SPEECH ACTS

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0 Austin 1962, Searle 1969, 1979, Bach and Harnish 1979, Grice 1969
Lemons are yellow.

What does this sentence mean?
Lemons are yellow.

What does this sentence mean?

What does the speaker mean by this sentence?
What does the speaker mean by this sentence?

Grice 1969
REFLEXIVE INTENTION

0 it is the speaker’s intention to have the person addressed recognize that the speaker wants him/her to accept the role of hearer and therefore be the recipient of the speaker’s message

0 speaker intends their utterance to have an effect on the hearer -> the effect is partly caused by the hearer recognizing that the speaker has the intention to communicate by means of the utterance
direct addressee VS. ratified participant (e.g. round-tables, can reject role of hearer; without being rude)

non-specific addressee: Congratulations to whoever is going to win!

overhearer: bystander, eavesdropper

reject role of hearer:
You heard him threaten me, didn’t you?
I wasn’t listening!
'You do see, don’t you, that she’s got to be killed?’

Curious words for one Hercule Poirot, detective, to overhear.

Hercule Poirot wondered what had occasioned the words he had just overheard. A collaboration, perhaps, over a play or a book. He thought, still smiling: ‘Those words might be remembered one day and given a more sinister meaning.’
speech act = a complex act including the following:
1. a **locutionary act** = uttering a sentence with meaning (sense and reference), according to specific grammatical conventions; it involves the proposition, or the propositional content; assessable in terms of truth value
2. an **illocutionary act** = what the utterance counts as, what the speaker intends to accomplish by means of the locution and the conventional force assigned to the locution propositional content + performative dimension
3. a **perlocutionary act**
locutionary act / distinct from: illocutionary act:

What do you mean?

What is that supposed to mean?
0 to perform an IA is to produce an utterance with a certain *illocutionary force* - IF = complex communicative intention, goal

0 the IA is happily performed only if a certain effect on the hearer is obtained

0 generally the effect: understanding of the meaning

0 “the securing of the uptake” cf. speaker meaning
discrepancy possible between illocutionary force as conceived by the speaker (intended illocutionary force) and as conceived by the hearer (uptake) -> there may be more than one illocutionary force assigned to an utterance (intentional) misunderstanding of speaker’s intention
LEONARD: What are you doing??
SHELDON: Playing the theremin.
LEONARD: No, I mean, what are you doing with a theremin?
SHELDON: Playing it.
LEONARD: Sheldon, we’re working here.
SHELDON: That’s all right. I can barely hear you over my theremin.
[Leonard unplugs theremin]
SHELDON: That was a little uncalled for. So your project is more important that mine?
LEONARD: Seeing as your project is to sabotage my project, yes.
SHELDON: Don’t beat around the bush Leonard, if you don’t want me here just say the word and I’ll leave.
Illocutionary acts: statement, contradiction, promise, invitation, oath, request, etc.

Examples of perlocutions: alerting the hearer by warning of danger, persuading via argumentation, intimidating by threatening, etc. – perlocutions fall under the investigation of behavioural patterns and/or cognitive representations.

Pragmatics: concerned with intentionality of speaker.
a. He ordered me to shoot her.
b. He got me to shoot her.
c. She suggested that he should steal the necklace.
d. He was goaded into stealing the necklace.
0 a perlocutionary act = effect: intended / unintended mistake illocutionary effect; unintended perlocutionary effect:
LEONARD: If you’re worried, we can go and see if she’s all right.

SHELDON: You know, I heard in the news, a bobcat has been spotted in her neighbourhood.

LEONARD: I don’t think Amy was eaten by a bobcat.

SHELDON (horrified): Who thinks Amy was eaten by a bobcat?

LEONARD: You do?

SHELDON: I was just mentioning an interesting local news item. Now, thanks to you, I’m worried Amy has been eaten by a bobcat.

LEONARD: Forget about the bobcat.

SHELDON: How can I? You won’t stop talking about it.
Austin ‘How to do things with words.’ 1963: distinction between performative and constative speech acts

The cat is on the mat.

