot assess such utterances as true or false as is illustrated by the bizarre nature of the following exchanges:

- I A: *I second the motion*  
 B: *That’s false*  
 II A: *I dub thee Sir Walter*  
 B: *Too true.*

Austin termed these peculiar and special sentences and the utterances realized in them, **performatives**, and contrasted them to statements, assertions, and utterances which he called **constatives**. Austin then went on to suggest that although, unlike constatives, performatives cannot be true or false, yet they can go wrong. He then set himself the task of cataloguing all the ways in which they can go wrong. For instance, suppose I say “*I christen this ship ‘Queen Elizabeth’*”. I may not succeed in so christening the vessel if, for instance, it is already named otherwise, or I am not the appointed namer, or there are no witnesses, bottles of champagne, etc. Successfully naming a ship requires certain institutional arrangements, without which the action that the utterance attempts to perform is simply null and void. On the basis of such different ways in which a performative can fail to

come off, Austin produced a typology of conditions which performatives must meet if they are to succeed or be “happy”. He called these conditions **felicity conditions**, and distinguished three main categories of them:

A. (1) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect.

(2) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate as specified in the procedure.

B. The procedure must be executed (1) correctly and (2) completely.

C. Often (1) the person must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions as specified in the procedure, and (2) if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must do so.

As evidence of the existence of such conditions consider what happens when some of them are not fulfilled. E.g., suppose as a British citizen, I say to my wife: *I hereby divorce you* I will not thereby achieve a divorce, because there simply is no such procedure whereby by uttering divorce can be achieved. In contrast, in Muslim cultures there is such a procedure, whereby the uttering of a sentence with the import of three times consecutively does thereby constitute a divorce.

As an illustration of a failure of condition A (2), consider a clergyman baptizing the wrong baby, or the right baby with the wrong name (Albert for Alfred, say) or consider the case of one head of state welcoming another, but addressing the attendant bodyguard in error.

As for condition B (1) the words must be the conventionally correct ones – the response as below will not do in the Church of England marriage ceremony

Curate: *Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife ... and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?*

Bridegroom: *Yes.*

The bridegroom must say, “*I will*”.

Finally violations of the C conditions are insincerities: to advise someone to do something when you really think it would be advantageous for you but not him or for a juror to find a defendant guilty when he knows him to be innocent, would be to violate condition C (1). And to promise to do something which one has no intention whatsoever of doing would be a straightforward violation of C (2).

Austin notes that these violations are not all of equal nature. Violations of A and B conditions give rise to **misfires** as he put it – the intended actions simply fail to come off. Violations of C conditions on the other hand are **abuses** not so easily detected at the time of the utterance in question, with the consequence that the action is performed but infelicitously or insincerely.

### 3. Identifying Speech Acts

If speakers were always explicit about what they were doing, in the sense that they were clear about the illocutionary force of their utterances, then speech act theory would offer the most powerful account of communication. But speakers are often unclear about what they are doing; they are typically indirect, multifunctional and vague about the purpose of their utterance. A speaker’s utterance does not always have a clear indicator of what its function is, and even the use of a simple performative verb does not guarantee the illocutionary force of an utterance. The illocutionary force of a speech act is easier to identify in highly conventional contexts such as wedding ceremonies, courts of law and games.

Most scholars have worked to classify illocutionary acts in terms of the recognizable intent of the speaker. The recognizable intent is an effectiveness criterion because illocutionary force is achieved when the hearer recognizes what the speaker intended to say or do. The hearer does not have to understand, agree with, or be affected by the utterance; the hearer must simply understand the speaker’s purpose in uttering something. Bach and Harnish in their book “Linguistic communication and speech acts” (Cambridge, 1979) argued for the communicative nature of illocutionary acts by suggesting a set of speech acts where the speaker expresses his or her intent to influence the hearer in some way as well as expressing an attitude about the subject matter of the utterance. Bach and Harnish suggested four categories of illocutionary acts that are communicative in nature.



The first is **constatives** – acts that reveal the speaker’s beliefs or knowledge state and have the hearer accepting these beliefs or knowledge states as their main intention. Suggesting, describing, informing and predicting are examples of constatives. In each case the speaker is trying to put the hearer into the same knowledge state as himself.

When the speaker is trying to induce a hearer to action and provides motivation for the action, then the speaker is using **directive** speech acts. Directives include advice, prohibitions and suggestions. The speaker wants the hearer to do something and is providing reasons, information and motivation for the action.

The third type of communicative illocutionary act are **commissives**. These are when the speaker is agreeing or obligating himself to do something for the hearer in the future. Promises and offers are examples of commissives. The speaker is by uttering the act committing himself to some future action.

The last category is termed **acknowledgements** and these include acts such as thanking, congratulating and apologizing. Acknowledgements are when the speaker is communicating emotions or feelings that he or she wants the hearer to understand.

Searle (1969) worked to specify the criteria involved in identifying a speech act and the situation in which that act “counts” as performing a function. He began by stating that normal communication conditions must occur, that is the speaker and hearer must share a common language, both must be able to hear, and so on. From these basic assumptions Searle extracted what he called constitutive rules for the performance of a particular speech act. The following is an example of the necessary conditions for the act of “warning”.

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Preparatory condition | Hearer has reasons to believe the event will occur and is not in the hearer’s interest. If it is not obvious to both speaker and hearer that event will occur. |
| 2. Sincerity condition   | Speaker believes the event will occur and is not in the hearer’s best interest.  |
| 3. Essential condition   | Counts as an undertaking that the event is not in the hearer’s interest.   |

A speaker might say, e.g., *“If you don’t organize your expense receipts, then you will have trouble at tax time.”* This utterance would count as a warning because it meets the three conditions just stated. The hearer believes that he or she will have trouble at tax time and that this is undesirable. Both the speaker and hearer recognize that trouble at tax time is not obvious and can be avoided (preparatory condition). The speaker genuinely believes that trouble at tax time is not in the hearer’s best interest (sincerity condition). And if trouble at tax time is not in the hearer’s best interest then the utterance counts as a warning (essential condition). The essential condition is the most important because it is what distinguishes a “warning” from “advice”. An event that is not in the hearer’s interest is a warning but if the event is in the hearer’s best interest then the speech act counts as advice.

#### 4. Locution, Illocution, Perlocution

Austin isolates three basic senses in which in saying something one is doing something, and hence three kinds of acts are simultaneously performed:

- 1) **locutionary act**: the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense of reference.
- 2) **illocutionary act**: the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it.
- 3) **perlocutionary act**: the bringing about of the effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterance.

In fact, Austin made a three-fold distinction:

**Locution** – the actual words uttered.

**Illocution** – the force or intention behind the words.

**Perlocution** – the effect of the illocution on the hearer.

E.g. I might say: “*It’s hot in here*” (locution), meaning I want some fresh air (illocution) and the perlocutionary effect might be that someone opens the window. Generally speaking, there is a close and predictable connection between locution and perlocutionary effect as in the following example:

The speakers are Lord Peter Wimsey, ace amateur detective, and Bunter, his butler.

*“If, Bunter, you do not immediately sit down here and have your supper, I will have you drummed out of the regiment...” Bunter drew up an obedient air.*

Bunter correctly interprets the illocutionary force of Lord Peter’s utterance as an invitation or request (in the form of a mock threat) to join his employer for supper. All competent adult speakers of a language can predict or interpret illocutionary force reasonably accurately most of the time – human beings simply could not operate, if they had no idea at all how their interlocutor would react, although, of course, things can go wrong as in the following example:

*A man and a woman enter an art gallery. The man is carrying a plastic carrier bag. The woman goes to buy the admission tickets, while her husband has gone ahead into the gallery.*

*Official: “Would the gentleman like to leave his bag here?”*

*Woman: “Oh, no, thank you. It’s not heavy.”*

*Official: “Only...we have had...we had a theft here yesterday, you see.”*

The illocutionary force of the official’s first utterance is to request the husband to leave his bag but the wife interprets it as an offer. Part of the problem stems from the fact that the same locution could have a different illocutionary force in different contexts. E.g. *What time is it?* could, depending on the context of utterance, mean any of the following:

1. The speaker wants the hearer to tell her the time.
2. The speaker is annoyed because the hearer is late.
3. The speaker thinks it is time the hearer went home.

Austin originally used the term “speech act” to refer to an utterance and the “total situation in which the utterance is used”. Today the term “speech act” is used to mean the same as illocutionary act.

## 5. Illocutionary, Perlocutionary and Propositional Acts

The theory of speech acts starts with the assumption that the minimal unit of human communication is not a sentence or other expression, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving orders, describing, explaining, apologizing, thanking, congratulating, etc. Characteristically, a speaker performs one or more of these acts by uttering a sentence or sentences; but the act itself is not to be confused with a sentence or other expression uttered in its performance. Such types of acts as those exemplified above are called, following Austin **illocutionary acts** and they are standardly contrasted with certain other types of acts, such as **perlocutionary acts** and **propositional acts**. **Perlocutionary acts have to do with those effects which our utterances have on hearers and which go beyond the hearer’s understanding of the utterance.** Such acts as convincing, persuading, annoying, amusing and frightening are all cases of perlocutionary acts. Illocutionary acts such as stating are often directed at or done for the purpose of achieving perlocutionary effects such as convincing or persuading, but it has seemed crucial to distinguish the illocutionary act which is a speech act proper from the achievement of the perlocutionary effect, which may or may not be achieved by specifically linguistic means.

It is necessary to make the distinction between **propositional** and **illocutionary acts** because the same reference or the same expression of a proposition can occur in different illocutionary acts. Thus, e.g. in a statement about President or in a question about President the same act of reference to him is made even though the total illocutionary acts are different. Also, in the sequence of utterances: “*Please, leave the room*”, “*You will leave the room*”, “*Will you leave the room?*” the same

proposition, that you will leave the room, is expressed in the performance of three different illocutionary acts, one a request, one a prediction, and one a question. There is a typical logical form of the illocutionary act whereby it has a propositional content (**p**) and that propositional content is presented with a certain illocutionary force **F**, giving the total act the structure **F (p)**. Thus, whenever two illocutionary acts contain the same reference and predication, provided that the meaning of the referring expression is the same we shall say the same proposition is expressed, e.g.:

*If Sam smokes habitually, he will not live long.*

A proposition is to be sharply distinguished from an assertion or statement of it. Stating and asserting are acts but propositions are not acts. **A proposition is what is asserted in the act of asserting, what is stated in the act of stating.** The expression of a proposition is a **propositional act**, not an illocutionary act. When a proposition is expressed, it is always expressed in the performance of an illocutionary act. So the illocutionary act and the propositional content of the illocutionary act are to be distinguished. Of course, not all illocutionary acts have a propositional content, e.g. an utterance of “*Hurrah*” does not, nor does “*Ouch*”.

From the semantic point of view we can distinguish two elements in the syntactical structure of the sentence, which we might call the **propositional indicator** and the illocutionary force indicator. **The illocutionary force indicator shows how the proposition is to be taken, or to put it another way, which illocutionary force the utterance is to have; that is what illocutionary act the speaker is performing in the utterance of a sentence.** Illocutionary force indicating devices in English include at least: word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation, the mood of the verb, and the so-called performative verbs. I may indicate the kind of illocutionary act I am performing by beginning the sentence with “*I apologize*”, “*I warn*”, “*I state*”, etc. Often in actual speech situations the context will make it clear what the illocutionary force of the utterance is, without it being necessary to invoke the appropriate explicit illocutionary force indicator. E.g. in the sentence, “*I promise to come*”, the surface structure does not seem to allow us to make a distinction between the indicator of illocutionary force and the indicator of propositional content. In this respect it differs from “*I promise that I will come*”, where the difference between the indicator of illocutionary force (“*I promise*”) and the indicator of propositional content (“*that I will come*”) lies right on the surface.

## 6. Performative Utterances

So far we have seen that the uttering of certain words by appropriate people in appropriate circumstances can constitute the performing of certain conventional acts; an obvious next question is what formal features mark utterances as performative? All Austin’s initial examples have the verb in the simple present active form with a first person singular subject, *I name this ship*, and this is apparently significant since neither *I am naming this ship* nor *he names/named this ship*, nor *this ship is named by me* is an acceptable substitute. However, it soon becomes apparent that there are some performative utterances with the verb in the passive – *passengers are requested to return to their seats* – and others which have no subject or verb at all – *guilty* pronounced by the foreman or a jury or *out* by an umpire – and Austin is forced to conclude reluctantly that there are in fact no linguistic features which reliably and unambiguously distinguish performative from non-performative utterances.

The achievement so far has been to isolate “a class of utterances, linguistically quite heterogeneous, which have in common that, in virtue of non-linguistic conventions, to issue them (happily) **counts as doing this or that**” [Warnock 1973]. In one important sense these performative utterances are idioms – the meanings of the individual words are not of great importance and synonyms cannot be substituted – it is the uttering of **predetermined** words in a fixed sequence in a few highly conventionalized and at times ritual situations, which constitutes the performing of the action. If performative utterances were restricted to such situations their existence would be an interesting but not particularly significant fact about language use. However, Austin noticed that the concept of the performative utterance, of doing something by saying something, had a more general

application, for in saying *I promise, I apologize, I warn you* one actually performs the acts of promising, apologizing and warning. Thus these utterances also are performative, but are crucially distinct from the first group in that there are no rule-governed conventions restricting their use – anyone can make a promise to anyone in any place at any time.

This extension of the concept to ordinary language situations is very exciting but it raises enormous descriptive problems because, although the performative utterance may be **explicit**, e.g. *I warn you that p*, it is much more likely to be **primary**, simply *p* – there are, as Strawson [1964] points out, cases in which “to utter the words *the ice over there is thin* to a skater is to issue a warning ... without its being the case that there is a storable convention at all”. This, of course, raises the crucial question of how one recognizes a given utterance as performative. There are even problems with utterances containing explicit performative verbs:

*I promise only when I intend to keep my word.*  
*I protest against the verdict.*

but these can usually be sorted out with the “*hereby*” test, i.e. placing the word “*hereby*” after the pronoun *I*. Much more problematic are the utterances, without a performative verb. Austin suggests that the problem is not, in fact, too difficult, because “any utterance which is in fact performative should be reducible or expandable or analysable into a form with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active. Thus “*Out!*” is equivalent to “*I declare, pronounce, deem you to be guilty*”.

In the following table the first column contains explicit performatives and the third column constatives, while the status of those in the middle column is doubtful.

Table 1

Types of Performative Utterances		
Performatives	?	Constatives
I thank you	I am grateful	I feel grateful
I bid you welcome	I welcome you	–
I apologize	I am sorry	I repent

Austin suggests four tests for deciding which way utterances in the middle column are being used:

1. Does the saying of the words constitute the performing of an act? This can be tested by asking *did he really* of particular utterance. It is not possible to dispute whether a person actually bid another welcome, the uttering of the words constitutes the action, but one can ask, following the utterance *I welcome you*, “Did he really welcome him?” and the answer and therefore the classification of the utterance is likely to depend on the circumstances.
2. Could the action be performed without uttering the words? One can be sorry just as one can repent without saying anything but one cannot apologize silently,
3. Is the action something that can be done deliberately and voluntarily? One can be “willing to apologize” but not “willing to be sorry” – one is either sorry or not, though one can be willing to **say** that one is sorry.
4. Can the utterance be literally false? Austin sees this as a crucial distinction between constatives which can be true or false and performatives which can only be happy or unhappy. Despite saying *I am sorry* it need not be true that one is sorry; if one says *I apologize*, however, it cannot be false that one has apologized – the apology may be insincere and the speaker may have **abused** the procedure but that is another matter.

Using these criteria it is possible to assign utterances of the form “I + present simple active verb” to the class of explicit performatives or of constatives, the one being subject to a test of happiness, the other to a test of truth.

However, yet again in the argument, having taken two steps forward we must take one back. Austin now recognizes a class of utterances which he labels **expositional performatives** or **expositives** where the main body of the utterance has generally or often the straightforward form of a statement, and which are therefore subject to a test of truth. However, prefacing the statement is a verb

phrase like “*I argue / conclude / testify / admit / predict*” which in fact satisfies all the criteria for performatives:

*“I argue that there is no backside to the moon.”*

and it doesn't take long to realize that even “*I state*” satisfies the performative test. This is initially very disconcerting because the whole drift of the argument so far has been concerned with distinguishing performatives from constatives, but it is now evident that all utterances previously labelled constatives, even those with the grammatical form “I + present simple active verb”, are in fact primary performatives which are expandable or analysable into a form “*I state that ...*”. There is now an elegance in the description – instead of claiming two classes of utterance, one performative and the other constatives, Austin now asserts that in saying anything one is performing some kind of act.

