EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

Faculty of Philosophy
General Linguistics

Semantics & Pragmatics SoSe 2022

Lecture 18: Speech Acts

07/07/2022, Christian Bentz

Mock Exam

- Will be held next **tuesday 12th July (12:00-13:30)** in the current lecture room.
- You do not have to attend (just as for any other lecture).
- It is not marked.
- Solutions will be discussed in the tutorials the following week.

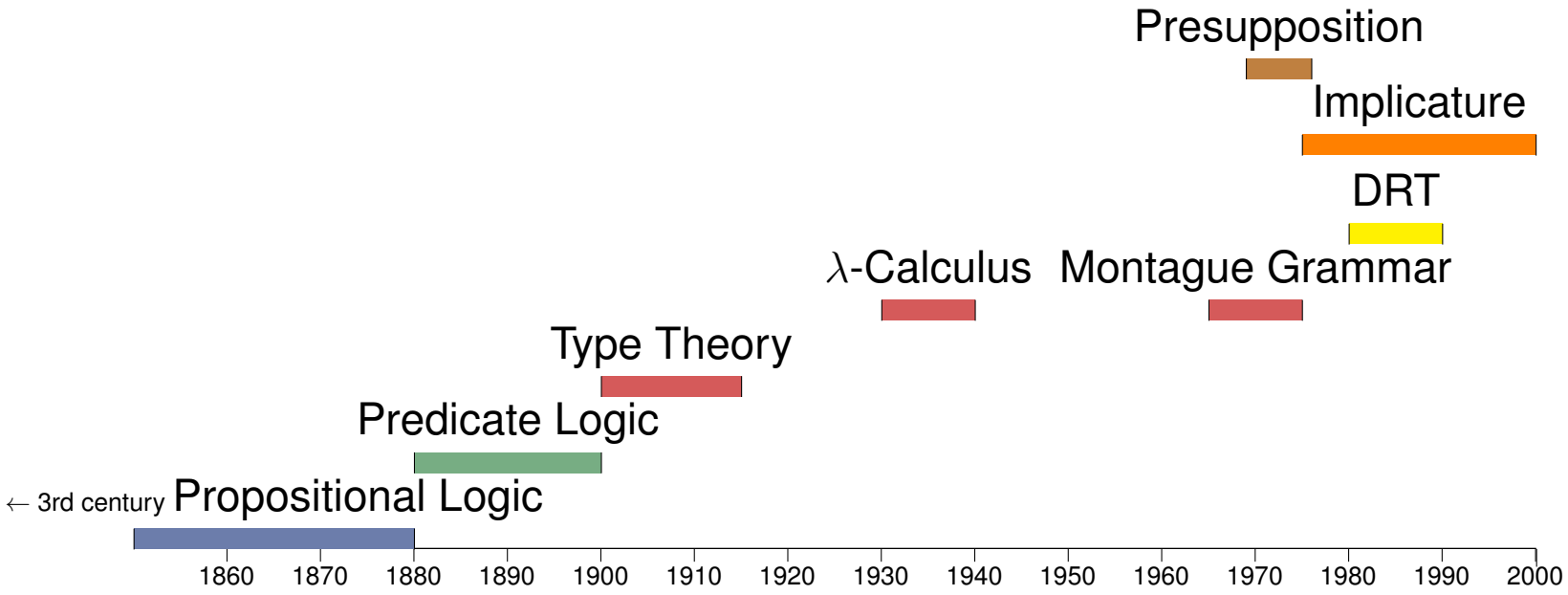
Overview

Section 1: Recap of Lecture 17

Historical Background

"[...] There is more literature on presupposition than on almost any other topic in pragmatics. [...] The volume of work is in part accounted for by a **long tradition of philosophical interest** [...] In addition presupposition was a **focal area in linguistic theory during the period 1969-76**, because it raised substantial problems for almost all kinds of (generative) linguistic theories [...]"

Levinson (1983), p. 167.



Informal Definition

"As a first approximation, let us define **presupposition as information** which is **linguistically encoded** as being part of the **common ground** at the time of utterance [...] Speakers can choose to indicate, by the use of certain words or grammatical constructions, that a certain piece of information is part of the common ground."

Kroeger (2019), p. 40.

(1) A: Kepler died in misery.
B: I don't know who you are talking about.

Note: If we see Bs comment as a rejection of the presupposition "Kepler refers to something", then this is an instance of *presupposition failure* ("Kepler does not exist" would be the clearest case of rejection). If we see this rather as a request for clarification who Kepler is, then it would be *accommodation*.

Formal Semantic Background (Standard Logic)

(2) A: Kepler died in misery.
B: I don't know who you are talking about.

