

# Notes on Speech Acts

Jean Mark Gawron

San Diego State

April 9, 2018

# Table of contents

- 1 Historical
- 2 Indirect Speech Acts
- 3 Questions
- 4 Bibliography

# Austin (1962)

## A theory based on Communicative Acts

- ① How to do things with words
- ② Rational agents equipped with goals, plans
- ③ Utterances as actions with the purpose of achieving a goal
- ④ There are other “action types” besides assertion (constatives)

# Performatives vs. Constatives

- ① I (hereby) christen this ship the *Titanic*!
- ② Thank you, Gawain.
- ③ I promise you I will give you a chocolate!
- ④ I promise you a chocolate!
- ⑤ I promise you she will never bother you again.
- ⑥ I promised you I would give you a chocolate.
- ⑦ John promises you he will give a chocolate.

# Illocutionary v. Locutionary

## Austin's insight

All utterances execute multiple actions:

<i>Acts</i>	<i>Act type</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<b>of speaking</b>	<b>locutionary</b>	<i>uttering sounds, using words in conformity with grammar, referring to individuals of actions, ...</i>
<b>in speaking</b>	<b>illocutionary</b>	<i>christening, promising, requesting, ordering...</i>

# Preliminary typology

<i>Verdictives</i>	<i>acts that consist of delivering a finding, e.g., acquit, hold (as a matter of law), read something as, etc.</i>
<i>Exercitives</i>	<i>acts of giving a decision for or against a course of action, e.g., appoint, dismiss, order, sentence, etc. (You should also feel free to use McCawley's subclass advisories, as in you are hereby advised to resign.)</i>
<i>Commissives</i>	<i>acts whose point is to commit the speaker to a course of action, e.g., contract, give one's word, declare one's intention, etc. Offers, acceptances of offers.</i>
<i>Behabitives</i>	<i>expressions of attitudes toward the conduct or attributes of others, e.g., apologize, thank, congratulate, welcome, praise, censure, ...</i>
<i>Expositives</i>	<i>acts of expounding of views, conducting of arguments, and clarifying, e.g., deny, inform, concede, refer, assert (?), explain(?) ...</i>

# Searle (1969)

	F(p)
Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)	$F$
Propositional content	$p$
IFID	I promise that
Prop	I will come

- I promise not to come.
- I do not promise to come.

# Felicity conditions/constitutive rules I

Only constatives may be true or false. Of the drunk who smashes a bottle against a docked ship and proclaims, “I hereby christen you the *Joseph Stalin*” we may say, “The christening was infelicitous.” Felicity involves conditions on F, p, S (speaker), and H (Hearer), and utterance (U).

## Promise

- p predicates some future act A of S
- H must prefer S's doing A to his not doing A
- A is not something S would do anyway in the normal course of events
- S must intend to do A
- U counts as the undertaking of an obligation by S to do A.



# Performative Hypothesis (Krifka notes)

## The Hypothesis

Surface                      John is bald.  
                                  [performative    ↑    deletion]  
 D-structure    I assert [<sub>S</sub> John is bald. ]

- ① # John is bald, but I don't believe it. (Moore's paradox)
- ② John was bald, but I did not believe John was bald.
- ③ (I promise you) I will give you chocolate.
- ④ Frankly, your shirt and I don't go together.
- ⑤ What did everyone bring to the party?
- ⑥ If you you want cookies, there are some on the counter.

# Issues

## Performatox (Boër and Lycan 1980)

- ① Truth-conditions
  - (Frankly), I'm cold.
  - I tell you frankly: I'm cold.
- ② I applaud your courage.
- ③

# The phenomenon

- Can you close the window?
- I'm cold.
- Is Julia at home? (Clark 1979)
  - ① Yes (Taking the literal meaning **seriously**)
  - ② I'll get her. (The opposite)
  - ③ Yes. I'll get her. (OK, too!)

# Stefanowitsch (2003)

- The form goes with one meaning
- The actual conventionalized meaning is motivated but not entirely predictable.
- It's a construction!

## Distributional Arguments

- ① *Please*
- ② Politeness modals (*would*)
- ③ Conditionals (*Since ...*)

# Questions easy & hard I

- Is it definitional of illocutionary acts that they may always be expressed in a conventional manner? That there is always a performative verb/ (I hereby warn you ...)
- Christenings may be infelicitous for a variety of reasons. Can constatives be infelicitous? If this is a confused question, say so. If now, how can constatives be infelicitous? Was this something Austin discussed?
- Given an example of how a non-constative speech requires (for felicity) that there be some correspondence between the words and the facts.
- Is *betting* a speech act? Why?
- Is *protesting* a speech act? Why?
- Can there be performatives whose subject is not I? Examples?

# Questions easy & hard II

- A claim made by many writers (**Morgan 1978**) is that indirect speech acts may be conventionalized or not. Explain a bit. What is a good test for distinguishing?
- Birner talks about *explicit* versus *implicit* speech acts. Explain.

# Bibliography I

Austin, J. L. 1962.

*How to do things with words.*

Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boër, Steven E, and William G Lycan. 1980.

A performatox in truth-conditional semantics.

*Linguistics and Philosophy* 4(1):71–100.

Clark, Herbert H. 1979.

Responding to indirect speech acts.

*Cognitive psychology* 11(4):430–477.

Morgan, J. 1978.

Two types of convention in speech acts.

In P. Cole (Ed.), *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, 261–280. New York: Academic Press.

# Bibliography II

Searle, John, R. 1969.  
Speech acts.

Stefanowitsch, Anatol. 2003.

A construction-based approach to indirect speech acts.

In K.-U. Panther and L. L. Thornburg (Eds.), *Metonymy and Pragmatic Inferencing*, 105–126. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.