Speech Acts

Read: Sadock 2004

Additional Source: Levinson 1983

Austin 1962

- ## Performative sentences
  - Sentences used to do something, instead of merely state something, can't be said to be true or false.
    - I bet you six pence it will rain tomorrow.
      I hereby christen this ship the H.M.S. Flounder.
      I declare war on Zanzibar.
      I apologize.
      I dub thee Sir Walter.
      I object
      I sentence you to ten years of hard labour.
      I bequeath you my Sansovino.
      I give my word.
      I warn you that trespassers will be prosecuted.

- ## Constative sentences
  - Sentences evaluatable as to whether they are true or false.

Felicity Conditions

A. (i) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect.
   (ii) the circumstances and persons must be appropriate, as specified in the procedure.

B. The procedure must be executed (i) correctly and (ii) completely.

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

The Doctrine of Infelicities

- <u>Misinvocations</u>
  - Disallow a purported act. E.g. a random individual saying the words of the marriage ceremony is disallowed from performing it. No purported speech act of banishing can succeed in our society because such an act is not allowed within it.

- <u>Misexecutions</u>
  - The act is vitiated by errors or omissions, including examples in which an appropriate authority pronounces a couple man and wife, but uses the wrong names or fails to complete the ceremony by signing the legal documents. Here, as in the case of misinvocations, the purported act does not take place.

- <u>Abuses</u>
  - The act succeeds, but the participants do not have the ordinary and expected thoughts and feelings associated with the happy performance of such an act. Insincere promises, mendacious findings of fact, unfelt congratulations, apologies, etc.

Constatives too are used to perform acts

- Utterances can bear truth and perform actions simultaneously:

  – I warn you the bull is about to charge.

- Statements are liable to the same infelicities

  – I bequeath you my Raphael.
    All of John's children are monks.

  – I promise to be there, and I have no intention of being there.
    The cat is on the mat, and I don't believe it.

- Statements can occur in "performative normal form":

  – I hereby state that I alone am responsible.

Three Types of Act

- <u>Locutionary act</u>
  - The utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference.

- <u>Illocutionary act</u>
  - The making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional *force* associated with it (or its explicit performative paraphrase)..

- <u>Perlocutionary act</u>
  - The bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstance of utterance.

Distinguishing the Acts

- Illocution vs. perlocution is "conventional", in the sense that it could be made explicit by the "performative formula":
  - I hereby V-present-active X…"
  - Problems:
    - The bull is about to charge.
    - I threaten you with a failing grade.

- Uptake
  - Built into the illocutionary act, but deals with consequences, so we can't say that all consequences of the speech act are perlocutionary effects.

- Locution (meaning) vs. illocution (force)
  - Problems
    - I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin.

Austin's classification of illocutionary acts

- Verdictives
  - acts that consist of delivering a finding
    - acquit, hold (as a matter of law), read something as, etc.
- Exercitives
  - acts of giving a decision for or against a course of action
    - appoint, dismiss, order, sentence, etc.
- Commissives
  - acts whose point is to commit the speaker to a course of action
    - contract, give one's word, declare one's intentions, etc.
- Behabitives
  - expressions of attitudes toward the conduct, fortunes, or attitudes of others
    - apologize, thank, congratulate, welcome, etc.
- Expositives
  - acts of expounding of views, conducting of arguments, and clarifying
    - deny, inform, concede, refer, etc.

Searle: Felicity Conditions

- Bipartite structure of an utterance: F(p)
  - Illocutionary force
    - IFID: Illocutionary force indicating device
  - Propositional act

- Felicity conditions [constitutive rules] (promise):
1. *Pr* (the IFID for promising) is to uttered only in the context of a sentence (or larger stretch of discourse) T the utterance of which predicates some future act A of S.
2. *Pr* is to be uttered only if the hearer H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A, and S believes hearer H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A.
3. *Pr* is to be uttered only if it is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events.
4. *Pr* is to uttered only if S intends to do A.
5. The utterance of *Pr* counts as an undertaking of an obligation to do A.

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(3)

	Assert	*Thank (for)*	*Warn*
Propositional content	Any proposition p	Past act A done by H.	Future event or state, etc., E.
Preparatory	1. S has evidence (reasons, etc.) for the truth of p. 2. It is not obvious to both S and H that H knows (does not need to be reminded of, etc.) p.	A benefits S and S believes A benefits S.	1. H has reason to believe E will occur and is not in H's interest. 2. It is not obvious to both S and H that E will occur.
Sincerity	S believes p.	S feels grateful or appreciative for A.	S believes E is not in H's best interest.
Essential	Counts as an undertaking that p represents an actual state of affairs.	Counts as an expression of gratitude or appreciation.	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that E is not in H's best interest.

Searle's classification of illocutionary acts

1. <u>Representatives</u>

   Commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition.

   Asserting, concluding

2. <u>Directives</u>

   Attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something.