Model $\mathbf{M}_A$

$D = \{e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots\}$
$I = \{\langle j, e_1\rangle, \langle p, e_2\rangle, \langle k, e_3\rangle, \dots, \langle D, \{\langle I(j)\rangle, \langle I(k)\rangle\}\rangle, \dots\}$
$I(D) = \{\langle I(j)\rangle, \langle I(k)\rangle, \dots\}$

Model $\mathbf{M}_B$

$D = \{e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots\}$
$I = \{\langle j, e_1\rangle, \langle p, e_2\rangle, \langle m, e_3\rangle, \dots \langle D, \{\langle I(j)\rangle, \langle I(k)\rangle\}\rangle, \dots\}$
$I(D) = \{\langle I(j)\rangle, \langle I(m)\rangle, \dots\}$

Translation key: j: John; p: Peter; k: Kepler; m: Mary, Dx: died in misery.

Formal Definition

"A statement A presupposes a statement B iff:

(i) if A is true, then B is true,

(ii) if A is false, then B is [still] true."

Levinson (1983), p. 175, citing Strawson (1952).

(3) Statement A: Kepler died in misery.
PRESUPPOSITION B: The name 'Kepler' denotes an individual.

(4) Statement $\neg A$: Kepler did *not* die in misery.
PRESUPPOSITION B: The name 'Kepler' denotes an individual.

Presupposition Triggers

Over the years, a large number of **presupposition triggers** have been identified (for English). These include but are not limited to:

(a) Definite descriptions:
- definite noun phrases
- possessive phrases
- restrictive relative clauses

(b) Factive predicates

(c) Implicative predicates

(d) Aspecutal predicates

(e) Temporal clauses

(f) Counterfactuals

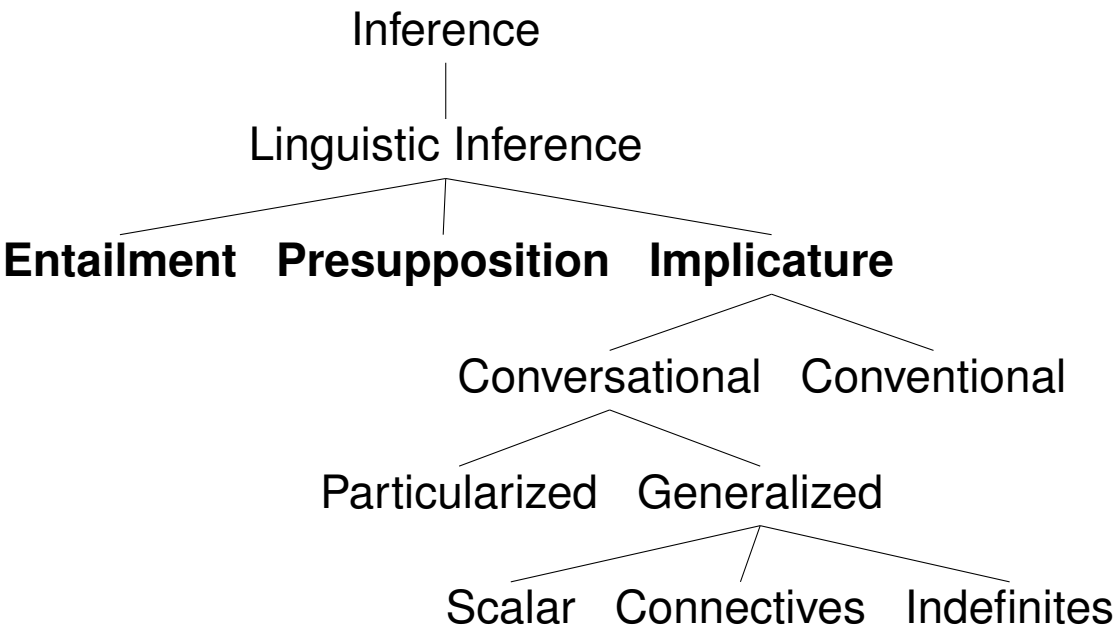
(g) Comparisons

(h) (Scalar terms)

Kroeger (2019), p. 43.

Entailment, Presupposition, and Implicature

Given that we have established the difference between linguistic and non-linguistic inferences, **presupposition** is one of several possible **linguistic inferences**. The others we have discussed are **entailment** and **implicature**.



Tests: Presuppositions

The tests relevant to distinguish **entailments** and **conversational implicatures** from **presuppositions** are mainly the *Negation* and the *Question Test*.

Kroeger (2019), p. 152.

	Entailment	Conversational Implicature	Presupposition
a. Cancellable	NO	YES	sometimes[1]
b. Suspendable	NO	YES	sometimes
c. Reinforceable	NO	YES	NO
d. Negation	NO	NO	YES
e. Question	NO	NO	YES

[1] According to Kroeger (2019), p. 152, some presuppositions seem to be cancellable, "but only if the clause containing the trigger is negated. Presuppositions triggered by positive statements are generally not cancellable."

Example Utterances

Assume we have the three example utterances and respective inferences below. We will run through the different tests to establish whether these **inferences** are **entailments**, **conversational implicatures**, or **presuppositions**.