## 7. Reference as a Speech Act

Any expression which serves to identify any thing, process, event, action, or any other kind of “individual” or “particular” is a referring expression. Referring expressions point to particular things, answering the questions “Who?”, “What?”, “Which?”

Reference is a speech act, and speech acts are performed by speakers in uttering words, not by words. Examples of singular definite referring expressions are: “*you*”, “*the battle of Waterloo*”, “*our copy of yesterday's newspaper*”, “*the constellation of Orion*”. It is characteristic of each of these expressions that their utterance serves to pick out or identify one “object” or “entity” or “particular” apart from other objects, about which the speaker then goes on to say something or ask some questions.

To sum up: the speech act of referring is to be explained by giving examples of paradigmatic referring expressions, by explaining the function which the utterance of these expressions serves in the complete speech act (the illocutionary act) and by contrasting the use of these expressions with other ones. Paradigmatic referring expressions in English fall into three classes as far as the surface structure of English sentences is concerned: proper names, nouns beginning with the definite article or a possessive pronoun or noun and followed by a singular noun or pronouns. **The uttering of a referring expression characteristically serves to pick out or identify a particular object apart from other objects.**

## 8. Expressions and Kinds of Speech Acts

Let us make some distinctions which naturally suggest themselves to us as soon as we shall begin to reflect on simple speech situations. Imagine a speaker and a hearer and suppose that in appropriate circumstances the speaker utters one of the following sentences:

1. *Sam smokes habitually.*
2. *Does Sam smoke habitually?*
3. *Sam, smoke habitually.*
4. *Would that Sam smoked habitually.*

Now let us ask how we might describe the speaker's utterance of one of these. What shall we say the speaker is doing when he utters one of these?

In uttering sentence 1 a speaker is making an assertion, in 2 asking a question, in 3 giving an order and in 4 (a somewhat archaic form) expressing a wish or desire. And in the performance of each of these four different acts the speaker performs certain other acts which are common to all four: in uttering any of these the speaker refers to or mentions, or designates a certain object Sam, and he predicates the expression “*smokes habitually*” of the object referred to. Thus, we shall say that in the utterance of all four the reference and predication are the same though in each case the same reference and predication occur as part of a complete speech act which is different from any of the other three. We thus detach the notions of referring and predicating from the notions of such complete speech acts

as asserting, questioning, commanding, etc., and the justification for the separation lies in the fact that the same reference and predication can occur in the performance of different complete speech acts. Austin baptized these complete speech acts with the name “illocutionary acts”. Some of the English verbs denoting illocutionary acts are: *state, describe, assert, warn, remark, comment, command, order, request, criticize, apologize, censure, approve, welcome, promise, object, demand and argue*, etc.

Uttering any of the four sentences a speaker is characteristically performing at least three distinct kinds of acts:

- a) uttering words (morphemes, sentences);
- b) referring and predicating;
- c) stating, questioning, commanding, promising, etc.

Let us assign names to these under the general heading of speech acts:

a) uttering words (morphemes, sentences) = performing **utterance** (locutionary in Austin’s classification) **acts**;

b) referring and predicating = performing **propositional acts**;

c) stating, questioning, commanding, promising, etc. = performing **illocutionary acts**.

In performing an illocutionary act one characteristically performs propositional and utterance acts. **Utterance acts** consist simply in uttering strings of words. **Illocutionary** and **propositional acts** consist in uttering words in sentences in certain contexts, under certain conditions and with certain intentions.

To these three notions Austin’s notion of the **perlocutionary act** may be added. Correlated with the notion of illocutionary acts is the notion of the consequences or effects such acts have on the actions, thoughts or beliefs, etc. of hearers. For example, by arguing I may persuade or convince someone, by warning him I may scare or alarm him, by making a request I may get him to do something, by informing I may convince him (enlighten, envy, inspire, get him to realize).

Thus, English speech act verbs reflect a certain interpretation of the world of human action and interaction.

### Check Yourself Test

- I. 1. What are basic or minimal units of linguistic communication?
2. Why is a theory of language part of a theory of action?
3. What have psychologists suggested?
4. What have linguists seen the notions of speech act theory as?
5. What do speech acts remain along with in linguistic pragmatics?
- II. 1. What are the basic insights offered by the work of philosophers based on?
2. What issues have been of certain interest since 1930?
3. What was Austin’s insistence?
4. What was his method?
5. What are felicity conditions?
- III. 1. What are the three kinds of acts that are simultaneously performed?
2. What three-fold distinction did Austin make?
3. What did Austin use the term “speech act” to refer to?
4. What is the term “speech act” used to mean today?
- IV. 1. What assumption does the theory of speech acts start with?
2. What is meant by an illocutionary act?
3. What do perlocutionary acts have to do with?
4. What is proposition and a propositional act?
5. What does the illocutionary force indicator show?
- V. 1. What is a performative utterance?
2. What types of performative utterances are distinguished?
3. How do we recognize a given utterance as performative?
4. What tests do we subject performatives and constatives?
5. What are expositives?

- VI. 1. What is a referring expression?  
 2. What do referring expressions point to?  
 3. Is reference a speech act?  
 4. How are speech acts performed by speakers?  
 5. What does their utterance serve to pick out or identify?
- VII. 1. When does one perform propositional and utterance acts?  
 2. What do utterance acts consist in?  
 3. What do illocutionary and propositional acts consist in?  
 4. What kind of notion is a perlocutionary act?  
 5. What do English speech act verbs reflect?

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## Lecture 2

### CATEGORIES AND TYPES OF PERFORMATIVES

1. Performative hypothesis.
2. Metalinguistic performatives.
3. Ritual performatives.
4. Collaborative performatives.
5. Group performatives.
6. Overlap of performatives.
7. Explicit and implicit performatives.

#### 1. Performative Hypothesis

Performative hypothesis shows how Austin's ideas of his book "How to do things with words" developed and it demonstrates neatly the distinction between a truth conditional approach to meaning and Austin's view of "world as actions". In other words it illustrates very clearly how and why pragmatics came into being. A third reason is that performatives constitute a very interesting (if very restricted) subset of illocutionary verbs.

Austin's first step in his book was to show that some utterances have no truth conditions. In fact, Austin claimed, they are not statements or questions but actions, a conclusion he reached through an analysis of what he termed "performative verbs". To understand what is meant by a performative verb, compare these four sentences:

1. *I drive a white car.*
2. *I apologize.*
3. *I name this ship The Albatross.*
4. *I bet you £5 it will rain.*

Syntactically the four sentences are similar: all are in the first person, declarative, indicative, active and in the simple present tense. Pragmatically, the first sentence is very different from the other three. Sentence (1) is a statement (what Austin called "constative") and it is a simple matter to establish empirically whether or not the statement is true. In fact my car is a rather pleasing metallic grey colour and if you discovered this fact and heard me utter sentence (1), you could contradict me by saying, "That is not true, your car is silver." In the case of the sentences (2) – (4) it makes no sense at all to respond to them by saying, "That is not true." This is because the verbs in sentences (2) – (4) do not make statements (which can be judged true or false) but belong instead to a class of utterances called "performatives", which (according to Austin) cannot be judged true or false, but are best understood as performing an action. In uttering the words *I apologize* I do not make a statement, I perform an act, the act of apologizing. One useful (but not infallible) test for a performative verb is to see whether you can meaningfully insert the adverb *hereby* between subject and verb:

- I hereby apologize*  
*I hereby name this ship The Albatross*  
*I hereby bet you £5*

but not:

- \*I hereby drive a white car*

As you may already have observed (2) - (4) are all instances of performatives, yet are not quite the same in nature. Sentence (2) is probably the least problematic: once I have uttered the words *I*



*apologize* no one can deny that I did apologize (even though you may suspect that my apology was insincere).

More important for the present discussion was Austin's belief that there is a lot more to a language than the meaning of its words and phrases. Austin was convinced that we do not just use language to say things (to make statements), but to do things (perform actions). It was this conviction which eventually led him to a theory of what he called **illocutionary acts**, a theory which examines what kinds of things we do when we speak, how we do them and how our acts may "succeed" or "fail", but he began exploring his ideas by way of the (soon to be abandoned) "**performative hypothesis**".

## 2. Metalinguistic Performatives

These are the most straightforward examples of performatives. Like all performatives they are self-referential (the verb refers to what the speaker of the utterance is doing); self-verifying (they contain their own truth conditions) and non-falsifiable (they can never be untrue). In any language there is probably a fairly small and certainly finite set of metalinguistic performatives. Examples in English include:

<i>I say</i>	<i>I withdraw (my complaint)</i>
<i>I protest</i>	<i>I declare (the meeting open)</i>
<i>I object</i>	<i>I plead (not guilty)</i>
<i>I apologize</i>	<i>I note (to abolish vivisection)</i>
<i>I deny</i>	<i>I move (the exams to be abolished)</i>
<i>I promise</i>	<i>I thank (the audience for their attention)</i>

Now compare the following pairs of sentences (the performatives appear in boldface)

- (1a) *I **say** that John is a liar.*
- (1b) *John is a liar.*
- (2a) *I **plead not guilty**.*
- (2b) *I am innocent.*
- (3a) *I **move** that fox-hunting be abolished.*
- (3b) *I believe that fox-hunting should be abolished.*
- (4a) *I **object** to the licensing hours being extended.*
- (4b) *I do not want the licensing hours to be extended.*
- (5a) *I **apologize** for deceiving the auditors.*
- (5b) *I am sorry I deceived the auditors.*

Sentence (1a) is different from (1b). *John is a liar* has truth conditions. If, in the real world, it can be shown that *John is a liar*, then sentence (1b) is true. Strictly speaking sentence (1a) is self-verifying. Whatever words follow they cannot, in strictly logical terms, be untrue: all the speaker is doing is making a statement about what he or she is saying.

Sentences (2a) and (2b) are identical to sentences (1a) and (1b) in terms of their truth conditions. Sentence (2a) must always be true if and only if in the real world the speaker has not committed the crime of which (s)he is accused. This time, however, if we look at the way in which people use these forms in real life, you will find that metalinguistic performatives are often used in precisely this way, even by speakers who are completely naïve linguistically: *I plead not guilty* is regularly (and legally and truthfully) used by people who know full well that they are guilty as charged. To say *I plead not guilty* is different from saying *I am not guilty*. In the first case you are merely saying something about your plea (saying something about what you are saying), in the second you are making an actual claim about your innocence.

Sentences (3a) and (4a) and (3b) and (4b) are identical in terms of their truth conditions. We would expect (3b) and (4b) to be produced by speakers who are opposed to fox-hunting, the extension of

licensing hours. All we can say for sure about the speakers of (3a) and (4a) is that they have formally opposed something. We cannot necessarily draw conclusions concerning their personal feelings about the so-called blood sports or late-night drinking (they could, e.g., be in Public Service or lawyers objecting on behalf of constituents or clients, even though they do not share their views).

In a similar way people seem intuitively to respond differently to (5a) *I apologize* and to (5b) *I am sorry that I ...* During the miners strike in Britain (1984/5) the miners' leader, Arthur Scargill, was ordered to apologize to the court or face sequestration of union funds. He was interviewed afterwards and asked whether he regretted his actions (in refusing to tell the auditors where his Union's funds were located). With a smile he replied: "*I said, I apologize, I didn't say I was sorry.*" Thus, *I apologize* often sounds like something one says for form's sake, that it is less sincere than *I am sorry*.

Although, as it has already been noted, all performatives are self-verifying, there is a difference between metalinguistic performatives and the rest. Metalinguistic performatives as well as always being true, are, in addition, always **felicitous** and **successful**. They do not appear to depend on any external conditions for their success. The following example illustrates the unfalsifiability of metalinguistic performatives:

Norman Tebbit, Conservative Secretary of State for Employment, made the following utterance: "I predict that unemployment figures will fall by one million within a year."

### 3. Ritual Performatives

The same automatic guarantee of successfulness does not apply to "ritual performatives". We raised the question of our renaming the Queen Elisabeth II The Albatross. Austin observed that although it would not make sense to respond to such an act of renaming by saying: "That is not true" yet it would be perfectly reasonable to say: "You have no right to do that!" Austin observed that although performatives are not subject to truth conditions, yet they can go wrong. If the **felicity conditions** are not observed (as in the case of our renaming the ship) the performative may be **infelicitous** (or may "fail" or be "unsuccessful"). Felicity conditions apply particularly to performatives associated with various rituals or very formal events. Unlike metalinguistic performatives (which seem to operate in broadly the same way in all languages and cultures and which apparently have no felicity conditions) ritual performatives are highly culturally dependent. Examples of such ritual performatives are:

- (1) *I sentence you to ten years.*
- (2) *I absolve you from your sins.*
- (3) *I baptize you.*
- (4) *I name this ship.*

Each of these can only appropriately and successfully be uttered by a specified person in a specified situation (e.g. by a judge in a court of law, by a priest, etc.)

### 4. Collaborative Performatives

Some writers have observed that some performatives do not have felicity conditions in the sense that a specified person must utter the words in particular circumstances, but nevertheless their success is not guaranteed. They require, for their success the "collaboration" or particular uptake of another person, as in the following example:

Mr X, an opposition M.P., had challenged the Minister of Defence using the performative "I bet you ...". His intervention was reported that evening in the following way.

Mr X offered to bet Mr Z £10 that the N Naval Support base would close within two years, but a cautious (or perhaps knowledgeable) Mr Z declined to take up the bet.

As the report makes clear, a bet or wager is only successfully made when the other person accepts it, e.g.:

*I bet / wager you five pounds ...  
I challenge you to pistols at dawn.  
I bequeath you my gerbil.*

As with a bet, a challenge is only successfully made when the other person accepts the challenge. And in English law a bequest is only successfully made if the legatee accepts the bequest.

## 5. Group Performatives

Some performatives are either commonly or necessarily produced by more than one person, e.g. a communiqué from a summit conference, a report from a committee, and, most obviously, a verdict from a jury (in the high court the judge responds to the statement the foreman or forewoman of the jury by asking: “And is that the verdict of you all?”). Group performatives may fall into any of the three preceding categories. Below are examples of a group metalinguistic, ritual and collaborative performatives. Note that the performative in example 2 is only successful when performed on behalf of the entire committee – the views of one member of the committee would carry no weight; unlike example 1, example 2 can only be successfully performed by the group.

Example 1. “*We three Fredricksons ... vow to try and put our name in history books because it’s our own and nobody can say it’s because of our grandfathers.*”

Example 2. This example is taken from the findings of the General Medical Council Disciplinary Committee. “*We do not judge you to be guilty of professional misconduct.*”

## 6. Overlap of Categories

Not all the categories are neat and self-contained. E.g. it would be possible to argue that many “ritual” performatives are also “collaborative” in nature. Performatives such as “*I baptize you ...*” are arguably only successful if the person concerned (or at least his or her representatives) is willing to accept the baptism. Similarly, some collaborative performatives also fall within the category of ritual performatives (bequeathing, e.g.) And the argument could be extended: can an announcement be made if there is no one to hear it? Can S be said to have apologized if H refuses to accept the apology (i.e. is there not a collaborative element to some metalinguistic performatives?) Consider the following letter in this respect:

*Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> Day of August  
To whom it may concern*

*I, James Benjamin Snift, now on this day of Sunday in the year of our Lord, 1901, do hereby confess to the murder of Molly Brown, maid of this establishment.*

*We had meetings, and she threatened to reveal that she had conceived. This I could not allow. Now I cannot live with a burden of my guilt any longer ...*

The letter was written in 1901, but as hidden under the floorboards in the maid’s room and not found until June 1994. Mrs Brown was never reported missing, nobody was even found, Mr Snift was never charged with anything. Can we seriously accept as a genuine confession a letter which was seen by no one until 93 years after the murder was committed. It seems that confessing can only succeed if at least one person hears and understands what has been said or written.

## 7. Explicit and Implicit Performatives

An explicit performative (of the *I hereby ...* kind) can now be seen to be a mechanism which allows the speaker to remove any possibility of misunderstanding the force behind an utterance. Compare:

- (1) *We remind you that all library books are due to be returned by 9<sup>th</sup> of June.*
- (2) *This is to remind you that all library books are due to be returned by 9<sup>th</sup> of June.*
- (3) *You are reminded that all library books are due to be returned by 9<sup>th</sup> of June.*
- (4) *All library books are due to be returned by 9<sup>th</sup> of June.*

We can see that sentences (1), (2), (3) and (4) all perform the same action – that of reminding borrowers to return their books by the due date. But whereas utterance (1) uses an explicit performative to perform the act of reminding (2) – (4) do so using different sorts of non-performative utterances. While it is certainly true to say, as Austin does, that there are no substantial distinctions in meaning between explicit and implicit performatives, yet (before we abandon the distinction altogether) it is worth exploring the difference in the way in which a performative utterance and its non-performative counterpart are used. Some situations (typically very formal situations) require that a specific form of language be used, while others imply a stylistic difference (e.g. in the degree of formality conveyed) or imply a difference in emphasis. Here are some examples:

- (1) *I apologize.*
- (2) *I am sorry.*  
Sentence (1) seems more formal than sentence (2).
- (3) *I assure you, I did send in the application on time.*
- (4) *I did send in the application on time.*  
Sentence (3) seems more forceful than (4).
- (5) *I swear I love you.*
- (6) *I love you.*

In this case, the performative form would only seem to be necessary in a situation where there seems to be a degree of doubt in the mind of the loved one. It might also be a second attempt at reassuring someone – we often find that a speaker will first try implicit performative and move onto an explicit performative only if the first attempt fails. People often avoid using an explicit performative since in many circumstances it seems to imply an unequal power relationship or a particular set of rights on the part of the speaker.

