Speech Acts Jerry Sadock

0. Theory of speech acts

a. Concerned with those acts which are not completely covered under the major divisions of grammar or general theory of actions.

b. Success depends on balance between convention and intention
   i. Conventional aspects of speech acts: Formal [grammatical] features of an utterance may be directly tied to its accomplishment, e.g. greetings or imperative requests.
   ii. Unconventional: speakers intention in making an utterance and the recognition of this intention by addressee. E.g. “Oh, I love chocolates” as way to thank a guest.

c. Although speech acts involve interpersonal relations, anthropological and discourse-based approaches have not been shown to be central to speech act theory.

1. Austin

a. First major work of speech act theory is Austin (1962), How to Do Things with Words

b. Initial two-way division
   i. CONSTATIVES: descriptive sentences
   ii. PERFORMATIVES: sentences designed to do something.

c. Every utterance has both a descriptive and effective aspect.

1.1 Locutions, Illocutions, and Perlocutions

a. Three way contrast among types of speech acts

b. All three are characteristic of most utterances, both performatives and constatives
   i. Locutionary Acts
      - Physical act of speaking
      →"Talaq. Talaq. Talaq." ("I divorce you" in Arabic.)
   ii. Illocutionary Acts
      - Apparent purpose of utterance; act performed in speaking
      → Marriage is over
   iii. Perlocutionary Acts
      - Consequence or by-product speaking; action performed by speaking
      → Feelings are hurt
   iii. something.

c. It can be difficult to distinguish locutions from illocutions, and illocutions from perlocutions.

E.g. “The bull is about to charge.”
   = illocutionary act of warning (because the speaker could have said, “I warn you that the bull is about to charge”?)
   = perlocutionary act of warning (because the production of alarm in addressee is a by-product of the assertion?)
1.2 The Doctrine of Infelicities:

a. Three broad categories:
   A. Misinvocations – e.g. Rebekah saying “I now pronounce you man and wife.”
   B. Misexecutions – e.g. a priest saying “Do you, Mary, take Joseph to be your lawfully wedded husband...” – to addressees named Maria and José.
   C. Abuses - when the act succeeds but the expected thoughts or feelings do not obtain - e.g. insincerely apologizing for a purposeful act.

b. Crucial distinction between constatives and performatives: both must align with “the facts” to be felicitious, but with illocutionary acts of assertion, statement, etc. correspondence with the facts = truth; its absence = falsity. With other types of illocutions, we do not think in terms of truth and falsity.

1.3 The Performative formula

(1) “I (hereby) verb-present-active X...”

a. Underlying every sentence there is a hidden “matrix” performative clause of the form:
   I (hereby) Vp you (that) S
   VP: Performative verb
   -Indicativemood
   -Activevoice
   -Simple present tense
   S: complement clause
   VP makes speech act explicit
   -“Get lost.” = “I hereby request that you get lost.”

b. Austin concluded that this was neither a necessary nor sufficient criterion for performatives. Although many acts fit this formula, there are cases of illocutionary acts that cannot be accomplished in terms of an explicit performative formula, e.g. “*I fire you.”

2. The Influence of Grice

a. Ordinary communication takes place not directly by means of convention, but in evincing and recognizing intentions.

b. The utterance is not in itself communicative, but only provides clues to the intentions of the speaker.

c. Grice’s program introduces maxims, implicatures, etc. to explain calculation of assumptions and intentions.

2.1 Strawson's Objection to Austin
a. Most of the acts Austin is concerned with take place only in highly formalized, ritualistic contexts, and have little to do with everyday communicative behavior.

b. For more commonplace speech acts, often accomplished through simple declarative sentences, the act succeeds through Gricean means—by arousing in the addressee an awareness of the intention of the speaker to achieve a certain communicative goal.