(5) John killed the wasp.
INFERENCE: The wasp died.

(6) A: I ran out of petrol.
B: There is a garage around the corner.
INFERENCE: One can buy petrol there.

(7) John regrets that he lied.
INFERENCE: John lied.

Test Summary

We then summarize the test results for each inference and compare it to the test-template (in the table above) to decide if it falls in either category.

(8) John killed the wasp.
INFERENCE: The wasp died.
_

cancellable: NO
suspendable: NO
reinforceable: NO
preserved under negation: NO
preserved in question: NO

→ **entailment**

(9) A: I ran out of petrol.
B: There is a garage around the corner.
INFERENCE: One can buy petrol there.

cancellable: YES
suspendable: YES
reinforceable: YES
preserved under negation: NO
preserved in question: NO

→ **conversational implicature**

(10) John regrets that he lied.
INFERENCE: John lied.
_

cancellable: NO
suspendable: NO?
reinforceable: NO
preserved under negation: YES
preserved in question: YES

→ **presupposition**

Accommodation

It is a **common misunderstanding** about presuppositions that they *have to be* part of the common ground. This is not necessarily true. If it turns out that the presupposition is not actually part of the common ground, then hearers often **accommodate** in the sense of accepting the presupposition as true, or they might ask for confirmation to "officially" establish the presupposition as common ground.

(11) A: My cat got stuck on the roof last night.
PRESUPPOSITION: The speaker has a cat.

(12) B (who doesn't know that A has a cat): Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. / Oh, you have a cat?

Presupposition Failure

Genuine **presupposition failure** only occurs when the hearer downright **rejects** the presupposition.

(13) A: Take some more tea.
PRESUPPOSITION: The hearer had some tea already.
B: I actually haven't had any tea yet.

(14) A: Are you a good witch or a bad witch?
PRESUPPOSITION: The hearer is some kind of witch.[2]
B: Who, me? I'm not a witch at all. I'm Dorothy Gale, from Kansas.

Kroeger (2019), p. 44, citing from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

[2] This is yet another kind of presupposition which we haven't discussed above. Also, it is a problematic one, as it doesn't preserve under negation: *You are not a good witch or a bad witch.*

EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

Faculty of Philosophy
General Linguistics

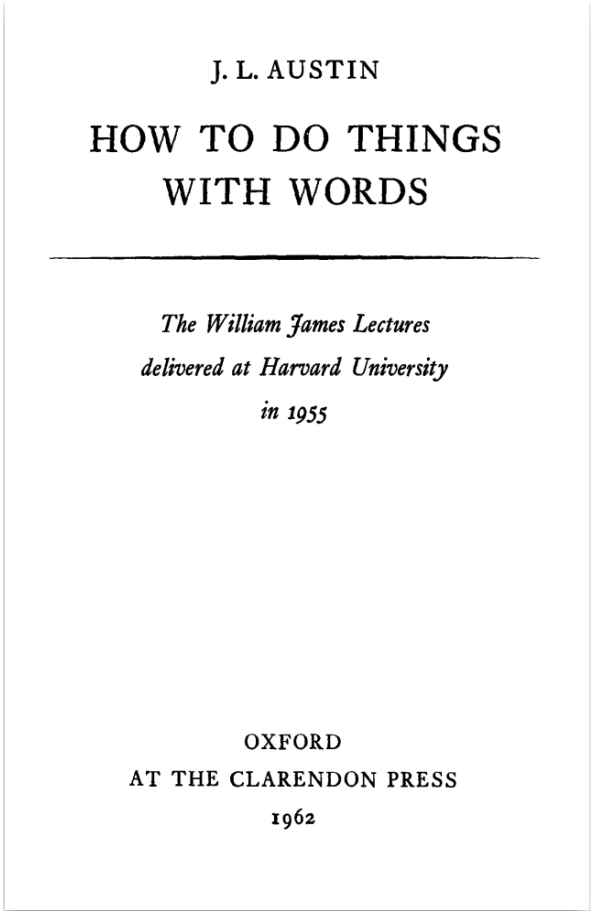
Speech Act Theory

Section 2: Historical Background

Historical Overview

"It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. Grammarians, indeed, have regularly pointed out that not all 'sentences' are (used in making) statements: there are, traditionally, besides (grammarians') statements, also questions and exclamations, and sentences expressing commands or wishes or concessions."