### **Check Yourself Test**

1. How do you understand the performative hypothesis?
2. Characterize metalinguistic performatives as distinct from other kinds?
3. What happens if the felicity conditions are not observed?
4. Give examples of ritual performatives.
5. How do collaborative performatives differ from other kinds of performatives?
6. What is characteristic about group performatives?
7. How do categories overlap?
8. Give the distinction between explicit and implicit performatives.

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### Lecture 3

## TYPES OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND CONDITIONS OF THEIR PERFORMING

1. Types of illocutionary acts.
2. Conditions of illocutionary acts.
3. Performing illocutionary acts.

### Types of Illocutionary Acts

In using language we intend to have a specific force. We make requests, give authorizations, make promises, offers, concede another's position, and make apologies, to name but several of the hundreds of different speech acts. It is in performing these speech acts, named by Austin (1962) as illocutionary acts, that we are linguistically communicating. First, we would like to consider what acts of communication are available to a speaker and then, second, what means are available for effecting this communication.

The best way to view linguistic communication is in terms of what a speaker is trying to accomplish in using language beyond the simple issuing of statements. To begin, every sentence is "about" something, independent of its syntactic form or intended use. The sentence "*I will be home by noon*" is about the speaker's anticipated presence at his home at midday. So are the sentences "*Will I be home by noon?*", "*I will be home by noon?*" and "*By noon I will be home.*" **The term propositional content will be used to refer to this notion of what a sentence is about.** Part of sentence meaning and hence what the speaker says often goes beyond the propositional content of the sentence. The utterance of "*I will be home by noon*", e.g., can be intended as a promise and when intended as such commits the speaker to much different attitude towards a future action of home coming than when the very same sentence is uttered and intended to be a threat, a warning, or simply a prediction. The most useful way to distinguish between these and other examples of using language is in terms of the attitude that the speaker holds towards the propositional content of what he says. In promising the speaker intends his utterance to commit him to carrying out the action specified, while for warning the attitude is that the speaker believes that the facts represented in the proposition pose an unfavourable consequence to the hearer. Similarly, if the speaker says, "*You are to leave at once*" and intends it as an order, then his attitude is one of desiring that the hearer carry out the action of leaving at once in virtue of the speaker's authority over the hearer. The same sentence used as a report carries the attitude of belief that the hearer is supposed to leave immediately.

Although there are several hundred speech acts, such as promising, requesting and reporting, there appear to be four major attitudes which can be expressed by the speaker and which partition these acts into types:

- |   |                   |   |
|---|-------------------|---|
| A | <b>Belief</b>     | Speaker expresses belief that proposition is true.  |
| B | <b>Desire</b>     | Speaker expresses a desire concerning the action specified in the proposition.                                    |
| C | <b>Commitment</b> | Speaker expresses an intention to undertake a commitment associated with the action specified in the proposition. |
| D | <b>Evaluation</b> | Speaker expresses a personal evaluation towards some past action.   |

We succeed in linguistically communicating when we get the hearer to recognize what we have said and what attitude we hold towards the propositional content of our utterance. The communicative effect on the hearer is not a new belief but rather a recognition of what attitude I hold towards the proposition I have expressed. For example if I make a request of you, my intention is to express my desire that you carry out the action specified in the utterance. I have successfully communicated if you recognize this attitude on my part.

There are two important points here. **First**, some, but not all modifications of a basic attitude presented above, have labels, associated with them. One that does, e.g., is in the speaker's desire that

the hearer carry out some action and do so in virtue of the speaker's wanting this done: this is a request. Slightly different is an order, in which the same desire is there but the action is expected to be carried out because of the speaker's authority over the hearer. Yet a third one is the action of pleading – a request with the added condition that the speaker, who is pleading, is unable to carry out the action effectively himself.

**Second**, although we have indicated that there are four speaker attitudes which characterize the intention underlying linguistic communication, these four certainly do not exhaust the possible attitudes a speaker might hold towards what he has said. What distinguishes each of these four attitudes is that once one is recognized as being the attitude intended by the speaker, the speaker has successfully communicated to the hearer. Thus, if you recognize that I intend my utterance to count as a request, an apology, or a statement, I have succeeded in making a request, an apology, or a statement at the very moment you recognize that this was my intention. Such is the nature of speech communication. However, if I intend my attitude towards what I say to count as a boast or an eloquent testimony to your abilities, I have neither boasted, nor eloquently testified about your abilities just because you have recognized my intentions.

Now we shall pass over to the set of illocutionary acts available to the speaker of English. The first genus of illocutionary acts is that in which the speaker expresses his belief that the propositional content of the utterance is true. Fraser calls them **representatives**. Acts of asserting, predicting, describing, advising, certifying, admitting and agreeing are all instances of the speaker's expressing his attitude of belief. However, as we might expect, within this genus of representatives there are a number of species and sub-species involving conditions surrounding the cause and basis of belief on the part of the speaker.

**Representatives.** Speaker expresses belief that the propositional content is true and:

- A. Indicates the belief is his own opinion
  - 1) without time restrictions (*affirm, allege, assert, aver, claim, declare, maintain, say, state*)
  - 2) with future time restriction (*forecast, predict, prophesy*)
  - 3) with past time restriction (*report, recount*)
- B. Indicates the belief rests with some verifiable knowledge (*advise, announce, apprise, disclose, inform, insist, notify, point out, report, reveal, tell, testify*)
- C. Indicates the belief rests with some truth-seeking procedure (*appraise, assess, certify, conclude, confirm, corroborate, diagnose, find, judge, substantiate, validate, verify*)
- D. Indicates the belief is contrary to the previous belief (*acknowledge, admit, agree, allow, assent, concede, concur, confer, grant*)
- E. Indicates the belief is no longer held by him (*correct, disavow, disclaim, renounce, retract, deny*)
- F. Indicates the belief is that of another person (*accept, agree, assent, concur*)
- G. Indicates the belief is not that of another person (*differ, disagree, dissent, reject*)
- H. Indicates the belief is tentative (*conjecture, guess, hypothesize, speculate, suggest*)
- I. Indicates the belief is worth consideration (*assume, hypothesize, postulate, stipulate, suppose, theorize*)
- J. Indicates the belief is not shared by all (*demur, dispute, object, protest, question*)
- K. Indicates the belief accurately characterizes some object (*appraise, assess, call, categorize, characterize, classify, date, describe, diagnose, evaluate, grade, identify, rank*)

The second genus **Directives** includes those acts in which the speaker expresses an attitude towards a prospective action by the hearer. Acts such as pleading, requesting, ordering, forbidding and suggesting all fall within this genus of which again there are a number of species.

**Directives:** Speaker expresses a desire regarding the action specified in the propositional content, namely:

- A. The hearer is to carry out the action
  - 1) indicating that the hearer is to do so in virtue of the speaker's desire (*ask, beg, beseech, implore, invite, petition, plead, request, solicit, summon, urge, injure, question*)
  - 2) indicating that the hearer is to do so in virtue of the speaker's authority over the hearer (*bid, charge, command, dictate, direct, enjoin, instruct, order, proscribe, require*)

- B. The hearer is not to carry out the action indicating that the hearer is not to do so in virtue of the authority of the speaker over the hearer (*enjoin, forbid, proscribe, restrict*)
- C. The hearer is to believe that (s)he is now entitled to carry out the action in virtue of the speaker's authority over the hearer (*agree to, allow, authorize, bless, consent to, dismiss, excuse, exempt, forgive, grant, license, pardon, release, sanction*)
- D. The hearer is to consider the merits of taking the action in virtue of the speaker's belief that there is sufficient reason for the hearer to act (*admonish, advise, caution, counsel, propose, recommend, suggest, urge, warn*)

The third genus of illocutionary acts comprise commissives. **Commissives** are acts in which the speaker expresses his intentions concerning some future action. There are two main species.

**Commissives:** Speaker intends that his utterance obligates him to carry out the action specified in the propositional content:

- A. Without any further preconditions (*promise, swear, guarantee, vow*)
- B. Subject to a favourable response by the hearer (*offer, propose, bet, volunteer, bid*)

The fourth group of acts are **Evaluatives**. They are those acts in which the speaker expresses his attitude towards some earlier action. The following species are typical.

**Evaluatives:** Speaker expresses:

- A. Regret for a prior action for the hearer feels responsible (*apologize*)
- B. Sympathy for the hearer's having suffered (*condole, commiserate*)
- C. Gladness for the hearer's having performed some action (*compliment, congratulate*)
- D. Pleasure at having encountered the hearer (*greet*)
- E. Gratitude for the hearer's participation in some prior action (*thank*)

There are some hybrid acts which seem to fall into at least two of the genera just discussed. One of these is the act of inviting, wherein the speaker is both suggesting the hearer consider the merits of some action and, at the same time, promising that the speaker will approve of the action should the hearer perform it. Another is the act of surrendering in which the speaker both admits defeat (a Representative) and simultaneously, promises to cease fighting (a Commissive).

## 2. Conditions of Illocutionary Acts

Austin (1962) introduced three categories of conditions which are associated with the successful and non-defective performance of an illocutionary act. Although these conditions are often treated as equally relevant for the performance of a given act, it is worthwhile to make a distinction between Success Conditions, those which are necessary and sufficient for the act to have been performed at all, and Felicity Conditions, those conditions in addition, which are required for there to be no defect in the performance. In the discussion above, the defining conditions on a particular act constitute its Success Conditions. For requesting, e.g., these require both that the speaker express his desire that the hearer carry out the act specified in the propositional content of the utterance and indicate that the hearer do so in virtue of the speaker's desire.

Felicity Conditions, on the other hand, are not required for the successful performance of the act, but their failure to be met gives rise to more-or-less serious defects. A first generalization is that felicity conditions can be inferred from the success conditions by applying certain general rules of rational behaviour. Considering the act of requesting, again, we might fairly expect the following:

- 1) the speaker is sincere in his expression of desire that the hearer act, that is, the speaker really wants the hearer to act;
- 2) that a requester believes that the hearer can, in fact, perform the action;
- 3) that the speaker does not believe that the act is going to be performed in the absence of a request.

Of course, I can successfully request my son to go upstairs to fetch the stapler, not really want the stapler but want him out of the room and know that he cannot fulfil the request since the stapler is on the table behind me. Or, again, somewhat defectively I can ask someone to tell me the time even though I have just heard him tell another that he is going to announce it publicly.

Insincerity is ordinarily not made obvious by the speaker; it is, nevertheless, sometimes obvious. Consider the situation in which someone tells you that he is stone-cold sober while holding a half-empty bottle of alcohol, and swaying to and fro with glassy eyes. In claiming that he is sober, he expresses the belief that he is sober; certainly by uttering, “*I am sober*”, he has done this. The speaker has, thus made a bona fide claim, one that neither the hearer, nor the speaker believe. But the act performed is a claim, since it was the intention of the speaker that this utterance count as such. The obvious insincerity of the speaker does not preclude him from performing the illocutionary act of expressing attitudes he does not have; rather, the obvious insincerity presents the hearer from believing that this belief in sobriety is held by the speaker.

### 3. Performing Illocutionary Acts

We shall refer to a particular illocutionary act with the notation **F (p)**, where the **F** characterizes the attitude to be expressed in performing the act, and the **p** characterizes the proposition about which the attitude is held.

A more careful consideration of these defining attitudes reveals that they place restrictions on the proposition about which the attitude is held. E.g., an apology involves the speaker’s expressing regret for a past act for which the speaker believes he was (at least partly) responsible. Thus, one can normally apologize for stepping on your toe but not for being about to step on your toe. I can appear to apologize for having to miss your recital tomorrow or appear to apologize for my son’s breaking your window, but in the former case my apology addresses my past poor planning, while in the latter I am assuming responsibility for my son’s action although I didn’t actually participate. The upshot of these observations is that each attitude places some restrictions on the proposition about which the attitude is held.

The utterance meaning (what the speaker says) provides the initial basis on which the hearer operates. But the utterance meaning provides information beyond the intended propositional content: it also provides clues to the intended force of the utterance.

When the speaker utters a declarative sentence, e.g., “*The cat is on the mat*”, he is saying that this is the case and hence he is expressing the belief that the cat is on the mat. The declarative syntactic form entails that the speaker is expressing the attitude of belief towards the propositional content. To utter an imperative sentence is to say that the hearer is to make it the case that the action specified in the propositional content is carried out, hence, the speaker expresses the desire that the hearer carry out the action. To utter a yes / no interrogative sentence, the speaker is expressing his desire that the hearer tell whether or not it is the case that the proposition is true. If a Wh question such as “*Who was there?*” is posed, the speaker is expressing his desire that the hearer fill in the missing referential term referred to by the Wh-word in the sentence. Syntactic form does contribute to sentence meaning and therefore to what the speaker says in uttering a particular sentence. Of course, the use of the simple declarative may only make it clear that the intention of the speaker is to express the attitude of the belief. Sentence meaning does not determine intended force but it certainly does limit it.

Nevertheless, on the basis of what the speaker says, the hearer can assign an illocutionary act potential to the utterance. A sentence has the potential of some particular illocutionary act just in case its propositional content does not violate the propositional constraints on the act (e.g. it conforms to the tense, mood and other constraints). “*I was there*” has the potential of a claim, but not a prediction due to the tense of the propositional content, and the potential of a claim but not an order due to its force-indicating properties; the speaker is expressing belief, not desire.

Certainly, a most visible force-indicating property is the so-called performative verb. Verbs such as *request* and *promise* when used in sentences such as, “*I request that you sit down*” and “*I promise that I will arrive on time*”, are said to be used performatively because they “announce” to the hearer the intention of the speaker. In the first sentence, e.g. the “*I request*” has the force-indicating property of expressing the speaker’s intention of having the utterance count as a request, while the “*you sit down*” captures the propositional content about which the attitude of requesting is held.



The speaker ordinarily intends the hearer to recognize which particular attitude he holds towards the expressed proposition, either because he has made that intention explicit or provided clues which enable the hearer to decide. Under such conditions of speaking we say that the speaker has directly performed an illocutionary act; if the intended act is recognized as such by the hearer then the speaker has directly communicated. Note that the speaker can directly perform a particular illocutionary act either literally or figuratively. If I utter, "*This room is a pigsty*", and speak literally, saying that this particular room is a home for pigs, then I have directly claimed that this room is a home for pigs. If I utter the same sentence but intend it to be taken figuratively, thereby saying that this room is a frightful mess, I have directly claimed that this room is a frightful mess.

Whether or not I speak literally or figuratively, in both cases I am saying something, and that is evaluated for its illocutionary force potential. If one of the potential acts is intended, and subsequently recognized, I have directly performed that act. Mutually shared beliefs aid in using language effectively.

Grice talks about what the speaker says and what the speaker implicates, but does not mention illocutionary force. However, determining what the speaker says is a preliminary step to determining what direct illocutionary act has been intended. Analogously what is implicated in Grice's terms is what is indirectly said. And it is quite reasonable to talk about what the speaker says and the corresponding direct illocutionary force (whether performed by speaking literally or figuratively) to what the speaker implicates and its associated indirect illocutionary force.

Searle (1975) provides a detailed account of how the hearer might proceed logically (although certainly not necessarily in practice) from what the speaker has said to what he indirectly intended. Considering a variety of examples, all of which are used to make an indirect request, e.g., "*Can you pass the salt?*", "*Could I have the salt?*" or, perhaps, "*Is there any salt on the table?*" he makes the following assumptions: that the sentence meaning does not involve the imperative force; that such utterances are not force-ambiguous; that when uttered to make a request, the sentences maintain their literal meaning, and are uttered with that meaning intended directly. He suggests that a reconstruction of the steps for the hearer to derive the request interpretation to pass the salt from the question about the hearer's ability might run as follows:

1. Speaker requested information about my abilities.
2. I assume he is abiding by the cooperative principle.
3. Context does not indicate any speaker interest in my actual salt-passing ability.
4. Speaker probably already knows the answer to the question.
5. There must, therefore, be some other reason for asking.
6. One condition on a request is the ability of the hearer to perform the act.
7. Thus, the speaker has asked me a question whose affirmative answer would entail that the preparatory condition for requesting me to pass the salt is satisfied.
8. Context is at dinner where passing the salt is appropriate.
9. Speaker has alluded to satisfaction of a preparatory condition for a request whose fulfilment is quite reasonable.
10. In absence of any plausible illocutionary point, speaker is probably asking me to pass the salt.

