

PRAGMATICS

2

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Austin

- In his seminal book, *'How to do things with words'* (1962), Austin stated that one of the age-old enigmas of philosophy - "how to bridge the gap between language and reality" - arises only when description (or representation) is regarded as the sole function of language, overlooking instances where *language and reality actually collapse into one 'deed'*.

Austin

- Austin argues that, instead of saying something a speaker may be doing something or be performing an action (performatives):
 - *give order or commands, get married, baptize, excommunicate, appoint somebody in a certain social or professional position, make bets, invitations, offers and promises, congratulate, warn, apologise, threaten, curse, protest, toast, thank and bless.*

Austin's distinction between performative and constative SA

- The constative utterance has the property of being true or false. The performative utterance, by contrast, can never be either. To issue such an utterance *is* to perform the action, which one might not perform, at least not with so much precision, in any other way. For instance:
 - I name this ship 'Liberté'.
 - I apologise.
 - I welcome you.
 - I advise you to do it.
- Austin's point is that by making such utterances under the right conditions, Speaker performs, respectively, an act of naming, an act of apologizing, an act of welcoming, and an act of advising.

Austin: *implicit* performatives vs. *explicit* performatives

- One distinction Austin makes in relation to performatives, is that between ***implicit performatives*** and ***explicit performatives***. Thus, the *intended illocutionary force* of the *imperative*
- ‘Don’t say that!’,
is implicit, as what the speaker has in mind by saying it is not specifically indicated. Because of its implicitness, the sentence can be, depending on the paralinguistic or kinetic cues given by the speaker, and on the power or status relationship between the speaker and hearer, a *warning*, a *command*, a *request* or a piece of *advice*.

Austin: *implicit* performatives vs. *explicit* performatives

- For the speaker to make the *illocutionary force explicit*, s/he has to indicate the speech act involved by inserting the *performative verb* before the clause. If the clause is not declarative, this will involve its grammatical conversion into a declarative clause:

'I warn you not to say that',

'I order you not to say that',

'I advise you not to say that',

'I forbid you to say that', etc.

Austin: *implicit* performatives vs. *explicit* performatives

- An explicit performative clause contains a verb that names the illocutionary point of the utterance.
- By saying :
 - ‘I promise I’ll lend you a hand with your proofreading’,
Speaker uses an explicit performative verb to make a promise.
- Speaker could also have made the promise by merely uttering
 - ‘I’ll lend you a hand with your proofreading’,
in which the promise is not explicitly spelled out yet is easily inferable.

Austin: *implicit* performatives vs. *explicit* performatives

- As *performatives* are seldom uttered using the above constructions, it does seem to be the case that most of the performatives we encounter in English are *implicit*.
- A short list of performative verbs may comprise:
 - *abolish, accept, acknowledge, acquit, admit, admonish, advise, affirm, agree to, announce, answer, apologize, ascribe, ask, assert, assess, assume, authorize, baptize, beg, bet, bid, caution, charge, christen, claim, classify, command, commiserate, compliment, concur, congratulate, convict, counsel, declare, delegate, demand, deny, describe, diagnose, disagree, donate, dub, excuse, exempt, fire, forbid, grant, guarantee, guess, hire, hypothesize, identify, implore, inform, instruct, license, name, notify, offer, order, pardon, permit, plead, pray, predict, prohibit, promise, query, question, rank, recommend, refuse, reject, renounce, report, request, require, resign, sanction, say, sentence, state, submit, suggest, summon, suppose, swear, tell, testify, thank, urge, volunteer, warn, withdraw.*

Austin: *performative verbs*

- The performative verb must be in the present tense, because the illocutionary act is being performed and denominated at the moment of utterance. If *'I promise to take you to the game tomorrow'* counts as a promise on the part of Speaker, than *'I promised to take you to the game tomorrow'* only reports on a past promise and *'I promise to visit you next time I'm in town'* only announces a predicted promise.

Austin: *performative* adverbs

- The adverb *hereby*, inserted into a performative clause, will mark the verb as performative (cf. Austin 1962).
- For instance:
 - ‘I must hereby renounce at your services’.
 - ‘Trespassers should hereby be warned that they will be prosecuted’.
 - ‘I hereby authorize you to act as our agent from this moment’.

Austin: *Felicity conditions*

- Unlike *constative* utterances, *performative* utterances do not depend on *truth conditions* in order to be meaningful, but on certain ***appropriateness or felicity conditions***.
- Austin distinguishes three types of felicity conditions:
 - (i) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect.
 - (ii) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate, as specified in the procedure.
 - (iii) The procedure must be executed correctly and completely.