I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.
I advise you to do it.
constative utterances: true or false

performative utterances – do not convey information; a performative sentence constitutes or is part of an action

performative utterances: felicitous or infelicitous
felicity conditions:
1. preparatory condition: circumstances, participants if condition 1 is violated, act is *misinvoked*
e.g. My seconds will call on you!
shrug it off – conventions of duelling no longer apply -> exploited in Don Quixote
felicity conditions:
2. **Executive condition**: correct and complete execution  \[\rightarrow misexecuted\]

a. I name this ship Queen Elisabeth (uttered by a random onlooker in the crowd).

b. We find the defendant guilty (uttered in the absence of the judge)
felicity conditions:
3. Sincerity condition
- an insincere act: not void! ‘abuse’

a. I congratulate you
felicity conditions:
4. Fulfillment condition: perlocutionary effect
implicit vs. explicit performative sentences:

I order you to go there.
I promise that I’ll be there.

performative verbs: e.g. admit, announce, apologize, ask, congratulate, disagree, swear, warn, etc.
syntactic features of explicit performative utterances:
0 1st pers, simple present, active voice
0 formal adverbials to enhance performative value: hereby

You are fired  ??I fire you.
0 -passive, 3rd person --> authorized agent
Notice is hereby given that...
The court permits you to step down.

continuous = descriptive
I’m warning you for the last time...
‘I wanted to see you once more so I could resign. I resign.’
some felicity conditions affect constative utterances:

insincere: You are beautiful.
void: John’s children are bald  (no children)

I promise to feed the fish. -> lie: not false
I’ve fed the fish. -> false

performatives can be false:
I warn you that the bull is about to charge (if not...)

I state that the earth is round. = describe a state of affairs + perform the act of stating
Communicative Presumption (Bach-Harnisch) = the mutual belief that whenever a speaker says something to a hearer he has a recognizable intention (reflexive intention)
Illocutionary acts: communicative and conventional (Bach and Harnisch)

0 Communicative IAs:

Constatives: affirm, announce, claim, report, state
Directives: advise, forbid, order, permit, suggest, warn
Commissives: offer, promise
Acknowledgements: apologize, congratulate, thank, greet

0 Conventional IAs: extralinguistic conventions
- voting, resigning, marrying, dedicating, baptizing, arresting, acquitting

0 Utterance is embodied in a ceremonial act
0 for successful communication, the hearer must recognize the intention of the speaker: if an e.g. apology is not understood as such, communication fails;

0 the act is felicitous if the speaker recognizes the act as a request/apology/thanks etc.

0 if an act is recognized as such: request, thanks, etc. it is felicitous – sincerity is not indispensable
‘What is that scent you’re wearing? It smells great.’
‘Dandruff shampoo. I have a dry scalp.’
‘Well you hair looks very nice.’
‘Are you a homosexual?’
‘No, I was just giving you a compliment.’
‘I would have been more flattered if you were a homosexual.’
securing uptake for the two acts:
0 recognition of intention
0 recognition of convention
0 communicative
0 conventional
communicative illocutionary acts – consequences: new interaction conditions

c conventional acts bring about institutional changes
0 conventions = reflexive intentions

locution specific: votes are cast with aye/nay, verdict: guilty/not guilty

1. EFFECTIVES You are fired.
2. VERDICTIVES Out. Guilty.
Conventional and communicative acts are not separate:
You are under arrest.
= conventional + assertion

What is the difference between:
Thank you!
Guilty.
formulaic acknowledgements VS. conventional acts:
= acknowledgements observe social conventions but they succeed in virtue of the hearer’s recognizing the intention of the speaker, and not by falling under a convention

‘Thank you’ - language unknown to speaker vs. getting married in a foreign country
Speaker: *planning*:

0 given that I want the mental state of the hearer to change/remain the same, how do I choose an utterance which will make the result the most likely?

Hearer: *forms hypotheses* and checks them against available contextual evidence

“*mutual contextual beliefs*”
an *illocutionary act is successful* if the speaker gets the hearer to recognize what he is doing

**ILLOCUTIONARY EFFECT** = understanding the sentence

**general conditions on successful speech act**

1. speaker utters sentence and means it
2. the speaker intends to produce in the hearer the illocutionary effect
3. intention will be recognized in virtue of the hearer’s knowledge of the rules governing the elements of the sentence
Wittgenstein: the descriptive fallacy (the belief that language is used for conveying information)

using language, people can play an infinity of language games
Classification of Speech Acts (Searle 1975)

0 Criteria:

1. illocutionary point or purpose
the point of an assertion: ....
the point of a promise: ....
! requests and commands have the same illocutionary point but not the same illocutionary force
Classification of Speech Acts (Searle 1975)

0 Criteria:

2. direction of fit
get the word to match the world
get the world to match the word
Classification of Speech Acts (Searle 1975)

0 Criteria:

3. expressed psychological state

*I state that p but I do not believe that p

4. other criteria: the **strength** (suggest vs insist), whether or not extralinguistic institutions are necessary (marry, vote)
Classification of Speech Acts (Searle 1975)