Thus, we can safely assume that not only will an account take into consideration the conditions defining the intended indirect act, what the speaker has directly done, the manner of speaking and the context of speaking but also a set of mutually shared beliefs.

### **Check Yourself Test**

1. What is propositional content?
2. What are the four major attitudes expressed by the speaker?
3. Give Fraser's classification of speech acts.
4. Define felicity and success conditions.
5. Reconstruct the interpretation of the utterance "*Could you pass the salt?*"

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## Lecture 4

### CONDITIONS OF PROMISES AND GENERAL HYPOTHESES CONCERNING ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS

1. How to promise: a complicated way.
2. Insincere promises.
3. General hypotheses concerning illocutionary acts.

#### 1. How to Promise: a Complicated Way

Given that a speaker S utters a sentence T in the presence of a hearer, then in the literal utterance of T S sincerely and non-defectively promises that p to H if and only if the following conditions 1-9 obtain:

##### 1. Normal input and output conditions obtain

The terms “input” and “output” are used to cover the large and indefinite range of conditions under which any kind of serious and literal linguistic communication is possible. “**Output**” covers the conditions for intelligible speaking and “**input**” covers the conditions of understanding. Together they include such things as that the speaker and hearer both know how to speak the language; both are conscious of what they are doing; they have no physical impediments to communication, such as deafness, aphasia or laryngitis; and they are not playing in a play or telling jokes, etc.

##### 2. S expresses the proposition that p in the utterance of T

This condition isolates the proposition from the rest of the speech act and enables us to concentrate on the peculiarities of promising as a kind of illocutionary act in the rest of the analysis.

##### 3. In expressing that p S predicates a future act A of S

In the case of promising the scope of the illocutionary force indicating device includes certain features of the proposition. In a promise an act must be predicated of the speaker and it cannot be a past act. I cannot promise to have done something, and I cannot promise that someone else will do something (although I can promise to see that he will do it). The notion of an act includes refraining from acts, performing series of acts, and may also include states and conditions: I may promise not to do something, I may promise to do some things repeatedly or sequentially and I may promise to be or remain in a certain state or condition. Conditions 2 and 3 are propositional content conditions.

##### 4. H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A, and S believes H would prefer his doing A to his not doing A

One crucial distinction between promises on the one hand and threats on the other is that a promise is a pledge to do something for you, not to you; but a threat is a pledge to do something to you, not for you. A promise is defective if the thing promised is something the promiser does not want done; and it is further defective if the promisee does not believe the promiser wants it done, since a non-defective promise must be intended as a promise and not as a threat or warning. Furthermore, a promise, unlike an invitation, normally requires some sort of occasion or situation that calls for the promise. A crucial feature of such occasions or situations seems to be that the promisee wishes (needs, desires) that something be done, and the promiser is aware of this wish (need, desire, etc.). Both halves of this double condition are necessary in order to avoid the following counter examples to this situation. E.g., suppose I say to a lazy student “*If you don't hand in your paper on time I promise I will give you a failing grade in the course.*” Is this utterance a promise? We would more naturally describe it as a warning or possibly even a threat. But why then is it possible to use the locution *I promise* in such a case? We use it here because *I promise* and *I hereby promise* are among the strongest illocutionary force indicating devices for commitment provided by the English language. For that reason we often use these expressions in the performance of speech acts which are not strictly speaking promises, but in which we wish to emphasize the degree of our commitment.

To illustrate this consider another apparent counter-example to the analysis along different lines. Sometimes one hears people say *I promise* when making an emphatic assertion. Suppose, for example,

I accuse you of having stolen the money. I say, “*You stole that money, didn’t you?*” You reply, “*No, I didn’t, I promise you I didn’t.*” Did you make a promise in this case? This utterance would be more aptly described as an emphatic denial and we can explain the occurrence of the illocutionary force indicating device *I promise* as derivative from genuine promises and serving here as the expression adding emphasis to your denial.

5. It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events.

This condition is an instance of a general condition on many different kinds of illocutionary acts to the effect that the act must have a point. E.g. If I make a request to someone to do something which it is obvious that he is already doing or is about to do quite independently of the request, then my request is pointless and to that extent defective. In an actual speech situation listeners, knowing the rules of performing illocutionary acts, will assume that this condition is satisfied. Suppose, e.g., that in the course of a public speech I say to a member of my audience, “*Look here, Smith, pay attention to what I am saying.*” In interpreting this utterance the audience will have to assume that Smith has not been paying attention or at any rate that it is not obvious that he has been paying attention, that the question of his not paying attention has arisen in some way, because a condition for making non-defective request is that it is not obvious that the hearer is doing or about to do the thing requested.

Similarly with promises. It is out of order for me to do something that is obvious to all concerned that I am going to do anyhow. If I do make such a promise, the only way my audience can interpret my utterance is to assume that I believe that it is not obvious that I am going to do the thing promised. A happily married man who promises his wife he will not desert her in the next week is likely to provide more anxiety than comfort.

Conditions 4 and 5 are preparatory conditions.

6. S intends to do A

The distinction between sincere and insincere promises is that in the case of sincere promises, the speaker intends to do the act promised; in the case of insincere promises, he does not intend to do the act. Also, in sincere promises, the speaker believes it is possible for him to do the act (or to refrain from doing it). This condition is the sincerity condition.

7. S intends that the utterance of T will place him under an obligation to do A

The essential feature of a promise is that it is the undertaking of an obligation to perform a certain act. This condition distinguishes promises (and other members of the same family such as vows) from other kinds of illocutionary acts. Notice that in the statement of the condition we only specify the speaker’s intention, further conditions will make clear how that intention is realized. It is clear, however, that having this intention is a necessary condition of making a promise, for if a speaker can demonstrate that he did not have this intention in a given utterance he can prove that the utterance was not a promise. We call this the essential condition.

8. S intends (i-I) to produce in Hearer the knowledge (K) that the utterance of T is to count placing S under an obligation to do A. S intends to produce K by means of the recognition of i-I and he intends i-I to be recognized in virtue of (by means of) H’s knowledge of the meaning of T.

The speaker intends to produce a certain illocutionary effect by means of getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect and he also intends this recognition to be achieved in virtue of the fact that that the meaning of the item he utters conventionally associates it with producing that effect. In this case the speaker assumes that the semantic rules (which determine the meaning) of the expressions uttered are such that the utterance counts as the undertaking of an obligation.

9. The semantical rules of the dialect spoken by S and H are such that T is correctly and sincerely uttered if and only if conditions 1-8 obtain.

This condition is intended to make clear that the sentence uttered is the one which, by the semantical rules of the language, is used to make a promise. The meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meaning of its elements, both lexical and syntactical.

## 2. Insincere Promises

In making an insincere promise the speaker does not have all the intentions he has when making a

sincere promise; in particular he lacks the intention to perform the act promised. However, he purports to have that intention. A promise involves an expression of intention, whether sincere or insincere. So to allow for insincere promises we need only to state that the speaker takes responsibility for having the intention rather than stating that he actually has. So to say *I promise to do A* is to take responsibility for intending to do A, and this condition holds whether the utterance was sincere or insincere. To allow for the possibility of an insincere promise, then we have only to revise condition 6 so that it states not that the speaker intends to do A, but that he takes responsibility for intending to do A. We shall phrase it as follows:

6a. S intends that the utterance of T will make him responsible for intending to do A. Thus amended, our analysis is neutral on the question whether the promise was sincere or insincere.

### 3. General Hypotheses Concerning Illocutionary Acts

There are other types of illocutionary acts, e.g. giving an order. The preparatory conditions include that the speaker should be in a position of authority over the hearer, the sincerity condition is that the speaker wants the ordered act done and the essential condition has to do with the fact that the speaker intends the utterance as an attempt to get the hearer to do the act. For assertions the preparatory conditions include the fact that the hearer must have some basis for supposing the asserted proposition is true, the sincerity condition is that he must believe it to be true, and the essential condition has to do with the fact that the proposition is presented as representing an actual state of affairs. Greetings are a much simpler kind of speech acts, but even here some of the distinctions apply. In the utterance of *Hello* there is no propositional content and no sincerity condition. The preparatory condition is that the speaker must have just encountered the hearer, and the essential rule is that the utterance counts as a courteous indication of recognition of the hearer. Now it is possible to formulate and test certain general hypotheses concerning illocutionary acts.

1. Wherever there is a psychological state specified in the sincerity condition, the performance of the act counts as an expression of that psychological state. This law holds whether the act is sincere or insincere, that is whether the speaker actually has the specified psychological state or not. Thus, to affirm, assert, state, counts as an expression of belief (that p). To request, ask, order, entreat, enjoin, pray, or command (that A be done) counts as an expression of a wish or desire (that A be done). To promise, vow, threaten or pledge (that A will be done) counts as an expression of intention (to do A). To thank, welcome or congratulate counts as an expression of gratitude, pleasure (at H's arrival), or pleasure (at H's good fortune).

2. To converse of the first law is possible only in cases when the act counts as the expression of a psychological state and that is called insincerity possibility. One cannot, e.g., greet or christen insincerely, but one can state or promise insincerely.

3. Where the sincerity condition tells us what the speaker **expresses** in the performance of the act, the preparatory condition tells us (at least part of) what he **implies** in the performance of the act. To put it generally, in the performance of any illocutionary act the speaker implies that the preparatory conditions of the act are satisfied. Thus, e.g., when I make a statement, I imply that I can back it up, when I make a promise, I imply that the thing promised is in the hearer's interest. When I thank someone, I imply that the thing I am thanking him for has benefited me (or was at least intended to benefit me), etc.

It would be nicely symmetrical if we could give an account of **saying** in terms of the essential rules parallel to our accounts of **implying** and **expressing**. The temptation is to say the speaker **implies** the (satisfaction of the) preparatory conditions, **expresses** the (state specified in the) sincerity conditions, and **says** (whatever is specified by) the essential conditions. The reason this breaks down is that there is a close connection between saying and the constatives class of illocutionary acts. Saying fits statements but not greetings. Indeed, Austin's original insight into performative was that some utterances were not sayings, but doings of some other kind.

4. It is possible to perform the act without invoking an explicit illocutionary force indicating device where the context and the utterance make it clear that the essential condition is satisfied. I may say

only *"I'll do it for you"* but that utterance will count as and will be taken as a promise in any context, where it is obvious that in saying it I am accepting (or undertaking, etc.) an obligation. Seldom, in fact, does one actually need to say the explicit *"I promise"*. Similarly, I may say only *"I wish you wouldn't do that"*, but this utterance in certain contexts will be more than merely an expression of a wish. It will be a request in those contexts where the point of saying it is to get you to stop doing something, i.e. where the essential condition for a request is satisfied.

This feature of speech that an utterance in a context can indicate the satisfaction of an essential condition without the use of the explicit illocutionary force indicating device for that essential condition is the origin of many polite turns of phrase. Thus, e.g., the sentence, *"Could you do this for me?"* (in spite of the meaning of the lexical items and the interrogative illocutionary force indicating devices) is not characteristically uttered as a subjunctive question concerning your abilities; it is characteristically uttered as a request.

5. Whenever the illocutionary force of an utterance is not explicit it can always be made explicit. This is an instance of the principle of expressibility, stating that whatever can be made can be said. Of course a given language may not be rich enough to enable speakers to say everything they mean, but there are no barriers, in principle, of enriching it. Another application of this law is that whatever can be implied can be said, though it cannot be said without implying other things.

6. The overlap of conditions shows that certain kinds of illocutionary acts are really special cases of other kinds; thus asking questions is really a special case of requesting, viz. requesting information (real question) or requesting that the hearer display knowledge (exam question). This explains that an utterance of the request form *"Tell me the name of the first President of the USA"* is equivalent in force to an utterance of the question form *"What's the name of the first President of the USA?"* It also partly explains why the verb *ask* covers both requests and questions, e.g., *"He asked me to do it"* (request) and *"He asked me why"* (question).

7. In general the essential condition determines the others. E.g., since the essential rule for requesting is that the utterance counts as an attempt to get H to do something, then the propositional content rule has to involve future behaviour of H.

8. The notions of illocutionary force and different illocutionary acts involve really several quite different principles of distinction. First and most important, there is the point of purpose of the fact (the difference, e.g., between a statement and a question); second, the relative positions of S and H (the difference between a request and an order); third, the degree of commitment undertaken (the difference between a mere expression of intention and a promise); fourth, the difference in propositional content (the difference between predictions and reports); fifth, the difference in the way the proposition relates to the interest of S and H (the difference between boasts and laments, warnings and predictions); sixth, the different possible expressed psychological states (the difference between a promise, which is an expression of intention, and a statement, which is an expression of belief); seventh, the different ways in which an utterance relates to the rest of the conversation (the difference between simply replying to what someone has said and objection to what he has said).

Both because there are several different dimensions of illocutionary force and because the same utterance act may be performed with a variety of different intentions, it is important to realize that one and the same utterance may constitute the performance of several different illocutionary acts. There may be several different non-synonymous illocutionary verbs that correctly characterize the utterance. E.g., suppose at a party a wife says, *"It's quite late"*. That utterance may be at one level a statement of fact; to her interlocutor, who has just remarked on how early it was, it may be (and intended as) an objection; to her husband it may be (and be intended as) a suggestion or even a request *"Let's go home"* as well as a warning *"You'll feel rotten in the morning if we don't"*.

9. Some illocutionary verbs are definable in terms of the intended perlocutionary effect, some not. Thus, requesting is, as a matter of its essential condition, an attempt to get a hearer to do something, but promising is not essentially tied to such effects on or responses from the hearer.

### Check Yourself Test

1. What are the terms “input” and “output” used to cover?
2. What is the difference between promises and threats?
3. What are the preparatory conditions in promising?
4. How do sincere promises differ from insincere ones?
5. What types of illocutionary acts can you name?
6. Is it possible to perform a speech act without invoking an explicit illocutionary force indicating device?
7. Can we make the illocutionary force of an utterance explicit when it is implicit and vice versa?

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## Lecture 5

### A TAXONOMY OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS

1. Criteria for distinguishing illocutionary acts.
2. Basic categories of illocutionary acts.

#### 1. Criteria for Distinguishing Illocutionary Acts

Any taxonomic effort of this sort presupposes criteria for distinguishing one (kind of) illocutionary act from another. What are the criteria by which we can tell that of three actual utterances one is a report, one a prediction, and one a promise? In order to develop higher order genera, we must first know how promises, predictions, reports, etc. differ from one another. When one attempts to answer that question one discovers that there are several quite different principles of distinction; that is there are different kinds of differences that enable us to say that the force of this utterance is different from the force of that utterance. For this reason, the metaphor for force in the expression “illocutionary force” is misleading since it suggests that different illocutionary forces occupy different positions on a single continuum of force. What is actually the case is that there are several distinct criss-crossing continua. A related source of confusion is that we are inclined to confuse illocutionary verbs with types of illocutionary acts. Where we have two monosynonymous illocutionary verbs they must necessarily mark two different kinds of illocutionary acts. We shall try to keep a clear distinction between illocutionary verbs and illocutionary acts. Illocutions are a part of language as opposed to particular languages. Illocutionary verbs are always part of a particular language: French, German, English, etc. Differences in illocutionary verbs are a good guide but by no means a sure guide to differences in illocutionary acts.

There are twelve significant dimensions of variation in which illocutionary acts differ from one another:

1) Differences in the point (or purpose) of the (type of) act. The point or purpose of an order can be specified by saying that it is an attempt to get the hearer to do something. The point or purpose of a description is that it is a representation (true or false, accurate or inaccurate) of how something is. The point or purpose of a promise is that it is an undertaking of an obligation by the speaker to do something. These differences correspond to the essential conditions, which form the best basis for a taxonomy.

**The point or purpose of a type of illocution is called its illocutionary point.** Illocutionary point is part of but not the same as illocutionary force. Thus, e.g., the illocutionary point of requests is the same as that of commands: both are attempts to get hearers to do something. But the illocutionary forces are clearly different. In general, one can say that the notion of illocutionary force is the resultant of several elements of which illocutionary point is only one, though, the most important one.

