Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis

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Lecture (5)

Speech Acts
Speech Acts

A: There's no answer at the front door. Shall I try the back?
B: I shouldn't, if I were you. There's a Rhodesian ridgeback in the garden.
A: There's no answer at the front door. Shall I try the back?
B: I shouldn't, if I were you. There's a Rhodesian ridgeback in the garden.
Conventional Sentence Types

- **Declarative. (Assertion)**
  - *I seem to have forgotten my umbrella.*

- **Interrogative. (Question)**
  - *Where did I leave it?*

- **Imperative. (Order/Request)**
  - *Go find my umbrella!*

- **[Optative. (Wish)]**
  - *If only I had my umbrella!*
Pragmatics

- Not only language structure is rule governed – language *use* is, too
- Rules of language use are *social*: ”Is saying this ”possible?” / ”feasible?” / ”appropriate?” / ”done?”
  
  (Dell Hymes)
Speech Acts & Language Functions

“There is a policeman at the corner.”

could be …

- a warning,
- an assurance,
- a dare,
- a hint,
- a reminder to go and take your car out of the handicapped space you are parked in.
“I promise I’ll be there tomorrow.”

could be …
- a threat
- a promise,
depending on whether his presence tomorrow is a disadvantage or an advantage to the listener.

Contrast with:
“If you don’t behave, I promise you there’s going to be trouble.”
- This sentence says it’s a “promise,” but it’s a “threat.”
  (Searle *Speech Acts* 58)
Speech Acts & Language Functions

Language As Action

- Speech Act Theory was developed from the basic belief that language is used to perform actions. (meaning and action are related to language)
- **Speech acts** = actions performed via utterances (apology, complaint, compliment, etc.)
- They apply to the speaker’s communicative intention in producing an utterance.
- The speaker expects that his/her communicative intention will be recognized by the hearer.
- Both speaker and hearer are usually helped in this process by the context = speech events.
Speech act theory
- proposed by John L. Austin
- has been developed by J. R. Searle.
- They believe that language is not only used to inform or to describe things, it is often used to “do things”, to perform acts.
A traditional view of meaning in language at the time revolved around the assumptions that:

- The basic sentence type is declarative.
- The main use of language is to describe states of affairs.
- The meaning of utterances can be described in terms of truth and falsity (or the situations in which an utterance would be true/false).

However, there are many sentence types and usages that cannot really be said to be “true” or “false”. This seems to cover only declaratives, and not even all of them.
PERFORMATIVES

- a class of highly ritualistic utterances
- carry no information about the world outside language
- refer to themselves. (SAYING=DOING)

E.g.:

- a. I swear to...
- b. I sentence you to death.
- c. I hereby open the Theater House.
- d. I hereby name this ship ‘Aurora’.
1. explicit performative:
   - *I order you to clean your boots.*

2. implicit performative:
   - *Clean your boots!*
   - The assumption is that underlying every utterance there is a clause containing a performative verb which makes the function explicit.
     
     *I (hereby) [order] you (that/to)*

   - The subject must be first person sg., + the adverb ‘hereby’, indicating that the utterance counts as an action by being uttered + a performative verb in the present tense + indirect object
Austin suggests three kinds of acts

a. locutionary act
b. illocutionary act
c. perlocutionary act
Illocutionary Acts

- **a. Locutionary act:** the act of saying, the literal meaning of the utterance

- **b. Illocutionary act:** the extra meaning of the utterance produced on the basis of its literal meaning

- **c. Perlocutionary act:** the effect of the utterance on the hearer, depending on specific circumstances.
The locutionary act is the saying of it with its literal meaning “There isn’t enough fresh air in here”.

The illocutionary act can be a request of the hearer to open the window.

The perlocutionary act can be the hearer’s opening the window or his refusal to do so.

In fact, we might utter “There isn’t enough fresh air in here” to make a statement, a request, an explanation, or for some other communicative purposes. This is also generally known as the illocutionary force of the utterance.
Illocutionary Acts

a. Husband: That’s the phone.
b. Wife: I’m in the bathroom.
b. Husband: Okay.

Its illocutionary acts are:

- (i) a refusal to comply with the request
- (ii) a request to her husband to answer the phone instead.
Illocutionary Acts

‘And that is enough for today...’

- **Locutionary act**: (‘and that is enough for today’)

- **Illocutionary act**: (students must make preparations to quit the room)

- **Perlocutionary act**: (you realise that a change has occurred)
Direct Speech Acts

- You answered the phone.
- Did you answer the phone?
- Answer the phone!