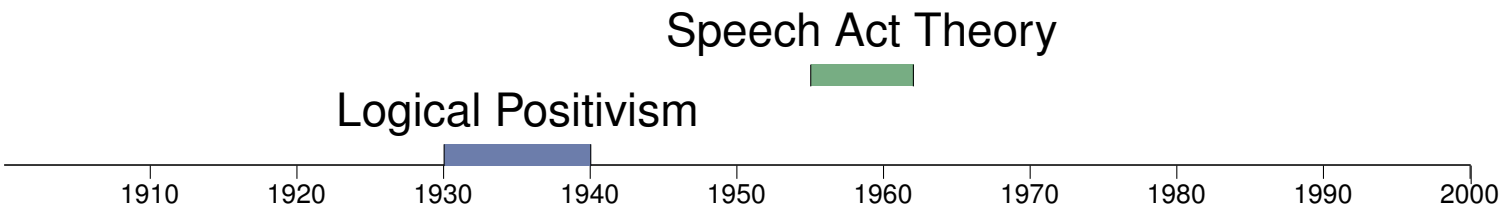
Austin (1962), p. 1.



Historical Background

"[...] In the 1930 there flourished what can now be treated as a philosophical excess, namely a the doctrine of **logical positivism**, a central tenet of which was that unless a sentence can, at least in principle, be *verified* (i.e. tested for its truth or falsity), it was strictly speaking *meaningless*."

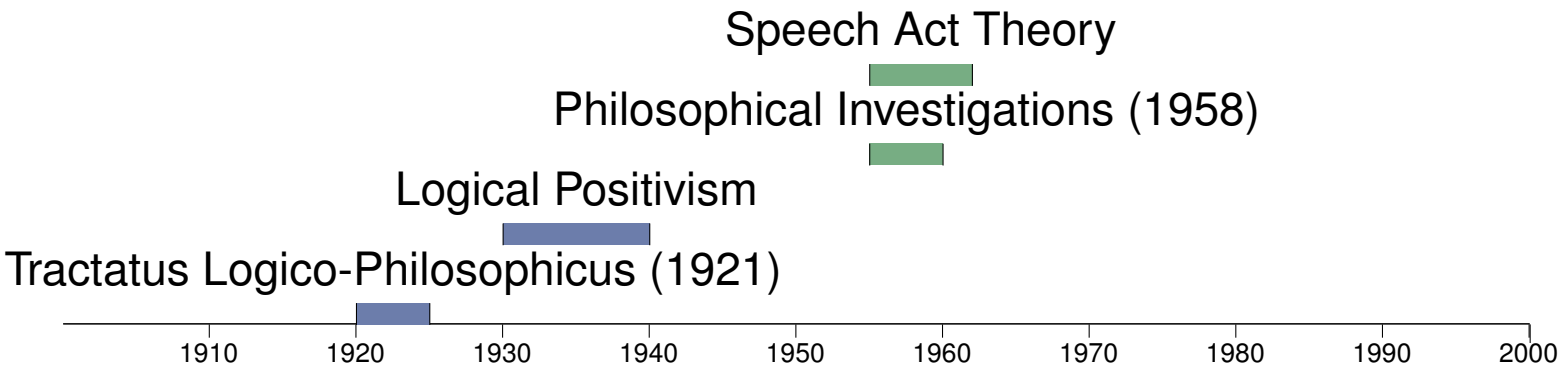
Levinson (1983), p. 227.



Historical Background

"It was this movement (which Wittgenstein had partly stimulated in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921)) that the later Wittgenstein was actively attacking in *Philosophical Investigation* with the well known slogan "meaning is use" (1958: para 43) and the insistence that utterances are only explicable in relation to the activities, or **language-games**, in which they play a role."

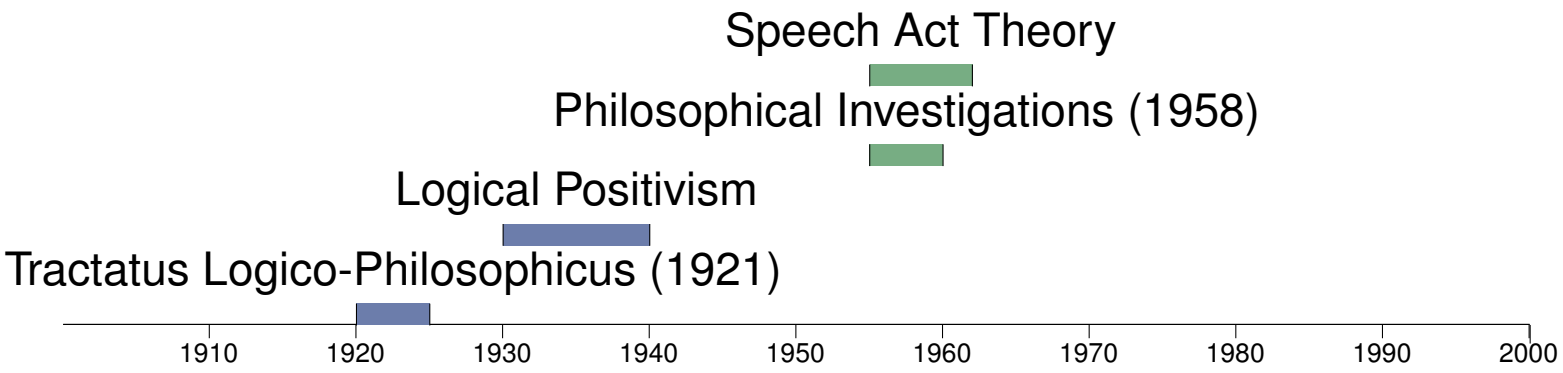
Levinson (1983), p. 227.