Austin: *Felicity conditions*

- Violation of any of the felicity conditions results in a performative ‘unhappy’ or infelicitous performative or a *‘misfire’*.
- For instance:
 - a registrar or a priest conducting a marriage ceremony in an unauthorized place will violate condition (i), thus committing a misfire.
 - if a judge utters ‘I sentence you to life imprisonment’ not in court but in the shower.

Austin: *Felicity conditions*

- when a president declares war to another country not via the official procedures but within an informal setting, when he merely voices his thought or intentions.
- A *command* cannot be issued by a particular person of lower *status* or *power* to another particular person of higher *status* or *power*.
- A promise is usually issued in relation to some future act, while an apology indicates regret for a past action Speaker feels responsible for.

Austin: *Sincerity condition*

- In addition, he formulates a sincerity condition, specifying that the persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions, as specified in the procedure.
- If the sincerity condition is violated, there is a case of what Austin calls an '**abuse**'. Examples of abuse include:
 - congratulating someone when one knows that they have passed an examination by cheating, or making a promise when one already intends to break it.

Austin: *performatives and truth values*

- Truth conditions are, nevertheless, not fully excluded from the performative framework. Thus, an utterance such as ‘I promise to feed the fish’ has no truth value but is felicitous if there is a fish such that Speaker has the ability and intention to feed, and is infelicitous - yet not false – in case there is no such fish. This contrasts with ‘I’ve fed the fish’ which is either true if Speaker has fed the fish, or false if not.
- To sum up, felicity conditions need to be met for performative acts to be successful. This not exclude taking truth value into account, yet entails that truth value is less communicatively significant than illocutionary point.

Austin: summary

- Allan (1994) summarises the Austinian framework of felicity conditions as follows:
 - A PREPARATORY CONDITION, meant to establish whether or not the circumstances of the speech act and the participants in it are appropriate to its successful performance.
 - An EXECUTIVE CONDITION, meant to determine whether or not the speech act has been properly executed.
 - A SINCERITY CONDITION involves Speaker's responsibility for the illocutions in the utterance. Normally, Hearer will assume that Speaker is being sincere unless s/he has good reason to believe otherwise.
 - A FULFILMENT CONDITION determined by the perlocutionary effect of the speech act (Allan 1994).

Searle's speech act classification and felicity conditions

- Searle *refined* Austin's set of *felicity conditions*, calling the fulfillment condition '*essential condition*' and introducing a '*propositional content condition*', which partially substitutes the executive condition:
 - 1) the **propositional content condition** focuses only upon the textual content
 - 2) the **executive/preparatory conditions** focus upon background circumstances
 - 3) the **sincerity condition** focuses upon the Speaker's psychological state
 - 4) the **fulfilment/essential condition** focuses upon the illocutionary point.

Searle's speech act classification and felicity conditions

- Searle classifies Speech Acts into five categories:
 - 1. Assertives:** commit the Speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. They have a truth value and express Speaker's belief that *p*.
Paradigm cases: *asserting, concluding, affirming, alleging, announcing, answering, attributing, claiming, classifying, concurring, confirming, conjecturing, denying, disagreeing, disclosing, disputing, identifying, informing, insisting, predicting, ranking, reporting, stating, stipulating.*

Searle's speech act classification and felicity conditions

- 2. Directives:** are Speech Acts which are attempts the Speaker makes in order to get the addressee engage in a certain action. They express Speaker's wish that Hearer do the act A.

Paradigm cases include *requesting, questioning, advising, admonishing, asking, begging, dismissing, excusing, forbidding, instructing, ordering, permitting, requiring, suggesting, urging, warning.*

Searle's speech act classification and felicity conditions

3. Commissives: commit Speaker to some future course of action.

Speaker expresses the intention that Speaker do the act A.

Paradigm cases comprise *promising, threatening, offering, agreeing, guaranteeing, inviting, swearing, volunteering* .

Searle's speech act classification and felicity conditions

4. **Expressives** express Speaker's attitude to a certain state of affairs specified (if at all) in the propositional content; a variety of different psychological states; propositional content must be related to Speaker or Hearer.