2. Differences in the direction of fit between words and the world. Some illocutions have as part of their illocutionary point to get the words (more strictly their propositional content) to match the world, others – to get the world to match the words. Assertions are in the former category, promises and requests are in the latter. The best illustration of this distinction is provided with the following example. Suppose a man goes to the supermarket with a shopping list given him by his wife on which are written the words “beans, butter, bacon and bread”. Suppose as he goes around with his shopping cart selecting these items he is followed by a detective who writes down everything he takes. As they emerge from the store both shopper and detective will have identical lists. But the function of the two lists will be quite different. In the case of the shopper's list, the purpose of the list is, so to speak, to get the world to match the words; the man is supposed to make his actions fit the list. In the case of the detective, the purpose of the list is to make the words match the world; the man is supposed to make the list fit the actions of the shopper. This can be further demonstrated by observing the role of “mistake” in the two cases. If the detective gets home and suddenly realizes that the man bought pork chops instead of bacon, he can simply erase the word “bacon” and write “pork chops”. But if the



shopper gets home and his wife points out he has bought pork chops when he should have bought bacon he cannot correct the mistake by erasing “bacon” from the list and writing “pork chops”.

In these examples the list provides the propositional content of the illocution and the illocutionary force determines how that content is supposed to relate to the world. This difference is called **difference in direction of fit**. The detective’s list has the word-to-world direction of fit (as do statements, descriptions, assertions and explanations); the shopper’s list has the world-to-word direction of fit (as do requests, commands, vows, promises). We shall represent the word-to-world direction of fit with a downward arrow ↓ and the world-to-word direction of fit with an upward arrow ↑. Direction of fit is always a consequence of illocutionary point.

3. Differences in expressed psychological states. A man who states, explains, asserts or claims that *p* expresses the belief that *p*; a man who promises, vows, threatens or pledges to do *A* expresses an intention to do *A*; a man who orders, commands, requests *H* to do *A* expresses a desire (want, wish) that *H* do *A*; a man who apologises for doing *A* expresses regret at having done *A*. In general, in the performance of any illocutionary act with a propositional content, the speaker expresses some attitudes, state, etc. to that propositional content. Notice that this holds even if he is insincere, even if he does not have the belief, desire, intention, regret or pleasure which he expresses, he, nonetheless, expresses a belief, desire, intention, regret or pleasure in the performance of the speech act. It is marked linguistically by the fact it is linguistically unacceptable (though not self-contradictory) to conjoin the explicit performative verb with the denial of the expressed psychological state. Thus one cannot say, “*I state that p but I do not believe that p*”, “*I promise that p but I do not intend that p*”, etc. Notice that this holds only in the first person performative use. One can say, “*He stated that p but didn’t really believe that p*”, “*I promised that p but did not really intend to do it*”, etc. **The psychological state expressed in the illocutionary act is the sincerity condition of the act.**

If one tries to do a classification of illocutionary acts based entirely on differently expressed psychological states (differences in the sincerity condition) one can get quite a long way. Thus, **belief** collects not only statements, assertions, remarks and explanations, but also postulations, declarations, deductions and arguments. **Intention** will collect promises, vows, threats and pledges. **Desire** or **want** will collect requests, orders, commands, askings, prayers, pleadings, beggings, and entreaties. **Pleasure** doesn’t collect quite so many – congratulations, felicitations, welcomes and a few others.

In what follows we shall symbolize the expressed psychological state with the capitalized initial letters of the corresponding verb, thus **B** for believe, **W** for want, **I** for intend, etc.

4. Differences in force or strength with which the illocutionary point is presented. Both “*I suggest that we go to the movies*” and “*I insist that we go to the movies*” have the same illocutionary point but it is presented with different strengths. Analogously with “*I solemnly swear that Bill stole the money*” and “*I guess Bill stole the money*”. Along the same dimension of illocutionary point or purpose there may be varying degrees of strength or commitment.

5. Differences in the status or position of the speaker and hearer as these bear on the illocutionary force of the utterance. If the general asks the private to clean up the room, that is in all likelihood a command or an order. If the private asks the general to clean up the room, that is likely to be a suggestion or proposal or request, but not an order of command.

6. Differences in the way the utterance relates to the interests of the speaker and the hearer. Consider, e.g. the differences between boasts and laments, between congratulations and condolences. In these two pairs one hears the difference as being between what is or is not in the interests of the speaker and hearer respectively.

7. Differences in relations to the rest of the discourse. Some performative expressions serve to relate the utterance to the rest of the discourse (and also to the surrounding context). Consider, e.g., *I reply, I deduce, I conclude and I object*. These expressions serve to relate utterances to other utterances and to the surrounding context. The features they mark seem mostly to involve utterances within the class of statements. In addition to simply stating a proposition, one may state it by way of objecting to what someone else has said; by way of replying to an earlier point, by way of deducing it from certain premises, etc. *however, moreover and therefore* also perform these discourse relating functions.

8. Differences in propositional content that are determined by illocutionary force indicating devices. The differences, e.g., between a report and a prediction involve the fact that a prediction must be about the future whereas a report can be about the past or present. These differences correspond to differences in propositional content conditions.

9. Differences between those acts that must always be speech acts and those that can be, but need not be performed as speech acts.

For example, one may classify things by saying “*I classify this as an A and this as B*”. But, one need not say anything at all in order to be classifying; one may simply throw all the As in the A box and all the Bs in the B box. Similarly with estimate, diagnose and conclude. I may make estimates, give diagnoses and draw conclusions in saying, “*I estimate*”, “*I diagnose*” and “*I conclude*”, but in order to estimate, diagnose or conclude it is not necessary to say anything at all. I may simply stand before a building and estimate its height, silently diagnose you as a marginal schizophrenic, or conclude that the man sitting next to me is quite drunk. In these cases no speech act, nor even an internal speech act is necessary.

10. Differences between those acts that require extra-linguistic institutions for their performance and those that do not. There is a large number of illocutionary acts that require an extra-linguistic institution and generally a special position by the speaker and the hearer within that institution in order for the act to be performed. Thus, in order to bless, excommunicate, christen, pronounce guilty, declare war, it is not sufficient for any old speaker to say to any old hearer “*I bless*”, “*I excommunicate*”, etc. One must have a position within an extralinguistic institution. In order to make a statement that it is raining or promise to come and see you I need only obey the rules of language. No extralinguistic institutions are required. This feature of certain speech acts that they require extralinguistic institutions needs to be distinguished from feature 5, the requirement of certain illocutionary acts that the speaker and possibly the hearer as well have a certain status. Extralinguistic institutions often confer status in a way relevant to illocutionary force, but not all differences of status derive from institutions. Thus, an armed robber in virtue of his possession of a gun may **order** as opposed to, e.g., request, entreat, or implore victims to raise their hands. But his status here does not derive from a position within an institution, but from his possession of a weapon.

11. Differences between those acts where the corresponding illocutionary verb has a performative use and those where it does not. Most illocutionary verbs have performative uses, e.g., *state*, *promise*, *order*, *conclude*. But one cannot perform acts of, e.g., boasting or threatening by saying, “*I hereby boast*” or “*I hereby threaten*”. Not all illocutionary verbs are performative.

12. Differences in the style of performance of the illocutionary act. Some illocutionary verbs serve to mark what we might call the special style in which an illocutionary act is performed. Thus, the difference between, e.g., announcing and confiding need not involve any difference in illocutionary point or propositional content but only in the style of performance of the illocutionary act.

## 2. Basic Categories of Illocutionary Acts

1. **Assertives.** The point or purpose of the members of the assertive class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case to the truth of the expressed proposition. All of the members of the assertive class are assessable on the dimension of assessment which includes true and false. This class may be symbolized as follows: ↓ **B (p)** The direction of fit is words to the world; the psychological state expressed is Belief (that p).

2. **Directives.** The illocutionary point of these consists in the fact that they are attempts (of varying degrees) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. They may be very modest “attempts” as when I invite you to do it or suggest that you do it, or they may be very fierce attempts as when I insist that you do it. Here we have the following symbolism: ↑ **W (Hearer does A)** The direction of fit is world-to-words and the sincerity condition is want (or wish or desire). The propositional content is always that the **H** does some future action **A**. Verbs denoting members of this class are: *ask*, *order*, *command*, *request*, *beg*, *plead*, *pray*, *entreat*, *invite*, *permit*, *advise*, *dare*, *defy*, *challenge*. Questions

are considered by J. Searle to be a subclass of directives, since they are attempts by **S** to get **H** to answer, i.e. to perform a speech act.

3. **Commissives.** Commissives are those illocutionary acts whose point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action. Using “**C**” for the member of this class we have the following symbolism: **C**  $\uparrow$  **I** (**S** does **A**) The direction of fit is world-to-word and the sincerity condition is Intention. The propositional content is always that the speaker **S** does some future action **A**.

4. **Expressives.** The illocutionary point of this class is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. The paradigms of expressive verbs are *thank*, *congratulate*, *apologize*, *condole*, *deplore* and *welcome*. Notice that in expressives there is no direction of fit: in performing an expressive act, the speaker is neither trying to get the world match the words, nor the words to match the world, rather the truth of the expressive proposition is presupposed. This fact is neatly reflected in the syntax (of English) by the fact that the paradigm of expressive verbs in their performative occurrence will not take **that clauses** but require a gerundial nominalization. One cannot say, \**“I apologize that I stepped on your toe.”* The correct English sentence would be: *“I apologize for stepping on your toe.”* Similarly, one cannot have: \**“I congratulate you that you won the race.”* or \**“I thank you that you paid the money.”* One must have: *“I congratulate you on winning the race (Congratulations on winning the race)”* *“I thank you for paying me the money (Thanks for paying me the money)”*.

The symbolization of this class must proceed as follows: **E**  $\emptyset$  (**P**) (**S** / **H** + **property**) where **E** indicates the illocutionary point common to all expressives.  $\emptyset$  is the null symbol indicating no direction of fit, **P** is a variable ranging over the different possible psychological states, expressed in the performance of the illocutionary acts in this class, and the propositional content ascribes some property (not necessarily an action) to either **S** or **H**. I can congratulate you not only on your winning the race, but also on your good looks. The property specified in the propositional content of an expressive must, however, be related to **S** or **H**. I cannot without some very special assumptions congratulate you on Newton’s first law of motion.

There is an important class of cases where the state of affairs represented in the proposition is realized or brought into existence by the illocutionary force indicating device, cases where one brings a state of affairs into existence by declaring it to exist, cases where, so to speak, “saying makes it so”. Examples of these cases are *“I resign”*, *“You are fired”*, *“I excommunicate you”*, *“I christen this ship the battleship Missouri”*, *“I appoint you chairman”*, *“War is hereby declared”*, This class is called **declarations**. It is the defining characteristic of this class that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality. Successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world: if I successfully perform the act of appointing you chairman, then you are a chairman; if I successfully perform the act of nominating you as candidate, then you are a candidate; if I successfully perform the act of declaring a state of war, then war is on; if I successfully perform the act of marrying you, then you are married.

The surface syntactical structure of many sentences used to perform declarations conceals this point from us because there is no surface syntactical distinction between propositional content and illocutionary force. Thus *“You are fired”* and *“I resign”* do not seem to permit a distinction between illocutionary force and propositional content, but in their use to perform declarations their semantic structure is:

*I declare: your employment is (hereby) terminated*

*I declare: my position is (hereby) terminated*

Declarations bring about some alteration in the status or condition of the object (or objects) referred to solely in virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed. This feature of declarations distinguishes them from other categories.

All the examples we have considered so far involve an extra-linguistic institution, a system of constitutive rules in addition to constitutive rules of language, in order that the declaration may be successfully performed. The mastery of these rules which constitute linguistic competence by the

speaker or hearer is not in general sufficient for the performance of a declaration. In addition, there must be an extra-linguistic institution and the speaker and hearer must occupy special places within this institution. It is only given such institutions as the church, the law, private property, the state and a special position of the speaker and hearer within these institutions that one can excommunicate, appoint, give and bequeath one's possessions or declare war. There are two classes of exceptions to the principle that every declaration requires an extra-linguistic institution. First, there are supernatural declarations. When, e.g., God says "*Let there be light*" that is a declaration. Secondly, there are declarations that concern language itself, e.g., when one says, "*I define, abbreviate, name, call or dub*". We shall symbolize declarations as a very special category of speech acts in the following way:  $D \updownarrow \emptyset (p)$  where  $D$  indicates the declarational illocutionary point; the direction of fit is both words-to-world and world-to-words because of the peculiar character of declarations. There is no sincerity condition, hence we have the null symbol in the sincerity condition slot; and we use the usual propositional variable " $p$ ".

The reason there has to be a relation of fit arrow here at all is that declarations do attempt to get language to match the world. But they do not attempt to do it either by describing an existing state of affairs (as do assertives) nor by trying to get someone to bring about a future state of affairs (as do directives and commissives).

Some members of the class of declarations overlap with members of the class of assertives. This is because in certain institutional situations we not only ascertain the facts but we need an authority to lay down a decision as to what the facts are after the fact-finding procedure has been gone through. Institutions characteristically require illocutionary acts to be issued by authorities of various kinds which have the force of illocutions. Some institutions require assertive claims to be issued with the force of declarations in order that the argument over the truth of the claim can come to an end somewhere and the next institutional steps which wait on the setting of the factual issue can proceed: a prisoner is released, a touchdown is scored. The existence of this class we may dub "**assertive declarations**". Unlike the other declarations, they share with assertives a sincerity condition. The judge, jury and umpire can, logically speaking, lie, but the man who declares war or nominates you cannot lie in the performance of his illocutionary act. The symbolism for the class of assertive declarations, then, is this:

$Da \downarrow \updownarrow B (p)$  where  $Da$  indicates the illocutionary point of issuing an assertive with the force of a declaration; the first arrow indicates the assertive direction of fit, the second arrow indicates the declarational direction of fit. The sincerity condition is belief and  $p$  represents the propositional content.

### Check Yourself Test

1. What are the dimensions of differentiation of illocutionary acts?
2. Define illocutionary point and give its difference from illocutionary force?
3. What is the direction of fit?
4. Give your understanding of sincerity condition of a speech act?
5. What are the basic categories of illocutionary acts?
6. How do declarations differ from assertive declarations?

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## Lecture 6

### METHODOLOGICAL REMARKS ON SPEECH ACT THEORY

1. Propositional content and the illocutionary force (point).
2. Speech acts and units of their activity.
3. Primary (natural) and secondary (institutional) speech acts.
4. Speech act classification.
5. General rules for inferring non-literal from literal meaning.

The notion of “speech act” is one of the most fruitful notions of contemporary linguistic theorizing. It orients our scientific endeavours towards studying the function of language in human communication. The universal part of speech act theory deals with the following topics:

- 1) the general structure of speech acts;
- 2) the general structure of speech act sequences;
- 3) the general institutional impacts on speech acts and speech act sequences;
- 4) the general classification of speech acts on the basis of 1-3;
- 5) the general rules for inferring non-literal from literal meaning.

#### 1. Propositional Content and the Illocutionary Force (Point)

It is widely accepted that each speech act can be characterized by its propositional content and its illocutionary force or point. The propositional content in general should, however, not be identified with a proposition. Rather the type of propositional content and the type of illocutionary force of a speech act are intrinsically interrelated. The propositional content of a speech act can explicitly be expressed by the complement sentence of a reported form of that very speech act. Therefore the primary methodological strategy for construing the types of propositional content is to inspect pieces of reported speech. Some of the relevant types of propositional content may be illustrated by the following table:

Table 2.

**Types of Propositional Content**

<b>general type of speech act</b>	<b>complement sentence of a report</b>	<b>designation of the complement sentence</b>	<b>denotation of the complement sentence</b>
representative (assertions)	that Paul came	a proposition	a truth value
directive (requests)	to come	a predicate concept	a property of individuals
erotetic (questions)	whether Paul came	a propositional concept	a property of proposition
erotetic (questions)	who came	an open timeless proposition	a property of term-denotation
erotetic (questions)	when Paul came	an open tensed proposition	a property of dates

The illocutionary force of a speech act should be characterized both:

- (a) in terms of (pragmatically) presupposed mental states of the participants;
- (b) in terms of the state of interactions brought about by performing that speech act. This follows from the assumption that:

a) in performing a speech act every speaker has something in mind, consequently the hearer is entitled to infer that the speaker has a certain belief or expectation;

b) each speech act brings about a certain effect in that it changes the obtaining state of interaction; consequently speaker and hearer are entitled to assume a certain new state of obligations and commitments, of information and of mutual social relationship.

Most generally an illocutionary force can be construed as a characteristic outcome function. This theoretical strategy also conforms to the daily use of speech act designating expressions. If someone has ordered something, then we say that there exists an order which one expects to be satisfied in the future course of action. Here we change our use of the word “order” from the act-perspective to the result-or-outcome perspective. The very purpose of the speech act of ordering is to bring about an order.