Some constructions are typically used to make a statement, ask a question and issue a command.
Direct And Indirect SAs

Compare the following:

- *Can you bake a cake?* [Question]
- *Can you pass me the salt?* [Request]

Such constructions are *not* always associated with the performance of their typical speech-acts.
Direct And Indirect S.As: Definition

- When we employ a construction (*interrogative, imperative, declarative*) to perform a typical speech-act (e.g. *statement, question, request*), we have a direct speech-act.

- When the construction is used with a different illocutionary force than the typical one, then we have an indirect speech-act.
Indirect SAs

Example

- *I will come back tomorrow.*

- Has the **declarative construction**.
  - It can be used to make a statement → **direct** speech act,
  - but also to make a **promise** or issue a **threat** → indirect speech-acts.
Indirect SAs

Example

Look at the range of possibilities for *complaining* about a meal in a restaurant.

- Waiter, get the manager immediately.
- Waiter, I insist on seeing the manager.
- Waiter, I want to see the manager.
- Waiter, I’d like to see the manager please.
- Waiter, if it’s not too much trouble I’d like to see the manager.
- Waiter, I don’t suppose I could see the manager, could I?

(from Carter et al. 2001)
Felicity Conditions

conditions to be fulfilled for utterances to be "felicitous" performatives

- Explicit performatives use performative verbs
e.g. *promise, recommend, warn, baptize, order*

- However, apparent "constatives" can also be performatives:
  "*It’s hot in here!*" and what action is being /to be performed here (turn the AC on)
Felicity Conditions

1. The *general condition* applies to all speech acts and requires that the participants in an exchange understand the language and that they are serious in what they are doing.

2. The *propositional content condition* specifies the content of an utterance; for example, a request must be about a future act by the hearer, while a promise must be about a future act by the speaker.

3. The *preparatory condition* sets out the conditions which must hold prior to the performance of the speech act; a request assumes that the speaker believes the hearer is able to perform the requested action and that the hearer would not do it without being asked;
Felicity Conditions

4. The *sincerity condition* requires that, for a request, the speaker genuinely wants the hearer to do the act; for a promise it requires that the speaker genuinely intends to do what s/he says s/he intends to do.

5. The *essential condition* refers to what the utterance counts for; with a request, the utterance counts as an attempt by the speaker to have the hearer perform an action; a promise counts as a commitment on the part of the speaker to do something.
Generally speaking:

• There must be an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances…

• The particular persons and circumstances must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked…

• The procedure must be executed by all the participants correctly and completely.

Or…

Misfire, abuse, …
Felicity Conditions For The Act Of Ordering

1. the sender believes the action should be done
2. the receiver has the ability to do the action
3. the receiver has the obligation to do the action
4. the sender has the right to tell the receiver to do the action

Example...

I think your boots need cleaning, Jones (Condition 1)
I’m bloody sure you can get your boots cleaner than that, Jones! (Condition 2)
You’re supposed to come on to parade with clean boots, Jones! (Condition 3)
It’s my job to see you’ve got cleaner boots than this! (Condition 4)
John R. Searle’s classifies Speech Acts into:

1. **Directives**
2. **Commissives**
3. **Representatives**
4. **Declaratives**
5. **Expressives**
Directive is a speech act that is to cause the hearer to take a particular action

- I need/want that car.
- Give me your pen.
- Could you give me your pen, please?
- May I have some soda? Is there any milk left?
- This has to be done over. What about the renovation?
Searle’s Classification of SAs

Commissives

- Commissive is a speech act that commits a speaker to some future action (promises, refuses)

Examples...

- *Maybe I can do that tomorrow.*
- *Don’t worry, I’ll be there.*
Representative is a speech act that commits a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition.

Example...

I went to the Royal Gallery of Arts. There are about twenty paintings on display. Some are very classic and extraordinarily breathtaking.
Searle’s Classification of SAs
Declaratives

- Declarative is a speech act that changes the reality in accord with the proposition of the declaration.

Example…
- *Class dismissed* (students get up and leave).
- *I now pronounce you husband and wife.*
Searle’s Classification of SAs

Expressives

Expressive is a speech act that expresses on the speaker's attitudes and emotions towards the proposition.

Examples…

- *I am very disappointed.*
- *What a great day!!!*
- *Oh my, that’s terrible.*
How We Understand Indirect Speech Acts

- Searle: reasoning from
  - Felicity conditions
  - Context
  - Principles of cooperative conversation
  - Convention
  - Perception of the direct act:
Why Be Indirect?

