



EGG 2018: Intro to pragmatics (week 2)

Session 4: Speech acts

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August 9, 2018



Previous classes

- ▶ **Minimal discourse model:**
 - ▶ list of interlocutors
 - ▶ their common ground
 - ▶ rules of how the common ground changes depending on different utterances
- ▶ Presupposed content relates to what is part of the common ground at the time of utterance.

Today: introduce classical speech acts and a modern conception of discourse moves related to a discourse model

⇒ this session is based mostly on Roberts 2017



Roadmap

Intro

Classical speech act theory

Discourse moves: rules to change the common ground

Further topics



Austin 1962 – “How to do things with words”

- (1)
- a. I name this ship the ‘Queen Elisabeth’.
 - b. I bet you 100KM that it won’t rain.
 - c. I promise you not to drink so much.
 - d. I pronounce you husband and wife.

Austin’s assumption: 3 acts with 1 utterance

- ▶ **locutionary act**: the act of uttering a sentence
- ▶ **illocutionary act**: the act of using the utterance of a sentence to effect a change in the world
- ▶ **perlocutionary act**: the provoking of intended and unintended effects/consequences that result from the illocutionary act

But: mostly concerned with certain **performative uses of verbs**

⇒ does not talk about “plain utterances”



Searle 1975

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Searle 1975

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Classification of speech acts: (= acts that can be performed using language)

- ▶ **Assertives** – suggesting, swearing, boasting, concluding. . .
⇒ commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition
- ▶ **Directives** – asking, ordering, requesting, inviting, advising, begging. . .
⇒ attempt to make the addressee perform an action
- ▶ **Commissives** – promising, planning, vowing, betting, opposing. . .
⇒ commit the speaker to some future course of action
- ▶ **Expressives** – thanking, apologizing, welcoming, deploring. . .
⇒ express how the speaker feels
- ▶ **Declarations** – firing, marrying, christening. . .
⇒ change the world to bring it into conformity with the propositional content



Main drawback of classical speech act theory



Main drawback of classical speech act theory

- ▶ Austin and Searle talk about **general actions** that can be performed using language.
 - ▶ The actions they identify and differentiate are **not strictly related to any linguistic form**.
- (2) [Context: B keeps complaining about not feeling well. A, B's partner, worries because B's father had a heart attack when he was a similar age.]
- A: I want you to get a check-up. (see Roberts 2017: 23)
- A': Please get a check-up!
- A'': Will you please get a check-up?



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A: I want you to get a check-up.

(see Roberts 2017: 23)

A': Please get a check-up!

A'': Will you please get a check-up?

- ⇒ all three sentences can be used to make a **request** (class: directives)
- ⇒ unclear how relevant classical speech act theory is for linguists
- ⇒ see Roberts 2017: Sect. 4.1 for more discussion



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Linguistically relevant pragmatic acts: discourse moves

Questions:

- ▶ What is the effect of an utterance on the discourse? Which parts of the discourse can be affected?
 - (3) A tells B: Yesterday, Mary played beer-pong.



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⇒ A's discourse move: **assertion**



Linguistically relevant pragmatic acts: discourse moves

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 - ⇒ A's discourse move: **assertion**

- ▶ Can the effect of an utterance be read off the form of the utterance? Are there linguistic pointers?
 - (4) A: Mary won the tournament.
 A': Did Mary win the tournament?
 A'': Win the tournament!



Linguistically relevant pragmatic acts: discourse moves

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⇒ **sentence type** points towards the type of discourse move



Sentence type and discourse moves – I

Cross-linguistically, all languages distinguish (at least) **three sentence types** – morphologically or syntactically:

- ▶ declarative (Mary won the tournament)
- ▶ interrogative (Did Mary win the tournament)
- ▶ imperative (Win the tournament)



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- ▶ declarative (Mary won the tournament)
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- ▶ imperative (Win the tournament)

The sentence types **correlate** with specific **discourse moves** that are usually performed with utterances of that type:

- ▶ declarative ~↔ assertion
- ▶ interrogative ~↔ question
- ▶ imperative ~↔ direction

Importantly: only a correlation! (see Kaufmann 2013, Roberts 2017: Sect. 4.2)



Assertion

The discourse move **assertion** affects the common ground:

(see Stalnaker 2002, Farkas & Bruce 2010)

- (5) If a speaker S asserts a sentence with content p , S proposes to update the common ground with p .
- ▶ the preceding common ground is compatible with p and its negation
⇒ an assertion proposes to exclude one of these possibilities



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- ▶ the preceding common ground is compatible with p and its negation
⇒ an assertion proposes to exclude one of these possibilities
 - ▶ **Importantly:** assertion does not automatically update the common ground; the addressee needs to accept the speaker's proposal before an update is effected
⇒ acceptance: “yes”, “aha”, nodding, silence
⇒ rejection needs to be overt: “no”, “no, that's not true”



Polar interrogatives

Which discourse move does A perform in (6)? Is it also an assertion?

(6) A: Did Mary win the tournament?



Polar interrogatives

Which discourse move does A perform in (6)? Is it also an assertion?

(6) A: Did Mary win the tournament?

- ▶ **Like assertions:** the common ground before A's utterance is compatible with both answers.
 - ⇒ Mary won the tournament (declaratives!)
 - ⇒ Mary didn't win the tournament
- ▶ **But:** A's utterance does not propose to update the common ground
 - ⇒ A does not propose to exclude a possibility

How can we describe the effect of A's utterance?



Polar questions – I

(7) A: Did Mary win the tournament?

- ▶ A signals that A would like to know which answer to the question applies.
 - ⇒ A prompts B to provide missing information
- ▶ A consents to update the common ground with either answer.
 - ⇒ B's answer will immediately become common ground



Polar questions – I

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Is there a discourse component that is targeted by A's prompt?



Polar questions – II

- ▶ The common ground cannot be the component that is affected!
- ▶ **Assume another component:** a list of open questions to be settled by the interlocutors (→ questions under discussion, QUD)
 - ⇒ Farkas & Bruce 2010: the Table (more-or-less)
 - ⇒ Roberts 2017: QUD
- ▶ This list can be given an independent motivation!
 - ⇒ **capture and manage the “accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange”**
- ▶ **Effect of A’s prompt:** the content of A’s question is added to the list of open questions



Updated less minimal discourse model

As a result of the above, we can modify the minimal discourse model:

- add another component to manage open questions
- specify: rules encoding the effect of utterances = discourse moves
 - ▶ list of interlocutors
 - ▶ their common ground
 - ▶ the current list of open questions
 - ▶ rules encoding the effect of different utterances: discourse moves

⇒ further analyses will suggest further modifications of this model



Further topics for independent reading

- ▶ **Performativity** (e.g., Condoravdi & Lauer 2011)
(8) You have to clean your room now.

 - ▶ **Fine grained discourse moves:**
 - ▶ initiating moves vs. reacting moves (e.g., Farkas & Bruce 2010)
 - ▶ epistemic resistance moves (Bledin & Rawlins 2016)
 - ▶ moved with imperatives (Roberts 2017)
- ⇒ usually involves extending the model



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