Whereas the central notion in dealing with propositional contents is truth, the corresponding notion in dealing with illocutionary outcomes is satisfaction. E.g. an order is said to be satisfied if the respective addressee performs the ordered action.

## 2. Speech Acts and Units of their Activity

No speech act is performed in isolation. Moreover, no speech acts follow each other in an arbitrary sequence. It is generally true of speech acts that they are organized within a certain variable discourse pattern. This feature is reflected in the particular structure of many speech acts as well. For instance, a question is something that calls for an answer, a proposal is something that calls for consideration, an apology is something that calls for an acknowledgement.

The most important notions for dealing with speech act sequences are as follows: turn, move, speech act pattern, complex speech unit and discourse type. When a participant speaks or makes a contribution to a conversation it is said “he takes a turn”. A **turn** may consist of a minimal utterance which doesn’t constitute a full speech act but it may also consist of a whole series of speech acts. Each turn includes places where another speaker may start speaking. Turns can also overlap but there is a tendency to reduce such situations. The notion of **move** is used to characterize the function of a speech act for the ongoing of the discourse. One may distinguish between initiating, reacting and continuing moves. Let’s look at this piece of dialogue:

1. A: *It’s cold here.*
2. B: *Do you think so?*
3. A: *Yes, indeed, couldn’t we move a little?*

A’s assertion (1) serves to initiate a theme, B’s question (2) counts as a reaction to it, whereas A’s next turn (3), consisting of a confirmation and a question, serves to continue the theme of 1. Reacting moves can be topic-accepting, or topic-rejecting, or neutral.

Some speech acts, in particular questions and requests, have a tendency to function as initiating moves. It is part of the nature of these speech acts. This doesn’t mean that couldn’t be also used in reactions. On the other hand, confirmations or answers are typical reacting moves. Whether an assertion is called an answer, or confirmation, or something else, depends solely on its position in the speech act sequence.

**A speech act pattern is a conventionalized ordered sequence of speech acts.** The positions of this sequence have to be filled in by speech acts of a certain kind, which in general must be performed alternately by the participants of the discourse. If one speaker starts with a speech act belonging to a certain pattern then it is expected that the respective addressee, too, should stick to this pattern, even if he interrupts it by a counter-question or alike. Some patterns contain positions where certain alternatives are possible. Sometimes there is a possibility of re-opening a part of a pattern such that a repetitive structure emerges.

Prominent speech act patterns are the adjacency pairs like question-answer, proposal-accounting for the proposal, opening and closing pairs of a conversation. But very often there are also three-place patterns. E.g. the minimal procedure of securing understanding consists of the reference utterance, a confirmation, and a reconfirmation.

1. A: *The lecture takes place in Room 14*
2. B: *Ah, in Room 14*
3. A: *Yes, indeed, in 14*

Thanks-giving expressing gratitude for a favour received, consists of the reference-action, the thanks-giving, and an acknowledgement.

1. A: (delivers B a package) *Here you are.*
2. B: *Thank you very much.*
3. A: *You are welcome.*

A complex **speech unit** consists of several speech acts delivered by a participant. He performs several stages in sequence: each one, however, can be commented on by the addressee to the effect that this stage be enlarged or reduced. Typical complex speech units are narration, argumentation and description. They normally have a beginning, a narrative middle part, and a coda; none of these parts can be completely left out. The structure of complex speech units is due to their complex tasks. A general theory of interaction has thus to be able to characterize the task of a narration, of an argumentation, and of a description.

The **discourse type** is the most complex unit of speech activity. It is the unit that can be realized by a whole conversation. Typical examples are getting-and-giving direction, instruction, interview, counselling. Each of them may contain descriptions as well as argumentations, and even narrations, and it will certainly contain stages with characteristic speech act patterns. Again, the structure of a discourse type depends on its communication task, on the structure of the normal experiences of the participants and on the structure of the reality concerned.

### 3. Primary (Natural) and Secondary (Institutional) Speech Acts

We may distinguish **primary** or **natural speech acts**, which are necessary for any kind of human interaction and **secondary** or **institutional speech acts**, which are specific for a certain institution. By an institution we mean an organized system of social life which results from the social division of labour and which is determined to fulfil the specific needs of society. Examples are: school-instruction, courtroom-investigation, political debate, commercial advertising. Some institutions are distributed throughout the world according to a certain cultural standard, and not very specific for a land community, whereas others are more specific.

Institutions can have various impacts on the development of speech activities:

a) An institution can create new kinds of speech acts, mostly of the declaration or of the satisfactive type, such as baptizing, judging, appointing, opening a session. Some of these are performed by means of using specific performative formulas.

b) An institution can modify primary speech acts. E.g., we have a whole range of institutionally modified kinds of questions and requests, such as examination questions, interrogation questions, test questions or control questions, orders, regulations, directions, summons or citations.

c) An institution can produce new discourse types, which reveal specific complex speech units and speech act patterns. These are sometimes regulatory devices, such as standing orders, but it may also happen that the conventions are only implicitly given by the institutional background.

### 4. Speech Act Classification

We can envisage the following four main criteria for speech act classification.

1. Speech acts can be classified according to the main grammatical markers (and their possible functional equivalents) in a given language. These markers are in languages like English and German at least the following ones: (a) the interrogative mood – speech acts of the erotetic type; b) the

imperative mood – speech acts of the directive type; (c) the declarative mood – speech acts of the representative type; (d) specific performative formulas – speech acts of the declaration type.

2. Speech acts can be classified according to (a) the type of propositional content, and (b) the type of illocutionary outcome or the type of satisfaction condition, respectively. Because of the interrelationship of propositional content and illocutionary outcome, an independent classification according to either (a) or (b) is not possible. The results will partly overlap with the results of the first classification.

3. Speech acts can be classified according to their function, i.e. as to whether they represent an initiating or a reacting move or, to put it differently, according to their position within speech act patterns.

4. Speech acts can be classified according to their origin as either primary (natural) speech acts or secondary (institutional) speech acts.

### 5. General Rules for Inferring Non-Literal from Literal Meaning

Literal meaning is always language specific. The meaning of an utterance of a sentence *s* of a language *L* is said to be literal if it is only composed of the meanings of the words and phrases in *s* in accordance with the syntactic conventions in *L*. It is, however, not always clear what the meaning of the words and phrases in *s* actually is, because their meaning often depends on the context *c* of the utterance. For example, the meaning of indexical expressions such as *I*, *here*, *now* in an utterance, or the meaning of anaphoric expression such as *he*, *then*, *that* in an utterance depends on *c*. Even words such as *enough*, *but*, *otherwise*, *big*, *can* and many others, have a context-dependent meaning, i.e. their meaning includes a context-variable *x*.

Let me introduce the notion of a **neutral context**, *co* of a sentence *s*. This context is a proper part of the full context *c* of any proper utterance of *s*. The neutral context *co* of *s* provides all the features which are necessary to determine the values of each context-variable *x* in the meanings of words or phrases in *s*. This means that a neutral context does not affect the propositional structure of *s*, and that it contributes nothing to the illocutionary force of the utterance of *s*.

We can, now, redefine our notion of literal meaning. The meaning of an utterance of a sentence *s* of language *L* is literal if the context used to determine the meaning is neutral with respect to *s*.

The meaning of an utterance of *s* is non-literal if in order to derive the meaning, a richer context *c* is used than the neutral context *co* of *s*.

Derivations of a non-literal meaning always make use of the literal meaning and of certain contextual premises. These include perceptual knowledge of the preceding context and of the respective state of interaction, knowledge of the relevant discourse type of the speech act pattern and of the institutional background, knowledge about the world and about the experience and mental states of the participants, about preferences, and about general principles of cooperation. It is the task of the universal theory of speech acts to specify the general structure of these inference procedures.

### Check Yourself Test

1. What does the universal part of speech act theory deal with?
2. What are the relevant types of the propositional content?
3. How do speech acts follow each other?
4. Characterize the most important notions of speech act sequences.
5. Define primary and secondary speech acts.
6. What are the main criteria for speech act classification?

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## Lecture 7

### INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS AND TYPES OF COMPETENCE

1. Preliminary remarks.
2. Searle's point of view on the problem.
3. Labov and Fanshel's rule for indirect requests.
4. Communicative competence: women, sex and gender.

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

In the theory of speech acts there is a customary distinction between **direct speech acts**, where the speaker says what he means, and **indirect speech acts**, where (s)he means something more than what (s)he says. E.g. in a standard dinner situation when a speaker says, "*Can you pass the salt?*" he performs the direct speech act of asking whether the hearer can pass the salt but normally also the indirect speech act of requesting the hearer to pass the salt. In an indirect speech act the speaker says one thing, means what he says, but he also means something more. A speaker might, e.g. say to a hearer, "*You are standing on my foot.*" And he might mean, "*You are standing on my foot,*" but in most contexts he would likely mean something more, such as, "*Please, get off my foot.*" In such an utterance the **direct speech act** expressed by the literal meaning of the sentence lies in the domain of semantics. The **indirect speech act**, expressed in the speaker's utterance meaning insofar as it differs from the literal meaning of the sentence, lies within the domain of pragmatics.

Speaker's utterance meaning may differ from literal meaning in a variety of ways. Speaker's meaning may include literal meaning, but go beyond it, as in the case of indirect speech acts, or it may depart from it, as in the case of metaphor, or it may be opposite to it, as in the case of irony. The distinction between speaker's meaning and sentence meaning is common to all theories of speech act; the question is whether that distinction is the same as the distinction between context free meanings (semantics) and context dependent meanings (pragmatics).

There are varying degrees of indirectness, depending on how different the two propositional contents are. If we take, for example, the sentence *Do you know what time it is?* a likely context for this (not the only possible one of course) is where I don't know the time, want to know the time, and believe you may well be able to tell me. In this context it would indirectly convey "*What time is it?*" This is why it would be thoroughly uncooperative in such a context for you to respond merely with *Yes*. *Yes* would answer the question that is actually asked, but not the one that I in fact want to have answered. Another plausible context for the above mentioned sentence is where it is addressed to a child (by a parent, say) when it is known to be past the child's bedtime: here my intention may well be to convey a directive to go to bed.

In either contextualization, I perform two illocutionary acts simultaneously, one directly (a question as to whether you know what time it is), and one indirectly (a question as to what time it is, or a directive to go to bed). Commonly, the direct act is obviously less important than the indirect one – as when the interest of the question whether you know the time is simply that if you do you will be able to answer the question that I really do want an answer to. The first suggested contextualization is less indirect than the second because the propositional content of the conveyed "*What time is it?*" is included as part of that which is actually expressed, whereas "*You go to bed*" is not.

Indirect speech acts are an immensely pervasive phenomenon. Some kinds of illocutionary act are more often performed indirectly than directly, either in general or in a certain range of contexts. Take first the case of requests, not in general but in a context where speaker and addressee are social equals yet not closely intimate. Here a request is much less likely to be made directly than indirectly. Instead of the direct *Please open the window*, for example, I am likely to use one of the following indirect directives or something along similar lines:

i *Can/Could you (please) open the window.*

- ii *Will/Would you (please) open the window.*
- iii *Would you be good enough to open the window (please).*
- iv *Would you mind opening the window (please)?*
- v *Would you like to open the window (please) ?*
- vi *I wonder if I might trouble you to open the window?*

As a second example, consider the more specialized illocutionary act of applying for a job, an act normally performed in writing. Some of the formulations used for this purpose are illustrated below, where those in [i] are direct, the others indirect:

- i a. *I hereby apply for the position of Lecturer in Philosophy advertised in 'The Australian' of 30 November.*
- b. *I apply for the position...*
- c. *This is an application for...*
- ii a. *I would/should like to apply...*
- b. *I wish to apply I make application...*
- c. *I am writing to apply...*
- d. *I would/should like to be considered for...*
- e. *I would/should be grateful if you would consider me for...*
- f. *Please consider this letter as my formal application for...*
- g. *I beg/wish to offer myself as a candidate for...*
- h. *The purpose of this letter is to express my interest in securing...*
- i. *I am very glad to have this opportunity to apply...*

Again, only a small minority of applications are performed directly, and there are innumerable variations on the indirect formulations exemplified in [ii].

Prosody and punctuation commonly serve as markers of indirect force:

- i *Could you turn your radio down a little.*
- ii *Isn't she fantastic!*

At the direct level these are questions, but I am unlikely to use them with question as the primary force: I would generally be indirectly conveying "Turn your radio down a little" (directive) and "How fantastic she is!" (exclamatory statement). In this use they would typically have falling intonation, rather than the rising intonation that is the most characteristic prosodic accompaniment of closed questions, and they are very often not punctuated with a question mark.

Such markers of the indirect force have the effect of increasing the difference in salience between the indirect speech act and the direct one, pushing the latter further into the background. In such an example as *Boy, am I ever hungry!* the combination of falling intonation with the non-propositional elements *boy* and *ever* causes the direct question force to be completely overshadowed by the indirect exclamatory statement force.

## 2. Searle's Point of View on the Problem

Searle formulates the problem of primary performatives as one of explaining how and when the grammatical moods (declarative, interrogative and imperative) do not realize the macro-functions of statement, question and directive. For illustrative purposes we will concentrate on directives:

1. *Can you pass the salt?*
2. *Would you pass the salt?*
3. *I'd like the salt.*
4. *You ought to pass her the salt.*

Sentences 1-3 are representative of a large set of utterances which Sadock (1974, 1975) has maintained are in fact primary performative versions of the explicit performative *I request you ...* – an

analysis is justified by the fact that they can all co-occur with “*please*”. In such cases we are in fact dealing with idioms, and thus that the initial interrogative or declarative item should not be broken down but treated unanalyzed as one conventional way of conveying a request. Certainly there is some intonational support for this – in many occurrences of such utterances the initial phrase is marked intonationally as uninformative by being unstressed or non-prominent.

However, there are major problems with an attempt to explain indirectness in terms of idioms. First, it cannot cope with all the data – examples like 4, where the requested action is implied or hinted at, must be explained in other ways. Second, the list of idioms is worryingly long. Third, as Levinson (1983, p. 270) points out, “idioms are by definition non-compositional and are therefore likely to be idiosyncratic to speech communities ... however, most of the basic ... structures translate across languages”. Finally, and as Searle himself points out, most importantly, the addressee can respond to both the surface form and the underlying force:

- A: *Can you pass the salt?*  
 B: *Sure.* (passes the salt)

These examples are easy to instance and accept, but Searle goes on to generalize, suggesting that ‘the man who says “*I want you to do this*” literally means he wants you to do it’; this leads him to argue that when such sentences are uttered the literal illocutionary act is also performed, and thus he talks of **indirect speech acts**, i.e. speech acts performed indirectly through the performance of another speech act. Searle suggests that the possible realizations can be grouped into six categories:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Sentences concerning hearer’s ability;                                   | Can you pass the salt?  |
| 2 | Sentences concerning hearer’s future action;                             | Are you going to pass the salt?   |
| 3 | Sentences concerning speaker’s wish or want;                             | I would like (you to pass) the salt.                                      |
| 4 | Sentences concerning hearer’s desire or willingness;                     | Would you mind passing the salt?<br>It might help if you passed the salt. |
| 5 | Sentences concerning reasons for actions;                                | I don’t think you salted the potatoes.                                    |
| 6 | Sentences embedding either one of the above or an explicit performative. | Can I ask you to pass the salt?   |

Searle observes that the first three types refer to the three felicity conditions on directive illocutionary acts which he proposed in 1969, respectively **preparatory**, concerned with the hearer’s ability; **propositional content**, concerned with the futurity of the action; and **sincerity**, concerned with the speaker wanting the hearer to perform the action. He combines groups 4 and 5 arguing that both concern reasons for doing A. He is then able to show that a speaker can make an indirect directive by:

1. either asking whether or stating that a preparatory condition concerning hearer’s ability to do A obtains;
2. either asking whether or stating that the propositional content condition obtains;
3. stating that the sincerity condition obtains, e.g. *Do you think I enjoy listening to you whistling?*
4. either stating or asking whether there are good or overriding reasons for doing A, except where the reason is that hearer wants or wishes, etc. to do A, in which case he can only ask whether hearer wants or wishes, etc. to do A.

These generalizations represent a powerful description of the data – they categorize and circumscribe the available ways of producing an indirect directive – but there is no attempt to **explain** why these are the options and the only options, nor how a hearer faced with an utterance like *Can you pass the salt?* sets about deciding whether the speaker intends it as a request or a question. Indeed, Searle admits that the hearer needs some way of finding out when the utterance is just a question about his abilities and when it is a request, but observes unhelpfully that it is at this point that the general principles of conversation (together with factual background information) come into play.