- Close the window.
- Can you close the window?
- I don’t suppose you could close the window, could you?
- I wonder if you’d mind closing the window.
- It’s rather chilly in here.

- Diminishing threats to face (worthiness, autonomy).
- I’d love to go, but I have to wash my hair, I have a headache, and it’s my mother’s birthday. Maybe another time.
1. What are the conditions for:
   - A marriage proposal
   - A bet
   - A request
   - An order
2. Look at the following utterances and try to determine what might have been their illocutionary force (Source: Cook, 1989):

- 1. Please, open the window.
- 2. It’s very stuff in here, isn’t it?
- 3. I’m sorry for what I’ve done.
- 4. I promise to repay you tomorrow.
- 5. Somebody’s messed up my computer.
3. What is the problem with the following speech acts. (Source: Mey, 1993:127)

- I promise (hereby) to set fire to your house.
- I hereby warn you that you will be awarded the Nobel prize in literature.
- WRNING: Your lawn will turn brown in November
4. Study the following conversations, and identify the functions they are attempting to teach.

*Liz: Do you like jazz, Tom?*

*Tom: No, I don't like it very much. Do you?*

*Liz: It's OK. What kind of music do you like?*

*Tom: Well, I like rock a lot.*

*Liz: U2. How about you? Do you like them?*

*Tom: No, I don't. I can't stand them.*

(Richards et al. 1990: 23)
5. Study the following conversations, and identify the functions they are attempting to teach.

Dave: There's a jazz concert at the Blue Note on Friday. Would you like to go?
Joan: Yeah, that sounds good! What time is the concert?
Dave: It's at 10 o'clock.
Joan: Great! Let's go.

(Richards et al. 1990: 25)
6. Study the following conversations, and identify the functions they are attempting to teach.

*Carolyn: Excuse me - are you Mrs. Baxter?*
*Mrs. Baxter: Yes, I am.*
*Carolyn: I'm Carolyn Duval.*
*Mrs. Baxter: Nice to meet you, Ms. Duval.*

(Warshawsky 1992: A2)
7. Study the following conversations, and identify the functions they are attempting to teach.

A: (Dials number) Rrring, rrring.
B: Directory Assistance.
A: I'd like the number of Jane Schaefer.
B: Could you spell the last name, please?
A: S-C-H-A-E-F-E-R
B: The number is 555-5275.
A: Thank you.
B: You're welcome.

(Warshawsky 1992: A17)
Cross Cultural Pragmatics
Pragmalinguistics/ Sociopragmatics

- Across cultures, meaning behind a speech act can vary, e.g. status of the ‘apology’, force of the ‘complaint’, cultural content of ‘requests, questioning styles, ways of giving advice
- Utterances have *local*, socio-pragmatic conditions
- *There are culturally distinct ways of showing and understanding speech acts* (Wierzbicka, 1991)
Cross-cultural and Interlanguage Pragmatics

1. An expression of an apology
   - An expression of regret
     - An expression of regret
       - I’m sorry.
   - An offer of apology
     - I apologise.
   - A request for forgiveness
     - Excuse me.

2. An expression or account of the situation
   - The bus was late.

3. An acknowledgement of responsibility:
   - Accepting the blame
     - It’s my fault.
   - Expressing self-deficiency
     - I wasn’t thinking.
   - Recognising the other person as deserving apology
     - You are right.
   - Expressing lack of intent
     - I didn’t mean it.

4. An offer of repair
   - I'll pay for the broken vase.

5. A promise of forbearance
   - It won’t happen again.

(cited in Ellis, 2008: 176)
Due to:
-L2 speaker assessing situational factors on the basis of sociopragmatic norms of L1, e.g. Japanese over-apologizing, students misunderstanding the role of the teacher
-L2 speaker transferring procedure and linguistic way of realising a speech act from L1 to L2, e.g. complaining, bartering

→ Difference between meaning and saying
Think ....

Have you ever experienced Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure?

Describe it and analyse it in terms of ‘saying’ and ‘meaning’
Clark and Bangerter (2004: 25) identify the various methods used in the literature in collecting speech act data. They identify three approaches: armchair, field and laboratory. Jucker (2009) subclassifies these approaches as follows:

- **Armchair** is subdivided into philosophic and interview;
- **Field** is divided into diary, philological, conversation analytic and corpus;
- **Laboratory** is divided into discourse completion task and role play.
End of class 05