Historical Background

"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 in the total speech situation** is the only actual phenomenon which, in the last resort, we are engaged in elucidating" (1962: 147)."

Levinson (1983), p. 227.



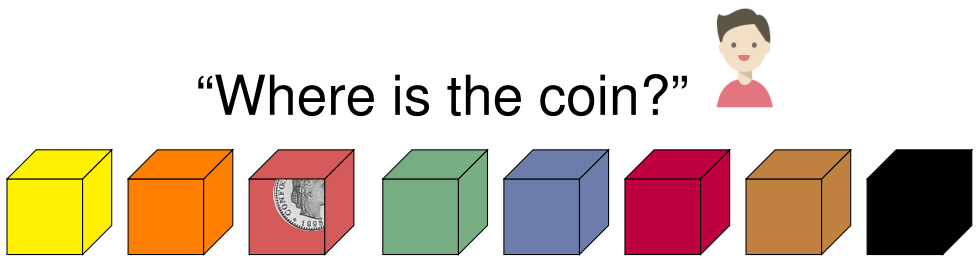
Section 3: Performatives

Beyond True and False

"To know the meaning of a [declarative] sentence is to know what the world would have to be like for the sentence to be true."

Kroeger (2019), p. 180, citing Dowty et al. (1981), p. 4.

"Where is the coin?"

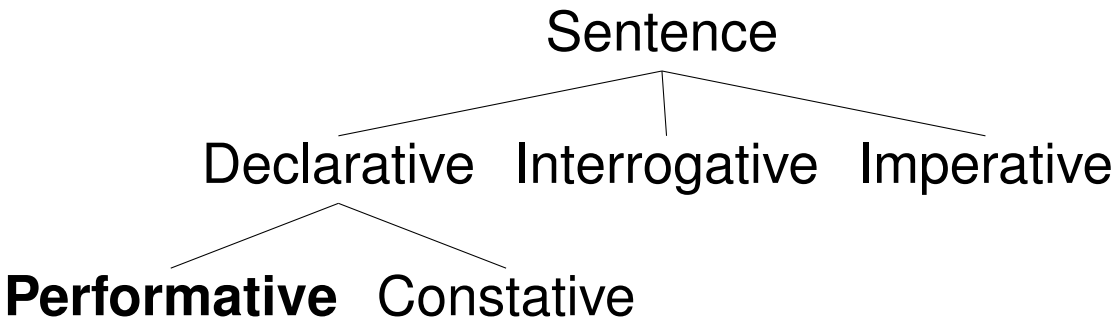


"In the red box."

Note: We can translate the declarative sentence *The coin is in the red box* into standard predicate logic, and evaluate its truth based on the model world we define. But how about the question *Where is the coin?*, and how about an imperative: *Give me the coin!*

Performatives

Even if we stay in the domain of *declarative sentences*, there are certain sentences for which we cannot straightforwardly assign a truth value. They are not just used to *say* something about the world, but to actually *do* something, i.e. actively change the world. This type of declaratives is called **performatives** by Austin (1962).



Performatives: Examples

Austin's own examples:

(15) 'I do (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)' – as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony.

(16) 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*' – as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem.

(17) 'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother' – as occurring in a will.

(18) 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.'

Austin (1962), p. 5.

Further examples:

(19) I hereby sentence you to 10 years in prison.

(20) I now pronounce you man and wife.

(21) I declare this meeting adjourned.

Kroeger (2019), p. 181.

Properties of Performatives

There is a list of features which distinguish **performatives** from "normal" **declarative sentences** (i.e. constatives):[3]

- *Indicative mood* and *present tense* (with a non-habitual interpretation).[4]
- Usage of a *performative verb* (e.g. *sentence, declare, confer, invite, request, order, accuse*, etc.)
- Normally performatives occur with *active voice* of a *first person subject*.[5]
- Optional usage of the performative adverb *hereby*.

[3] There is a further distinction between *explicit* and *implicit* performatives, which we won't discuss here.

[4] In English, indicative mood and simple present tense typically yield a *habitual* interpretation, e.g. *I play tennis* normally means *I play tennis regularly/habitually*.

[5] Passive voice with second or third person subjects is also possible, e.g. *Passengers are requested to not talk to the driver*.

Felicity Conditions

"[...] it does not make sense to try to describe truth conditions for performatives. Instead, Austin says, we need to identify the conditions under which the performative speech act will be **felicitous**, i.e. successful, valid, and appropriate. He identifies the following kinds of **Felicity Conditions**:"

Kroeger (2019), p. 182, citing Austin (1962: 14-15).