   Requesting, questioning

3. <u>Commissives</u>

   Commit the speaker to some future course of action.

   Promising, threatening, offering

4. <u>Expressives</u>

   Express a psychological state.

   Thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating

5. <u>Declarations</u>

   Effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions.

   Excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment

PH: Performative Hypothesis

1. Form of argument

   a) P is a property characteristic of clauses that are subordinate to a higher clause of form F.

   b) P', a special case of P, is found in main clauses.

   c) P' would be explained if in underlying structure, the main clause is subordinate to a higher clause of the form F'.

   d) There exists an abstract performative clause of the form F' that provides just the right environment for the occurrence of P'.

2. Example

   a) The reflexive pronoun in the sentence *Nancy claimed that the book was written by Fred and herself* requires coreference with the subject of a higher verb of speaking.

   b) First person reflexive pronouns of this kind can be found in main clauses (*This book was written by Fred and myself/*herself*)

   c) This use of the reflexive would be explained if in deep structure the main clause were subordinate to a higher clause with a first person subject and a verb of speaking.

   d) An abstract performative clause *I state that* provides just the right environment.

PH: Gazdar 1979

1. Every sentence has a performative clause in deep or underlying structure.

2. The subject of this clause is first person singular, the indirect object second person singular, and the verb is drawn from a delimited set of performative verbs, and is conjugated in the indicative active simple present tense (or is associated with the underlying representation thereof).

3. This clause is always the highest clause in underlying structure, or at the very least always occurs in a determinable position in that structure.

4. There is only one such clause per sentence.

5. The performative clause is deletable, such deletion not changing the meaning of the sentence.

6. Illocutionary force is semantic (in the truth-conditional sense) and is fully specified by the meaning of the performative clause itself.

Problems with the PH

- Semantic problems:
  - Snow is green.
  - I state to you that snow is green.
  - I stated to you that snow is green.

- Syntactic problems:
  - The company hereby undertakes to replace any can of Doggo-Meat that fails to please, with no questions asked.
  - We regret that the company is forced by economic circumstances to hereby request you to tender your resignation at your earliest convenience.
  - Wittgenstein was an Oxford philosopher, wasn't he?
  - I voted for Labour because, frankly, I don't trust the Conservatives.

Indirect Speech Acts

- Performing more than one illocutionary act at the same time.
  - Or is the indirect act a perlocutionary effect as Sadock suggests? It could also be a conversational implicature.
- Idiomatic ways of indirectly performing certain speech acts
  - Can you please pass the salt?
  - ?Are you able to please pass the salt?
- Motivation: politeness--Don't impose!

LFH: Literal Force Hypothesis
(Gazdar, Levinson)

- Illocutionary force is built into sentence form.

(i) Explicit performatives have the force named by the performative verb in the matrix clause.

(ii) Otherwise, the three major sentence-types in English, namely the imperative, interrogative and declarative, have the forces traditionally associated with them, namely ordering (or requesting), questioning and stating respectively (with, of course, the exception of explicit performatives which happen to be in declarative format).

- Any usages other than those in accord with (i) or (ii) are indirect speech acts. They have the rule-associated force as their literal force, but simply have in addition an inferred indirect force.

LFH is believed in today by some syntacticians

- Han, Chung-hye. 2000. The Structure and Interpretation of Imperatives: Mood and Force in Universal Grammar. Garland Publishing: Outstanding Dissertations in Linguistics Series.
  - Matrix complementizer node in imperative sentences contains an Imperative Operator which consists of a force feature [directive] and a mood feature [irrealis].
- Chung-hye Han (personal communication)
  - Interrogative sentences have a question force operator, and declarative sentences have an assertion force operator, inside the C node of a matrix clause.

Inference theories (contrasted with idiom theories)

1. The literal meaning and the literal force of an utterance is computed by, and available to, participants.
2. For an utterance to be an *indirect* speech act, there must be an inference trigger, i.e. some indication that the literal meaning and/or literal force is conversationally inadequate in the context and must be 'repaired' or supplemented by some inference.
3. There must be specific principles or rules of inference that will derive, from the literal meaning and force and the context, the relevant indirect force.
4. There must be pragmatically sensitive linguistic rules or constraints, which will govern the occurrence of, for example, pre-verbal *please* in both direct and indirect requests.

Gricean chain of reasoning
Can you pass the salt?

(13)a. The speaker has asked about a certain ability of mine.

b. It is clear that I have that ability.

c. Therefore, if the speaker is being cooperative, she must have intended something beyond a mere question concerning my abilities.

d. My being able to pass the salt is a prerequisite (a preparatory condition) to my actually passing it.

e. We are at the moment eating at the dinner table.

f. People often like to add salt to their food.

g. The speaker cannot add salt to her food unless she can reach it.

h. I see that she cannot reach the salt at the moment.

i. Therefore, by uttering *Can you pass the salt?* she is therefore requesting that I pass the salt to her.