### 3. Labov and Fanshel's Rule for Indirect Requests

It is interesting at this point to compare Searle's description with that proposed from a different perspective by Labov and Fanshel [1977]. They begin first by characterizing the prerequisites for an utterance imperative in form to be heard as a valid directive, or in their terms a **request for action**:

If A addresses to B an imperative specifying an action X at a time T and B believes that A believes that

1. a) X should be done for a purpose Y (need for the action)
  - b) B would not do X in the absence of the request (need for the request)
  2. B has the ability to do X
  3. B has the obligation to do X or is willing to do it
  4. A has the right to tell B to do X,
- then A is heard as making a valid request for action.

Imperative utterances which fail to satisfy one or more of these preconditions are, in Austin's terms, infelicitous, and may be variously interpreted as cheeky, insulting, joking or simply irrelevant.

Labov and Fanshel offer a **rule for indirect requests**:

If A makes to B a request for information or an assertion about

- a) the existential status of an action X to be performed by B
- b) the consequences of performing an action X
- c) the time T that an action X might be performed by B
- d) any of the pre-conditions for a valid request for X as given in the Rule for Requests

and all other pre-conditions are in effect, then A is heard as making a valid request of B for the action X.

There are many ways in which an indirect request can be realized by questioning or asserting other pre-conditions:

- |     |                       |  |
|-----|-----------------------|--|
| a)  | Existential status    | Have you dusted yet?<br>You don't seem to have dusted this room yet.   |
| b)  | Consequences          | How would it look if you were to dust this room?<br>This room would look a lot better if you dusted it.                |
| c)  | Time referents        | When do you plan to dust?<br>I imagine you will be dusting this evening.   |
| d)  | Pre-conditions        | Don't you think the dust is pretty thick   |
| 1a. | need for the action:  | This place is really dusty.  |
| 1b. | need for the request: | Are you planning to dust this room?<br>I don't have to remind you to dust this room.                                   |
| 2.  | ability:              | Can you grab a dust rag and just dust around?<br>You have time enough to dust before you go.                           |
| 3a. | willingness:          | Would you mind picking up a dust rag?<br>I'm sure you wouldn't mind picking up a dust rag and just dusting around.     |
| 3b. | obligation:           | Isn't it your turn to dust?<br>You ought to do your part in keeping this place clean.                                  |
| 4.  | rights:               | Didn't you ask me to remind you to dust this place?<br>I'm supposed to look after this place, but not do all the work. |

Of course, a given indirect request can be made in an unlimited number of ways only if it is considered in isolation; in reality, the constraints of the preceding discourse, the current topic, the facts of the situation and the current speaker's intentions for the progress of the succeeding discourse will all reduce the choice enormously.

The situation is not as simple as Labov and Fanshel suggest – the following is a counter-example to their claim that in producing an utterance following their rules, A will be heard as making a valid request of B:

A: *Malcolm, can you open this for me.*

B: *I don't know.*

A: *No, I was making a request.*

In fact, the Labov and Fanshel analysis has the same problem as Searle's: both need, as Levinson points out, an associated inference theory to explain how a listener comes to reject the direct interpretation and select the indirect one – the most convincing proposals are those of Grice [1975].

#### 4. Communicative Competence: Women, Sex and Gender

**Communicative** competence is the ability to use language appropriately in social situations. In order to speak a language successfully, you need to have purely **linguistic competence** in that language: **mastery of pronunciation, of grammar, and of vocabulary**. But you need more than that: you also need **sociolinguistic competence, knowledge of such things as how to begin and end conversations, how and when to be polite, and how to address people**. In addition you further need **strategic competence, knowledge of how to organize a piece of speech in an effective manner and how to spot and compensate for any misunderstandings or other difficulties**.

Depending on who is using it, the term **communicative competence** refers (more usually) to the last two of these or (less usually) to all three together. The concept and the term were introduced, in the narrower sense, by the American linguist Dell Hymes in the 1970s. Hymes was dismayed by what he saw as the excessively narrow concern of many linguists with nothing but internal linguistic structure, at the expense of communication, and he wished to draw attention to the importance of appropriateness of language use.

Today linguists who have an interest in anthropological linguistics, in functionalism, in language in use, in language teaching or in communication generally attach great importance to the examination and elucidation of communicative competence.

Men and women do indeed speak rather differently in English, quite apart from the obvious fact that they tend to talk about different things: women spend more time talking about clothes and children, while men talk more about cars and sports. Here are a few of the differences some of which are controversial.

1. Women are said to make frequent use of a number of admiring terms rarely used by men: divine, cute, adorable, thrilling and others.

2. Women are said to make finer discriminations than men in certain areas such as colour terms – that is, women are much more likely to use precise terms such as burgundy, ecru, chartreuse, crimson and beige.

3. Men are said to swear much more than women. Well, this may have been true a generation ago, but if the language of my female students is anything to go by, it's not true any more, though a few of the coarser expressions are, perhaps, still mainly used by men.

4. Women are said to use more tag questions than men – that is, they are more likely to say things like *"It's nice, isn't it?"* as if to seek confirmation. (This claim is particularly controversial).

5. Men interrupt far more than women.

6. Women use more baby-talk than men.

7. Very generally, women's discourse is **cooperative**, while men's is **competitive**. That is women in conversation usually seek to sympathize with one another and to support and admire the ideas and contributions of others. Men, in contrast, tend to try to outdo one another, to score points and to top what the others have said.

8. Finally, women are more likely than men of the same social group to use (overt) prestige forms and are likely to report themselves as using more prestige forms than they actually do. Men do just the opposite: they use fewer prestige forms, and they report themselves as using even fewer than they do.

### **Check Yourself Test**

1. What does the speaker say in direct speech acts?
2. What does s/he mean in indirect acts?
3. What domain does the direct speech act lie in?
4. What domain does the indirect speech act lie in?
5. What may speaker's meaning include?
6. What types of competence are distinguished by linguists?
7. What is included into the communicative competence?
8. How does women's talk differ from men's talk?
9. Do men and women speak differently in your native language?

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## Lecture 8

### THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE OF SPEECH ACTS

1. Grice's conversational maxims.
2. The interconnection of the Cooperative Principle, maxims and conversational implicature.
3. Examples of conversational implicature.

#### 1. Grice's Conversational Maxims

One may distinguish four categories under which certain more specific maxims and submaxims will fall, the following of which will, in general, yield results in accordance with the Cooperative Principle. P. Grice called these categories Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner.

- |   |          |  |
|---|----------|--|
| 1 | relation | be relevant  |
| 2 | quality  | a) do not say what you believe to be false<br>b) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence  |
| 3 | quantity | a) make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)<br>b) do not make your contribution more informative than is required |
| 4 | manner   | a) avoid obscurity of expression<br>b) avoid ambiguity<br>c) be brief<br>d) be orderly   |

The category of **Quantity** relates to the quantity of information to be provided and under it the following maxims fall:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Under the category of **Quality** falls a supermaxim "Try to make your contribution one that is true" – and two more specific maxims:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Under the category of **Relation** P. Grice placed a single maxim, namely, "Be relevant".

Finally, under the category of **Manner**, which is understood as relating not (like the previous categories) to what is said, but, rather, to how something is to be said, Grice includes the supermaxim "Be perspicuous" and various maxims such as:

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

There are, of course, all sorts of other maxims (aesthetic, social or moral in character) such as "Be polite", that are also normally observed by participants in talk exchanges, and these may also generate nonconventional implicatures. Here is one example for each conversational category.

1. **Quantity.** If you are assisting me to mend a car, I expect your contribution to be neither more nor less than is required. If, e.g., at a particular stage I need four screws, I expect you to hand me four, rather than two or six.

2. **Quality.** I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious. If I need sugar as an ingredient in the cake you are assisting me to make, I do not expect you to hand me salt; if I need a spoon, I do not expect a trick spoon made of rubber.



3. **Relation.** I expect a partner's contribution to be appropriate to the immediate needs at each stage of the transaction. If I am mixing ingredients for a cake I do not expect to be handed a good book or even an oven cloth (though this might be an appropriate contribution at a latter stage).

4. **Manner.** I expect a partner to make it clear what contribution he is making and to execute his performance with reasonable dispatch.

Talk exchanges exhibit certain features that jointly distinguish cooperative transactions:

1. The participants have some common immediate aim, like getting a car mended; their ultimate aims may, of course, be independent and even in conflict – each may want to get the car mended in order to drive off, leaving the other stranded. In characteristic talk exchanges there is a common aim even if, as in an over-the-wall chat, it is a second-order one, namely, that each party should, for the time being, identify himself with the transitory conversational interests of the other.

2. The contributions of the participants should be dovetailed, mutually dependent.

3. There is some sort of understanding (which may be explicit but which is often tacit) that other things being equal, the transaction should continue in appropriate style unless both parties are agreeable that it should terminate. You do not just shove off or start doing something else.

But while some such quasi-contractual basis as this may apply to some cases, there are too many types of exchange like quarrelling and letter writing, that it fails to fit comfortably. In any case, one feels that the talker who is irrelevant or obscure has primarily let down not his audience but himself. So the observance of the Cooperative Principle and maxims is reasonable (rational) along the following lines: anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation / communication (such as giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others) must be expected to have an interest in talk exchanges that will be profitable only in the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the Cooperative Principle and the maxims.

## **2. The Interconnection between the Cooperative Principle, Maxims and Conversational Implicature**

A participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfil a maxim in various ways which include the following:

1. He may quietly and unostentatiously violate a maxim; if so, in some cases he will be able to mislead.

2. He may opt out from the operation both of the maxim and of the Cooperative Principle; he may say, indicate or allow it become plain that he is unwilling to cooperate in the way the maxim requires. He may say, e.g., *I cannot say more; my lips are sealed.*

3. He may be faced with a clash: he may be unable, e.g., to fulfil the first maxim of Quantity (Be as informative as it is required) without violating the second maxim of Quality (Have adequate evidence for what you say).

4. He may flout a maxim; that is, he may blatantly fail to fulfil it. On the assumption that the speaker is able to fulfil the maxim and to do so without violating another maxim (because of the clash), is not opting out and is not, in view of the blatancy (of his performance), trying to mislead, the hearer is faced with a mirror problem: How can his saying what he did say be reconciled with the supposition that he is observing the overall Cooperative Principle. This situation is one that gives rise to a conversational implicature; and when a conversational implicature is generated, in this way, the maxim is being exploited.

To work out that a particular conversational implicature is present, the hearer will reply on the following data: 1) the conventional meaning of the words used, together with the identity of any reference that may be involved; 2) The Cooperative Principle and its maxims; 3) the context, linguistic or otherwise of the utterance; 4) other items of background knowledge; 5) the fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case.

### 3. Examples of Conversational Implicature

**Group A:** Examples in which no maxim is violated or at least in which it is not clear that any maxim is violated.

A is standing by an obviously immobilized car and is approached by B; the following exchange takes place:

(1) A: *I am out of petrol.*

B: *There is a garage round the corner.*

(Gloss: B would be infringing the maxim “Be relevant” unless he thinks it possible that the garage is open and has petrol to sell; so he implicates that the garage is, or at least may be open, etc.)

(2) A: *Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.*

B: *He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.*

(Gloss: B implicates that Smith has, or may have, a girlfriend in New York.)

In both examples the speaker implicates that which he must be assumed to believe in order to preserve the assumption that he is observing the maxim of relation.

**Group B:** Examples in which a maxim is violated but its violation is to be explained by the supposition of a clash with another maxim.

A is planning with B an itinerary for a holiday in France. Both know that A wants to see his friend C, if to do so would involve to great a prolongation of his journey:

(3) A: *Where does C live?*

B: *Somewhere in the South of France.*

(Gloss: There is no reason to suppose that B is opting out; his answer is, as he well knows, less informative than is required to meet A's needs. This infringement of the first maxim of Quantity can be explained only by the supposition that B is aware that to be more informative would be to say something that infringed the second maxim of Quality “Don't say what you lack adequate evidence for”, so B implicates that he does not know in which town C lives.)

**Group C:** Examples that involve exploitation, that is, a procedure, by which a maxim is flouted for the purpose of getting in a conversational implicature by means of something of the nature of a figure of speech.

In these examples, though some maxim is violated at the level of what is said, the hearer is entitled to assume that the maxim, or at least the overall Cooperative Principle, is observed at the level of what is implicated.

(1a) A flouting of the first maxim of Quantity

A is writing a testimonial about a pupil who is a candidate for a philosophy job, and his letter reads as follows:

*“Dear Sir, Mr X's command of English is excellent, and his attendance of tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc.”*

(Gloss: A cannot be opting out, since if he wished to be uncooperative, why write at all? He cannot be unable through ignorance, since the man is his pupil; moreover, he knows that more information than this is wanted. He must, therefore, be wishing to impart information that he is reluctant to write down. This supposition is tenable only if he thinks Mr X is no good at philosophy. This, then, is what he is implicating.)

Extreme examples of a flouting of the first maxim of Quantity are provided by utterances of patent tautologies like *Women are women* and *War is war*. Such remarks are totally noninformative and so, at

that level, cannot but infringe the first maxim of Quantity in any conversational context. They are, of course, informative at the level of what is implicated, and the hearer's identification of their informative content at this level is dependent on his ability to explain the speaker's selection of this particular patent tautology.

(2a) Examples in which the first maxim of Quality is flouted ("Do not say what you believe to be false")

**Irony.** X with whom A has been on close terms until now has betrayed a secret of A's to a business rival. A and his audience both know this. A says, "*X is a fine friend.*"

(Gloss: It is perfectly obvious to A and his audience that what A has said or has made, as if to say, is something he does not believe, and the audience knows that A knows that this is obvious to the audience.)

(2b) Examples in which the second maxim of Quality "Do not say that for which you lack evident evidence" is flouted, e.g., I say of X's wife, "She is probably deceiving him this evening." In a suitable context, or with a suitable gesture, or tone of voice it may be clear that I have no adequate reason for supposing this to be the case. My partner, to preserve the assumption that the conversational game is still being played, assumes that I am getting at some related proposition for the acceptance of which I do have a reasonable basis. The related proposition might well be that she is given to deceiving her husband, or possibly that she is the sort of person who would not stop short of such conduct.

(3) Examples in which an implicature is achieved by real as distinct from apparent violation of the maxim of Relation are: At a genteel tea party A says, "*Mrs X is an old bag.*" There is a moment of appalled silence and then B says, "*The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn't it?*" B has blatantly refused to make what he says relevant to A's preceding remark. He thereby implicates that A's remark should not be discussed and, that A has committed a social gaffe.

(4) Examples in which various maxims falling under the supermaxim "Be perspicuous" are flouted.

**Ambiguity.** We must remember that we are concerned only with ambiguity that is deliberate, and that the speaker intends or expects to be recognized by his hearer. The problem the hearer has to solve is why a speaker should, when still playing the conversational game, go out his way to choose an ambiguous utterance. There are two ways of cases:

a) Examples in which there is no difference between two interpretations of an utterance with respect to straightforwardness; neither interpretation is notably more sophisticated, less standard, more recondite or more far-fetched than the other.

b) Examples in which one interpretation is notably less straightforward than another.

### Check Yourself Test

1. Enumerate Grice's conversational maxims.
2. What features that jointly distinguish cooperative transactions are exhibited by talk exchanges?
3. What are the ways in which a participant in a talk exchange may fail to fulfil a maxim?
4. Give examples of conversational implicature.
5. Give examples of irony, expressed by conversational implicature.
6. Give examples of ambiguity, expressed by conversational implicature.

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## Lecture 9

### PRAGMATICS AS THE THEORY OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION

1. Preliminary remarks.
2. Saying something.
3. Rules of speaking.
4. Sociolinguistic interests.

#### 1. Preliminary Remarks

The essence of language is human activity – activity on the part of one individual to make himself understood by another, and activity on the part of that other to understand what was in the mind of the first. These two individuals: the producer and the recipient of language, or as we may more conveniently call them the speaker and the hearer, and their relationship to one another should never be lost sight of if we want to understand the feature of language and of that part of language which is dealt with in grammar [Jespersen. *The Philosophy of Grammar*].

Consider the following facts about the use of English. “*How are you?*” counts as a greeting, not a farewell. “*Can you pass the salt?*” is frequently used as a request, while “*Are you able to pass the salt?*” is not. “*John is married to his work?*” involves a metaphor. “*I will be there?*” is used as a promise, a warning, a threat or a prediction, but not as a criticism or a request.

“*Well?*” at the beginning of an utterance may signal a sense of contemplation, annoyance, or a surprise.

“*Your breath smells so bad it would knock a buzzard off a manure wagon?*” will be heard as an insult.