2.2 Searle's Defense of Austin


b. Utterances may be composed of propositional act \( (p) \) + illocutionary force \( (F) \) (formally distinguished by IFID: illocutionary force indicating device) \( = F(p) \)

c. Certain conditions must obtain for an illocutionary act to be felicitously performed. Searle proposed that the IFID should only be uttered if that felicity condition is satisfied.

d. Felicity conditions for illocutionary act of promising:
   i. \( Pr \) (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 \( S \).
   ii. \( Pr \) 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 \( A \).
   iii. \( Pr \) 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.
   iv. \( Pr \) is to uttered only if \( S \) intends to do \( A \).
   v. The utterance of \( Pr \) counts as an undertaking of an obligation to do \( A \).

e. Searle’s system of CONSTITUTIVE RULES are similarly applied for other types of illocutions.
   1. Propositional content rule
      - specifies restrictions on propositional content of utterance
        • promise: future act \( A \) of speaker \( S \)
        • request: future act \( A \) of addressee \( H \)
   2. Preparatory rules (i. and ii. above)
      - Real-world prerequisites
        • promise: it is clear to \( S \) and \( A \) that
          – \( H \) prefers \( A \) to be accomplished
          – \( A \) will not occur in the normal course of action
        • request: \( S \) thinks that
          – \( H \) can carry out \( A \)
          – \( H \) will not carry out \( A \) unless asked
must be satisfied if the speech act is to be carried out sincerely (otherwise, abuse)

- promise: S intends to carry out A
- request: S wants H to carry out A

4. Essential rule
- S intends U to count as the speech act in question, and H recognizes this
  - promise: S intends for U to create an obligation on S to do A
  - request: S intends for U to count as an attempt to get H to do A

3. Illocutionary act potential

a. Alston noticed a problem with declarative sentences like “This dog bites.” Depending on the circumstances, this could be an assertion, warning, admission, testimony, apology, etc. Is the sentence, then, multiply ambiguous with respect to illocutionary force?

b. Illocutionary act potential: a declarative sentence is suited to a particular range of illocutionary forces, as conditioned by context. The illocutionary act potential of a sentence is conventionally associated with its form.

3.1 Strawson redux: Bach & Harnish (1979)

New version of Strawson’s intention-centered theory...(not really important)

3.2 The classification of illocutionary acts

a. Austin (1962) presents five-way taxonomy of illocutionary acts:
   1. Verdictives: acts that consist of delivering a finding
      - acquit, hold (as a matter of law), read something as, etc.
   2. Exercitives: acts of giving a decision for or against a course of action
      - appoint, dismiss, order, sentence, etc.
   3. Commissives: acts whose point is to commit the speaker to a course of action
      - contract, give one’s word, declare one’s intentions, etc.
   4. Behabitives: expressions of attitudes toward the conduct, fortunes, or attitudes of others
      - apologize, thank, congratulate, welcome, etc.
   5. Expositives: acts of expounding of views, conducting of arguments, and clarifying
      - deny, inform, concede, refer, etc.

b. This taxonomy has been revised many times since (see McCawley 1977), and there is still no firm agreement on the ultimate taxonomic system for illocutionary acts/performative verbs.
3.3 Speech acts and grammar

a. Katz & Postal (1964):
   - Suggest that Transformational Grammar include markers of force in the D-structure of imperative and interrogative sentences
   - Alternatively, D-structures of such sentences might include whole performative clauses:
     “Go home!” = I request that you go home.
     “Did you go home?” = I ask you whether you went home.

b. Performative hypothesis: “quickly and roundly condemned.”

4 Indirect speech acts

a. Searle (1969) distinguished between two types of locutionary effects:
   i. Illocutionary effects: when hearer recognizes that the rules governing IFID (illocutionary force indicating device) are in effect. E.g. “I’m warning you that that bull is about to charge.”
   ii. Perlocutionary effects: effects achieved indirectly as byproduct of the speech act. E.g. “That bull sure looks ready to charge.”

b. Sometimes there is a conventional indication in the form of utterances with indirect, perlocutionary effects:
   “Could you pass the salt?”
   Sadock: such sentences are sufficiently conventionalized to be treated as directly illocutionary. This is the idiomatic theory of indirect speech acts.

4.2 Mood and sentence type

a. Cross-linguistic assumption: in each language, sentences can be classified into types, with each type associated with a certain Illocutionary Act Potential (IAP). The formal features defining such types must be mutually exclusive.
   - Declaratives: IAP = stating, asserting, testifying, etc.
   - Interrogatives: IAP = asking, inquiring, querying, etc.
   - Imperative: IPA = requesting, demanding, commanding, etc.

b. Analysis of mood:
   - mood = performativity?
   - mood = reflects t-conditions in questions and imperatives?
   - mood = determines illocutionary force potential of sentence?

5 Formal approaches

Axiomatize aspects of speech act theory to produce an algebra of illocutionary forces, acts, etc. In AI, researchers have formalized notions of plans, goals, beliefs, and intentions as primitives.