(A.1) Conventionality Condition

(A.2) Appropriateness Condition

(B.1) Correctness Condition

(B.2) Completeness Condition

(C.1) Sincerity Condition

(C.2) Subsequent Conduct Condition

Conventionality and Appropriateness Conditions

"(A.1) There must exist an **accepted conventional procedure** having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) the **particular persons and circumstances** in a given case must be **appropriate** for the invocations of the particular procedure invoked."

Kroeger (2019), p. 182, citing Austin (1962: 14-15).

(22) I now pronounce you man and wife.

(23) I lend you this book.

Conventionalty:
There has to be a conventionalized procedure to get married.
There is a conventionalized sense of "to lend sb. sth."

Appropriateness:
The person uttering this sentence has to be licensed to perform such a ceremony.
The person uttering this sentence has to own the book to lend it.

Correctness and Completeness Conditions

"(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely."

Kroeger (2019), p. 182, citing Austin (1962: 14-15).

(24) I now pronounce you man and wife.

Correctness:
In this particular case, the exact wording has to be correct. The other steps of the ceremony have to be correct (e.g. exchange of rings).

Completeness:
The verbal procedure has to be complete. The other procedures linked to the verbal procedures have to be complete.

Sincerity and Subsequent Conduct Conditions

"(C.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(C.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently."

Kroeger (2019), p. 182, citing Austin (1962: 14-15).

(25) I do (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife).

(26) I promise to return this book by Sunday.

Sincerity:
The speaker actually intends to do so.

Subsequent Conduct:
The speaker should then subsequently conduct in this way.

Violations of Conditions

There are two types of violations to these conditions:

- **Misfire**: In case the conditions under A-B are violated, this counts as a “misfire”, i.e. an attempt to formulate a performative, which is, however, not valid.
- **Abuse**: In case the conditions under C are violated, we talk about an “abuse”. The performative act is successful, but it is not sincere, and not followed by subsequent conduct. In a sense, the performative is void.

Kroeger (2019), p. 182.

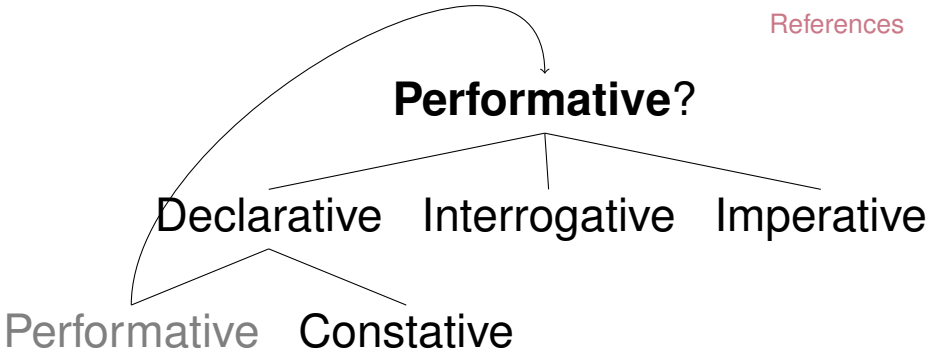
Are all Sentences Performatives?

It turns out that all (or most) sentences can be **paraphrased as performatives**. Does this mean that the term *performative* is void? According to Kroeger, understanding performatives and speech acts is still important, since the meaning of a sentence is more than just the proposition it carries.

Kroeger (2019), p. 184.

(27) Is it raining?
Performative: I hereby ask you whether it is raining.

(28) Shut the window!
Performative: I command you to shut the window.



EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

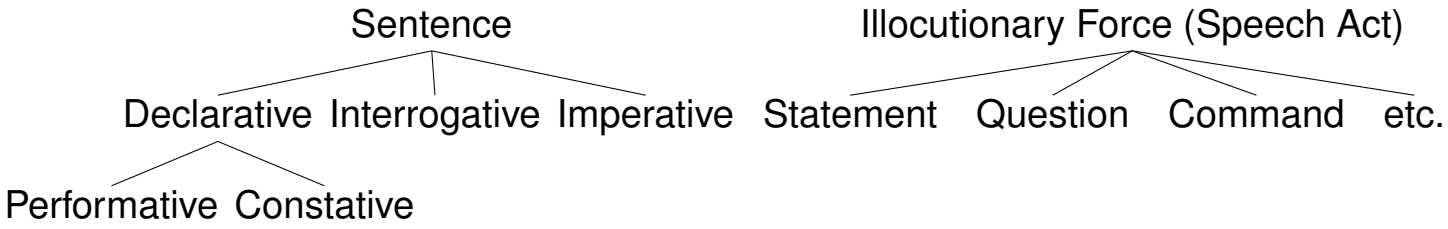
Faculty of Philosophy
General Linguistics

Section 4: Speech Acts

Speech Acts

"We are attuned in everyday conversation not primarily to the sentences we utter to one another, but to the **speech acts** that those utterances are used to perform: *requests*, *warnings*, *invitations*, *promises*, *apologies*, *predictions*, and the like."