Each of these facts goes beyond what we would want to ascribe as knowledge a native speaker has about the grammar of English. Knowing a grammar is to know the rules for characterizing language form. Knowing facts of the sort presented above, however, involves knowing rules for language use as well.

When we use language, we characteristically do three things:

- 1) we say something;
- 2) we indicate how we intend the hearer to take what we have said and
- 3) we have definite effects on the hearer as a result.

For example, if I tell you, “*The police stopped drinking by midnight?*” I might intend to say that the police enforced a midnight curfew (rather than to say that they themselves, ceased imbibing). In so speaking, I might communicate to you that what I have said is to be taken as a claim on my part rather than, say, an admission. And because I have made this claim about the police, I might intend to affect you in a certain way, for example, to relieve you rather than anger you or surprise you, perhaps because I know you were worrying about how late your children were out.

Although we communicate in many different modes, linguistic communication occurs only in those classes in which we intend in using language to convey certain attitudes to our hearer (e.g., that we want our utterance to have the force of a request) and the hearer recognizes what these attitudes are based upon what we have said.

Pragmatics as the theory of speech communication studies what is involved in linguistic communication, what can be communicated, how the speaker goes in accomplishing the intended communication and many certain strategies are selected under particular circumstances to bring about the communication.

First, when talking about linguistic communication one is referring to the case in which the speaker is attempting to communicate to the hearer by relying at least in part on the semantic interpretation of the linguistic form uttered. E.g., to shout, “*The ice is thin?*” may linguistically communicate a warning; to comment, “*That was certainly a dumb thing for me to do?*”, may be taken as an apology depending on the situation in which I spoke and my manner of speaking.

Second, linguistic communication succeeds only when the speaker has an attitude, which he intends to convey to the hearer in using language, and the hearer recognizes this attitude. If, for example, I am terribly embarrassed by a past action and comment on my thoughtlessness, you might take me as issuing an apology. You may have correctly understood my feelings but not by way of linguistic communication. Similarly, if I say, “*I will take you skiing for your birthday*”, intending it to be a promise, but you hear it as a threat. Since you abhor skiing I will have failed to communicate either a threat or a promise: I did not intend the former, you did not recognize my intent of the latter.

Finally, there is an area that is specifically excluded from the theory, namely, the theory of conversation including such elements as openings, closings, repairs, responses, discussions, explanations, and a variety of other conversational acts. Consider the utterance “*Good morning. How are you?*” This counts as a greeting just as the utterance of “*Excuse me. Could I talk to you for a moment?*” may count as an apology followed by a request.

## 2. Saying Something

To ask what a speaker has said is to ask the question: what is the operational meaning of the speaker’s utterance: what did he mean? As a first approximation, we might coincide that the speaker has said whatever is understood to be the semantic interpretation of the sentence uttered. There are at least 3 factors which play a role in determining the answer to this question for a given utterance:

- 1) the sense(s) of the sentence uttered;
- 2) the identity of the objects in the real world referred to by the speaker;
- 3) whether or not the speaker was speaking literally or figuratively.

The issue of what sense the speaker intends for an utterance involves the potential ambiguity of the sentence used. On the assumption that in uttering a sentence the speaker always means one and only one sense to be understood, the task of the hearer is to determine which one. A sentence such as “*Smoking children can be a nuisance*”, might appear to be unambiguous at first glance, but in addition to the interpretation that children who smoke annoy us, we have a variety of other interpretations, e.g., treating children as cigarettes, considering the nuisance value of children on fire, and the trouble entailed in curing children, much as one would cure ham. Part of determining what the speaker has said involves determining which of the possible semantic interpretations of the sentence was the intended one.

The second factor in determining operational meaning is what we can call the referential problem; what objects in the real world do the referring terms refer to? e.g., if I say to you, “*We shall overcome*”, is the *we* referring to just me and my compatriots, or does it include you as well? Or if someone tells me, “*The crayon is over there*”, where is the *there*. Or if I hear, “*the President was not in Washington then*”, when was the *then*? Without the answers to these questions in each case the hearer cannot determine what the speaker intends to be the meaning of the utterance although he might be able to determine which of several senses (ambiguities) was intended.

The third factor in determining what has been said is the issue of literal vs. figurative use of the language. If the speaker is speaking literally, then the operational meaning of the utterance involves one of semantic interpretation of the linguistic expression uttered. Various types of figurative language exist, e.g., **sarcasm** “*I just love people who turn in front of me without signalling*” arises when the speaker appears to say one thing but means something close to the opposite and, moreover, intends the comment to be derisive. In metaphor (“*John is married to his work*”) the speaker is using the predicate in a non-literal way, and an analogy must be constructed in order to interpret the intended operational meaning. **Synecdoche** and **metonymy** are closely related. In both a referring expression is used (non-literally – “*All hands are to report to the Captain*”). **Hyperbole** (exaggeration) and **meiosis** (understatement) are at opposite ends of the continuum, but unlike the other tropes just mentioned, they vary in the degree to which they deviate from strict literalness. We talk of “slightly exaggerated” and “greatly exaggerated” but never somewhat synecdochic use of language. **Similes** are figurative much like metaphors, e.g., “*He is as big as a house*” is to announce to the hearer not only that the

speaker intends to be heard as speaking figuratively, but to indicate the type of figurative device being utilized.

To summarize, the hearer operates on the assumption that the speaker is using the language seriously and attempting to communicate with the hearers. He initially assumes that the speaker is speaking literally and, therefore, attempts to determine what the speaker is literally saying – the literal operational meaning of the utterance. If this fails, either because no literal interpretation can be made or there are clues that the utterance is intended to be taken figuratively, then the hearer must consider both the potential semantic interpretations of the sentence as well as his theory of figurative language interpretation to then determine the operational meaning of the utterance, but in this case what the speaker has figuratively said. In either the literal or the figurative case – the speaker is never doing both at the same time with the same utterance – the hearer has at this point, in understanding the speaker, arrived at the operational meaning of the utterance.

### 3. Rules of Speaking

From the point of view of language learning and of intercultural communication, it is important to recognize that the individual who wishes to learn a new language must, in addition to acquiring a new vocabulary and a new set of phonological and syntactic rules, learn the rules of speaking: the patterns of sociolinguistic behaviour of the target language. It is a well-known axiom of sociolinguistics that languages differ from one another not only in such areas as phonology, syntax and lexicon, but in the very use to which these linguistic resources are put. Members of one community share not only a language, but also knowledge of the speech conduct appropriate to the various events which make up their daily existence.

It follows that the understanding and knowledge of appropriate speech behaviour is crucial if learners are to communicate effectively with native speakers of the language they are learning. Communicative competence includes not only the mastery of grammar and lexicon, but also the rules of speaking, e.g. knowing when it is appropriate to open a conversation and how, what topics are appropriate to particular speech events, which forms of address are to be used to whom and in which situations and how such speech acts as greetings, compliments, apologies, invitations and complaints are to be given, interpreted and responded to.

Since how people speak is part of what they say, language learners may be unable to interpret the meaning of an utterance even though they know all the words. Worse, they may interpret what they hear according to the rules of speaking of their native language, thus, frequently misunderstanding the speaker's intention and, perhaps, perceiving insincerity or offence where none was meant. In addition to misunderstanding the meaning or function of what is said, language learners face the equally serious problem of having their own speech behaviour misunderstood by native speakers with whom they interact. A form of address or a personal question may be perfectly appropriate or even mandatory in the learner's native language might, when translated into the new language and its setting, seem absurd or even insulting. The sort of miscommunication which occurs when people transfer the rules of their own native speech communities to what seems to them to be a corresponding situation in a new speech community may be termed **communicative interference**.

Rules of speaking, or more generally, norms of interaction are both culture specific and largely unconscious. In interacting with foreigners native speakers tend to be rather tolerant of errors in pronunciation or syntax. In contrast, violations of rules of speaking are often interpreted as bad manners since the naïve native speaker is unlikely to be aware of sociolinguistic relativity. For these reasons language instruction must not be limited to the teaching of the traditional written and oral skills but rather the aim of such instruction must be **communicative competence**.

### 4. Sociolinguistic Interests

The inclusion of sociolinguistic interests within language teaching and the recognition of the necessity to make communicative competence the goal of the second language curriculum is a major

step both for the theory and practice of language teaching. Native speakers are usually able to express the norms of their own speech communities. If learners are to be to interpret and conform to the rules, they will need instruction based on how people actually speak in their everyday interactions, not about how they think they speak. E.g., the form *I am sorry*, though commonly thought of as an expression of apology in English, is not necessarily used to apologize at all. *I am sorry* is basically an expression of dismay or regret about a state of affairs viewed or portrayed as unfortunate. Thus it is perfectly appropriate for English speakers to speech act *I am sorry* even when no injury has been inflicted on the addressee, when there is no question of a social norm being violated. The form *excuse me*, on the other hand, is found to be specifically used to remedy a past or immediately forthcoming break of etiquette on the part of the speaker. The basic concern behind *excuse me* is “I have broken or I am in danger of breaking a social rule”, and the basic concern behind *I am sorry* is “You are or you may be hurt”. Even in situations where either of the two forms might be used to perform the same remedial function, we feel that *excuse me* primarily expresses the speaker’s relationship to a rule, or a set of rules, while, *I am sorry* primarily expresses the speaker’s relation to another person.

### Check Yourself Test

1. What is the essence of language in human activity?
2. What do we do when using language?
3. Define operational meaning of an utterance.
4. Explain what is meant under the term communicative interference.
5. Give your understanding of communicative competence.
6. What are the sociolinguistic interests within language teaching?

### Literature

1. Новое в зарубежной лингвистике. – Вып. 16. Лингвистическая прагматика. – М.: Прогресс, 1985. – 500с.
2. Fraser B. The Domain of Pragmatics. Longman, London, New York, 1983. – 276p.
3. Leech G.N. Explorations in Semantics and Pragmatics. – Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1980. – 133p.
4. Leech G.N. Principles of Pragmatics. – London, N.Y.: Longman, 1983. – 250p.
5. Levinson S.C. Pragmatics. – Cambridge, etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1985. – 420p.
6. Thomas J. Meaning in Interaction: an Introduction to Pragmatics. Longman, London.
7. Yule G. Pragmatics. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. – 138p.

**Method-Guides and Plans for Seminars on the Course for Choice**  
**BASIC PROBLEMS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY**

PREFACE

The present set of method-guides and plans for seminars on the course for choice “Basic problems of speech act theory” is intended for the 5<sup>th</sup> year students of the day-time Department. It is based on the requirements for University Faculties of Foreign Languages.

The structure of these plans, the number of themes included and the interpretation of the material is determined by the standard syllabus of instruction and the up-to-date manuals in speech act theory. The list of recommended literature contains the most authoritative manuals and articles published on the topic.

The students’ assignment for independent work is to get them acquainted with the material available in the list of recommended literature by taking notes of the books read, which gives a deeper insight into the problems dealt with at the lectures in basic theoretical courses. The planned independent work with a special consideration of the items mentioned in the method-guides aims at providing a more profound comprehension of the problems of speech act theory, acquiring skills and habits of methods and procedures of pragmatic analysis, critical assessment of diverse viewpoints and concepts, stimulating the students into forming their own views on problematic and controversial issues of speech act theory.

Thus the present set of method-guides and plans has its aim to assist the students of the English Department in their study of fundamentals of speech act theory, favours the better acquisition of this essential linguistic discipline. In preparing this set the authors have tried to take into consideration the latest achievements in speech act theory and the other branches of linguistics it is linked with.

**Seminar 1**

**MEANING, STRUCTURE AND TYPES OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS**  
**PERFORMATIVE UTTERANCES**

**Plan**

1. Introduction to speech act theory.
2. Categories and types of performatives.
3. Types of illocutionary acts and conditions of their performing.
4. Conditions of promises and general hypotheses concerning illocutionary acts.

**Recommended Literature**

1. Agar M. Language Shock (Understanding the Culture of Conversation). William Narrow and Company. New York, 1994.
2. Austin J. How to Do Things with Words. N.Y., 1962.
3. Coulthard M. An Introduction to Discourse Analysis. Longman. London and New York, 1985.
4. Ellis D.G. From Language to Communication. Lawrence Erlbaum Associate Publishers. New Jersey, 1992.
5. Sadock J.M. The Soft Interpretative Underbelly of Generative Semantics. In Cole and Morgan, 1975. – P. 383-396.
6. Sadock J.M. Towards a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts. – NY: Academic Press, 1974.
7. Searle J.R. Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language. Cambridge University Press, 1969.
8. Thomas J. Meaning in Interaction: an Introduction to Pragmatics. Longman, London and New York, 1996.



9. Warnock G.J. Some Types of Performative utterances. In Warnock G.J. (ed) *Essays on J.L. Austin*, 1973. – P. 69-89.
10. Wierzbicka A. *English Speech Act Verbs*. Academic Press. Sydney, 1987.

## **GUIDELINES**

The seminar is devoted to the basic categories, conditions of illocutionary acts, types of differences among them and one of the most well-known classifications made by Fraser. Special attention should be paid to the performative hypothesis and types of performatives. The students are to be able to distinguish between performative and constatives utterances. Unlike constatives, that can be true or false, performatives have felicity conditions – a typology of conditions which performative utterances must meet if they are to succeed or be “happy”. It should be made clear that in the utterance of a sentence three kinds of acts are simultaneously performed: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. It is very important that the conditions of performing illocutionary acts be elucidated and analyzed on numerous examples to be able to use the knowledge acquired in practice.

### **Seminar 2**

## **PRAGMATICS AND SPEECH ACT THEORY AS DISCIPLINES STUDYING VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

### **Plan**

1. A taxonomy of illocutionary acts.
2. Methodological remarks on speech act theory.
3. Indirect speech acts and types of competence.
4. The Cooperative Principle of speech acts.
5. Pragmatics as the theory of speech communication.

### **Recommended Literature**

1. Austin J. *How to Do Things with Words*. N.Y., 1962.
2. Fraser B. *The Domain of Pragmatics*. Longman, London, New York, 1983. – 276p.
3. Grice P. *Studies in the Way of Words*. London, 1989.
4. Grice P. *The Cooperative Principle of Speech Acts*. London, 1989.
5. Labov W., Fanshel D. *Therapeutic Discourse: Psychotherapy as Conversation*. – NY: Academic Press, 1977.
6. Levinson S. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press, 1983. – 420p.
7. Richards J.C. *Language and Communication*. Longman, London, New York, 1983.
8. Searle J.R. *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press, 1969.
9. Searle J.R. *Indirect Speech Acts // Syntax and Semantics*. vol. 3. *Speech Acts*. – NY: Academic Press, 1975. – P. 5-125.
10. Strawson P.F. *Intention and Convention in Speech Acts // Philosophical Review № 73*. – P. 439-460.
11. Thomas J. *Meaning in Interaction: an Introduction to Pragmatics*. Longman, London and New York, 1996. – 224p.
12. Wunderlich D. *On Problems of Speech Act Theory // Basic Problems in Methodology and Linguistics*. – Dordrecht: Reidel, 1977. – P. 243-258.
13. Wunderlich D. *Methodological Remarks on Speech Act Theory // Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*. – Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980. – 317p.
14. Yule G. *Pragmatics*. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. – 138p.

## GUIDELINES

The present seminar aims at facilitating the comprehension of speech acts as the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication. Ordinary declarative sentences are not used to say things, that is to describe state of affairs, but rather actively to do things. Special attention should be devoted to the conversational maxims suggested by P. Grice, the connection between the Cooperative Principle, maxims of communication and conversational implicature. Students are to know that pragmatics as the theory of speech communication studies what is involved in linguistic communication, what can be communicated, how the speaker goes in accomplishing the intended communication and many certain strategies are selected under particular circumstances to bring about the communication. Learners of English as a foreign language should be aware that the understanding and knowledge of appropriate speech behaviour is crucial if learners are to communicate effectively with native speakers of the language they are learning. Communicative competence includes not only the mastery of grammar and lexicon, but also the rules of speaking, e.g. knowing when it is appropriate to open a conversation and how, what topics are appropriate to particular speech events, which forms of address are to be used to whom and in which situations and how such speech acts as greetings, compliments, apologies, invitations and complaints are to be given, interpreted and responded to.

The students are also to be able to differentiate direct and indirect, primary (natural) and secondary (institutional) speech acts, give different points of view on the problem as well as to determine the propositional content and the illocutionary force (point) of a speech act, to know the general rules for inferring non-literal from literal meaning. Of special interest and therefore of special importance is the problem of speech acts and units of their activity.

Навчальне видання

Полюжин М.М., Врабель Т.Т.

**ОСНОВНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ ТЕОРІЇ  
МОВЛЕННЕВОГО АКТУ**

*Курс лекцій (англ. мовою)*

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