0 Classification:

1. **assertives**: assert, conclude $\rightarrow$ truth value
2. **directives**: request, question
3. **commissives**: promise, threat, offer
4. **expressives**: thank, apologize, express attitude
5. **declaratives**: cf. Austin’s performatives

*direction of fit: ........*
She suggested that there had been a mistake
She suggested that we should leave early

0 hybrids; compound illocutions:
The food is expensive there
Questions:
0 Preparatory condition: H knows answer
0 Sincerity condition: S wants to find out answer
0 Propositional content condition: any proposition
0 Essential condition: act counts as request for info

0 apparent counterexamples: teacher questioning student, lawyer questioning witness, rhetorical questions
Requests:
0 Preparatory condition: ....
0 Sincerity condition: ....
0 Propositional condition: speaker predicates future act of hearer
0 Essential condition: act counts as ....

0 distinction between request and command: .....
Compliment vs. congratulations:
0 Preparatory condition: act is in hearer’s interest.
0 Sincerity condition: speaker is pleased at it
0 Propositional condition:
0 Essential condition:
congratulation: speaker-centred:
compliment: hearer – centred
Not all speech acts have propositional content:

Huh? Wow!

Atypical cases of apology:

Sorry the boys are shouting so much! – apology on smb else’s behalf

Sorry you’ve arrived in such lousy weather – apologize for something you’ve no control over
Indirect Speech Acts

The door is over there.

0 primary illocutionary intent
0 secondary illocutionary intent

0 first step: hearer notices that literal SA is not relevant enough under the circumstances => the speaker could not merely be stating p
0 indirect speech act differs from literal speech act both in illocutionary force and propositional content

The door is over there. = Leave!
IF:.....
You could be a little more quiet.

p = be quiet

IF1:

IF2:
Locutionary strategy:
0 speaker says: The door is over there
0 Literal strategy: Speaker points out location of door
0 Literally based indirect strategy: H knows location of door; therefore S is irrelevant; \( \Rightarrow \) H deduces that utterance = directive: S wants H to leave
Can you pass the salt?
*Yes I can.

0 S alludes to preparatory condition (is H able to perform proposition conveyed by directive)
‘But what can I possibly tell you about it?’

‘I don’t know what you can tell me, but I know what I want to ask.'
0 mutual contextual beliefs are crucial for understanding indirectness:

a. ‘I particularly want you to remember those dates – ‘The jury wrote them down. Lord Peter murmured: ‘They all wrote down on their slates, She doesn’t believe there’s an atom of meaning in it....’
0 examples where felicity conditions are highlighted in indirect speech acts

- preparatory condition:
  - directives: H is able to perform
    Could you be a little more quiet?
  - commissives: S is able to perform
    I can do that for you.
  - assertions: there is evidence
    I can say that Harry is a fool.
0 examples where felicity conditions are highlighted in indirect speech acts

- the point of the SA:
  - directives
  Is the door closed? You haven’t closed the door.
  - commissives:
  Nobody has helped you. Hasn’t anybody helped you?
  - assertions:
  Haven’t I already said that....
0 examples where felicity conditions are highlighted in indirect speech acts

- sincerity condition:
  - directives: speaker wishes H to do
    I would like you to go now.
  - commissives: S intends to do
    I intend to do it.
  - assertions: S believes p
    I believe he is a fool
0 examples where felicity conditions are highlighted in indirect speech acts

- politeness condition:
  - metalinguistic utterances

May I ask you to help me?
The essential condition cannot be used directly (what the act counts as)

the closest we can get:

Can I get you to help me?
Can you believe that he is bald?
Speakers often feel the need to give a hint regarding the reasonableness of an act.

0 reasons:
1. willingness:
Would you mind...
Would it be convenient/too much trouble...
I’d be delighted...
I want to say that...
0 Speakers often feel the need to give a hint regarding the reasonableness of an act

0 reasons:
2. asserting the propositional content: Officers will henceforth wear ties at dinners. You will be here at five. I’m going to do it. I’ll give it to you next week.
Speakers often feel the need to give a hint regarding the reasonableness of an act

0 reasons:
It wouldn’t hurt if...
You’re standing on my foot.
I can’t see while you have your hat on.
should...
0 indirectness = non-literalness:
0 irony:
I’m sure the cat likes to have its tail pulled
-> indirect request

0 hearer will infer both meanings: the literal one and the indirect illocutionary force
Speech Act can be:
0 direct and literal: Don’t spill food all over you!
0 direct and figurative: Don’t be a pig!
0 indirect and literal: I like cleanliness.
0 indirect and figurative: I hate pigs.