Green (2017).



Note: This distinction between *types of sentences* and *types of illocutionary forces/ speech acts* is mostly not strictly adhered to. This is apparent also in Kroeger (2019), p. 181: "Austin called this special class of declarative sentences performatives. He argued that we need to recognize performatives as a new class of speech acts [...] in addition to the commonly recognized speech acts such as statements, questions, and commands.

Forces of Utterances

"Besides the question that has been very much studied in the past as to what a certain utterance means, there is a further question distinct from this as to what was the **force**, as we call it, of the utterance. [...] What we need [...] is a new doctrine about all the possible forces of utterances [...]"

Levinson (1983), p. 236, citing Austin (1970a), p. 251.

"So it is now claimed that all utterances, in addition to meaning whatever they mean, perform **specific actions** (or 'do things') through **having specific forces** [...]."

Levinson (1983), p. 236.

Three Parts of Speech Acts

According to Austin, there are three major subparts when performing a speech act:

1. **Locutionary Act**: The act of performing an utterance (phonetically and grammatically).
2. **Illocutionary Act**: The act of performing a *statement*, *question*, *command*, etc. by means of its conventional *force* (i.e. what is the locutionary act used for?)
3. **Perlocutionary Act**: The act of effecting the audience in a particular way.

Note: The Latin word *locutio* can mean “speech, speaking, phrase, pronunciation” (https://en.pons.com/translate/latin-german/locutio).

Locutionary Act

"[...] to say something is in the full normal sense to do something – which includes the utterance of certain noises, the utterance of certain words in a certain construction, and the utterance of them with a certain 'meaning' in the favorite philosophical sense of that word, i.e. with a certain sense and a certain reference. [...]"

Austin (1962), p. 94.

1. **Phonetic act**: Uttering certain "noises", i.e. *speech sounds* using the speech aparatus.
2. **Phatic act**: Uttering of certain *words*, i.e. strings of speech sounds belonging to a certain vocabulary, and conforming to a certain grammar.
3. **Rhetic act**: Uttering the respective words with a certain "more-or-less" definite *sense and reference*.

Illocutionary Act

"To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso*[6] to perform an **illocutionary act**, as I propose to call it. To determine what illocutionary act is so performed we must determine in what way we are using the locution [...]"

Austin (1962), p. 98.

- asking or answering questions
- assurance or warning
- announcing a verdict or an intention
- pronouncing a sentence
- etc.

[6] Translates into English as "of and by itself". Note that this is likely true for humans in most situations of language usage, though not necessarily for animals. Some animals might learn to repeat strings of sounds uttered by humans, but they do not necessarily perform an illocutionary act by performing the locutionary act.

Perlocutionary Act

"Saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain **consequential effects** upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the *design, intention, or purpose* of producing them [...]"

"It will be seen that the consequential effects of perlocutions are really consequences, which do not include such *conventional effects* as, for example, the speaker's being commited by his promise (which comes into the illocutionary act)."

Austin (1962), p. 101-103.

Example

(29) A to B: You can't do that.

SPEECH ACT performed by A:

LOCUTIONARY ACT: Production and pronunciation of the above sentence (in speech, writing or sign), given knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of English, and the referent of *you*.[7]

ILLOCUTIONARY ACT: Protest against B doing sth., commanding B not to do sth.[8]

PERLOCUTIONARY ACT: Stopping B, Annoying B, etc.[9]

Austin (1962), p. 102.

[7] Austin would paraphrases this as "He said to me ...".
[8] Austin would paraphrase this as "He protested against my doing it".
[9] Austin would paraphrase this as "He stopped me, annoyed me, etc. ...".

Example

(30) A: I will go vote tomorrow, but who should I vote for?
B: Well, don't vote for the current president!

SPEECH ACT performed by B:

LOCUTIONARY ACT: Production and pronunciation of the above sentence (in speech, writing or sign), given knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of English, and the referent of *the president*.[10]

ILLOCUTIONARY ACT: Giving the advice/command (not to vote for the current president).[11]

PERLOCUTIONARY ACT: Persuading A (not to vote for the current president).[12]

[10] Austin would paraphrases this as "He said to me ...".
[11] Austin would paraphrase this as "He commanded/advised me to ...".
[12] Austin would paraphrase this as "He persuaded me to ...".