Paradigm cases: *thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating, condoling, greeting, accepting.*

Searle's speech act classification and felicity conditions

5. Declarations are Speech Acts which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extralinguistic institutions.

Paradigm cases include *excommunicating, declaring war, christening, marrying, firing from employment.*

Example of conditions in Searle's framework

- Thomas (1995) summarises the set of felicity conditions required by successful promises as follows:
- Conditions for **PROMISING**, where
 - S = speaker,
 - H= hearer,
 - A = future action,
 - P = proposition expressed in the SA,
 - e = linguistic expression

Example of conditions in Searle's framework

- Preparatory condition 1:
 - H would prefer S's doing A to their not doing A.
 - S believes H would prefer S's doing A to not doing A.
- Preparatory condition 2:
 - It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events.
- Propositional condition:
 - In expressing that P, S predicates a future act A of S.
- Sincerity condition:
 - S intends to do A.
- Essential condition:
 - the utterance *e* counts as an undertaking to do A.

Criticism brought to the Searlean framework

- Searle's conditions fail to provide a comprehensive description of *overlapping* Speech Acts and often do not manage to disambiguate between in-between instances of Speech Acts (Leech, Thomas 1995).
- There are cases when only the essential condition distinguishes between seemingly unrelated Speech Acts.
- Thomas specifies that this is the case with acts such as compliment vs. congratulate (1995).

Criticism brought to the Searlean framework

- If 'e' is the expression making up the illocution, the two acts need the same preparatory, propositional and sincerity conditions, namely:
 - Preparatory condition: 'e' is in H's interest and S believes 'e' is in H's interest
 - Propositional condition: Some event, act, aspect 'e' related to H.
 - Sincerity condition: S is pleased at 'e',

Criticism brought to the Searlean framework

- Yet the two differ in point of their essential condition, since with CONGRATULATE, 'e' counts as an expression of pleasure on the part of the Speaker, it is Speaker-centred, as in
'I'm so happy to see you've done something to your hair!'
- On the other hand, with COMPLIMENT, 'e' counts as tribute to the Hearer, being hearer-centred, as in
'You look great with this new hairdo!'

Criticism brought to the Searlean framework

- **Not all Speech Acts have propositional content**
- Although certain utterances lack propositional content, they still count as felicitous verbalisations of communicative intentions. This frequently occurs with apologies or attempts to interrupt an ongoing conversation, such as:
 - ‘Sorry! Excuse me!’,
 - ‘Huh?’,
 - ‘Hello! Hi!’,
 - ‘Wow!’

Criticism brought to the Searlean framework

- A minute assessment of felicitous apologies and/or greetings points out that Searle's conditions solely cope with the most prototypical instances of Speech Acts and often fail to label the 'in-between' or blurred cases.
- Searle himself admitted confinement to such prototypicality.
- Utterances are multifunctional which makes the task of distinguishing between one Speech Act and another cumbersome e.g. distinguishing request from invite, demand or question from examine, inquire, quiz, etc.

Criticism brought to the Searlean framework

- Thus,
‘Are you doing anything tonight?’
may count as an invitation to a date. Yet, if issued by your boss who needs your immediate contribution to a project due very soon, it most likely counts as a veiled order.
- An utterance such as
‘Have you had many extramarital affairs during the past three years?’
may be part of a court inquiry, meant to establish the (in)fidelity of the spouse or may be part of a psychiatric examination and evaluation regarding the reasons of one person’s emotional (in)stability. It may as well be an item in a magazine quiz.

Bach & Harnish speech act classification and felicity conditions

- Bach and Harnish (1979) employ Searle's criteria, while making Speaker's *psychological state* or Speaker's *attitude* more salient.
- Bach and Harnish spell out the correlation between the type of each *illocutionary act* and the typically expressed *attitude*.
- They identify six classes, splitting Searle's 'declarations' into:
 1. **effectives**, acts meant to bring about changes in institutional states of affairs;
 2. **verdictives**, acts which bear official, institutionalised impact in the situations in which they were performed.

Bach & Harnish speech act classification and felicity conditions

- The act is *felicitous* if the Hearer recognizes the attitude being expressed, which may be a belief in the case of a statement or a desire in the case of a request.
- Any further effect it has on the hearer, such as being believed or being complied with, or just being taken as sincere, is not indispensable to its counting as a statement or a request.
- Thus an utterance can be communicatively felicitous despite insincerity on the part of the speaker.

Bach & Harnish speech act classification and felicity conditions

- Communicating is about overtly displaying an attitude; sincerity is about embracing the expressed attitude.
- The hearer can understand the utterance without regarding it as sincere (taking it as an apology) or without whole-heartedly believing that the speaker regrets having done the deed in question.
- Getting one's audience to believe which attitude one explicitly adopts is not an illocutionary but a perlocutionary act.