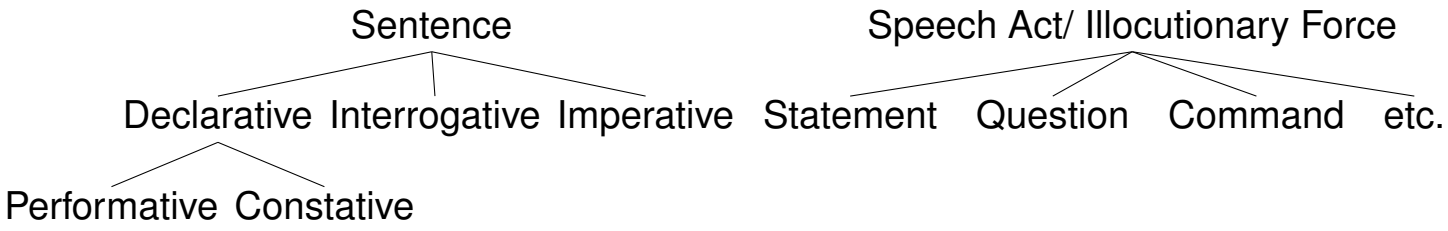
EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN

Faculty of Philosophy
General Linguistics

Section 5: Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

Sentences and Speech Acts

Remember from above that we might draw a distinction (though it is not always adhered to in the literature) between *types of sentences* on one hand, and *types of speech acts* – according to their different *illocutionary forces* – on the other hand.



Direct Speech Act

We have a **direct speech act** if the type of sentence (grammatical form) **matches the type of illocutionary force** (according to general expectation).

Declarative ⟶ *Statement*
Interrogative ⟶ *Question*
Imperative ⟶ *Command*

Examples: Direct Speech Acts

(31) It is raining. (Declarative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Making a statement.

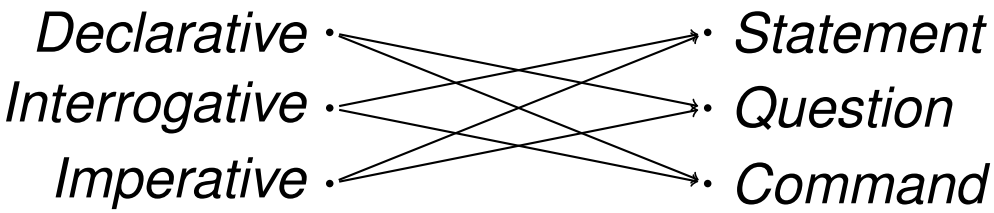
(32) Is it raining? (Interrogative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Asking a question (request for information).

(33) Make it rain! (Imperative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Giving a command.

Indirect Speech Act

"We might define an **indirect speech act** (following Searle 1975) as an utterance in which one illocutionary act (the **primary act**) is intentionally performed by means of the performance of another act (the **literal act**). In other words, it is an utterance whose **form does not reflect the intended illocutionary force**."

Kroeger (2019), p. 186.



Examples: Indirect Speech Acts

(34) I want you to leave now. (Declarative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Giving a command.

(35) I would like to have a cup of tea, please. (Declarative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Request for tea.

(36) Can you pass me the salt? (Interrogative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Command (rather than request for information).

(37) Isn't this a beautiful day? (Interrogative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Statement (i.e. rhetorical question, which is not necessarily a request for information).

(38) Tell me the way to the train station! (Imperative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Request for Information/Question.

(39) Look how blue the sky is! (Imperative)
ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE: Statement.[13]

[13] Thanks to Tanja Heck for the last two examples.

Indirect Speech Acts and Conversational Implicatures

"Having recognized [...] an **indirect speech act**, how does the addressee figure out what the intended illocutionary force is? Searle's solution is essentially the Gricean method of **calculating implicatures**, enriched by an understanding of the Felicity Conditions for the intended speech act."

Kroeger (2019), p. 189.

(40) A to B: Can you pass me the salt?
INFERENCE by B: The question is irrelevant to our conversation (Maxim of Relevance); There is a politeness convention to ask for sth. rather than to command to hand it over (Conventionality Condition). Hence, the speaker actually commands me to pass the salt.

Summary

Summary

- **Performatives** are another type of declarative sentence (besides constatives) accounting for the fact that we can **perform actions**, i.e. 'do things with words', rather than just describing the world.
- Besides different **types of sentences** there also exist different **types of speech acts** according to the illocutionary force that a sentence has.
- Furthermore, speech acts consist of three parts: **locutionary**, **illocutionary**, and **perlocutionary** acts.
- In the case of **direct speech acts**, the **grammatical form** matches with the **illocutionary force** of an utterance, while in the case of **indirect speech acts**, there is a mismatch between the two.

References

References

Austin, John L. (1962). *How to do things with words.* The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Green, Mitchell (2017). Speech Acts. In: Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), online at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/speech-acts/.

Grice, Paul (1975). *Studies in the way of words.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Kroeger, Paul R. (2019). *Analyzing meaning. An introduction to semantics and pragmatics.* Second corrected and slightly revised version. Berlin: Language Science Press.

Levinson, Stephen C. (1983). *Pragmatics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thank You.

Contact:

Faculty of Philosophy
General Linguistics
Dr. Christian Bentz
SFS Wilhelmstraße 19-23, Room 1.24
chris@christianbentz.de
Office hours:
During term: Wednesdays 10-11am
Out of term: arrange via e-mail