

PHIL 332: Philosophy of Language  
Class 37: More on Speech Acts

1. Last time we discussed pairs of sentences such as the following. Each can be used either constatively (to describe the world), or performatively (to make a promise):
  - a. I promise that I was there.
  - b. I was there.
2. We considered a test for when they are used performatively: iff the speaker could use 'I hereby promise that I was there' instead.
3. We considered a problem case: 'Today is Monday' → 'I assert that today is Monday' → 'I hereby assert that today is Monday'. So according to this test, ordinary constative uses are also performative.
4. But maybe that's right. Maybe we should think of every use of a sentence as being performative – as being used to do something.
5. Idea: every utterance has *illocutionary force*, which is in addition to its *locutionary content* (i.e. descriptive content, what is said).

Different utterances of the one sentence can have different illocutionary forces (even with the same locutionary content). 'That dog has been starving for days' – could be uttered as an observation, or a warning. 'If you don't stop I'll hit you' – is that a threat or a promise? 'I will be there' – is that a prediction, a promise, or a threat?

6. Austin also proposed that utterances can have *perlocutionary effects*: frightening, convincing, alarming, amazing, amusing, annoying, boring, embarrassing, encouraging, deceiving, distracting, impressing, informing, inspiring, insulting, irritating, persuading.

Note the oddity: 'I hereby persuade you that Ithaca is gorgeous.'

7. So when a speaker uses a sentence she performs at least three kinds of act: a *locutionary act*: saying something (which is more than just uttering the sentence); an *illocutionary act*: what is done in saying that – asking a question, giving an order, making a promise, stating a fact, etc; and a *perlocutionary act*: achieving something by means of saying what she did – drawing attention to something, convincing someone of something, getting someone to do something, etc. These are three different kinds of things that we do with words.

Example: 'Shut the door!'

8. Austin thought that no one of these three kinds of act could be reduced to the other two.

9. According to Austin, when I speaker uses the sentences in (1) to make a promise, she is not describing the world, not saying something that is true or false (as in constative uses). Rather, she is doing something, or getting something done. Is that right?
10. Question: what, if any, are the truth conditions of 'I promise that I was there'?
11. At least three options:
- 'I promise that I was there' as uttered by S is neither true nor false.
  - 'I promise that I was there' as uttered by S is true iff S promises that she was there.
  - 'I promise that I was there' as uttered by S is true iff S was there.
12. Here might be an argument in favour of the second option: 'I freely promise that I was there', 'I gladly promise that I was there', 'I reluctantly promise that I was there', etc. Even: 'Mindful that you might not believe me, I promise that I was there'.
13. Here are some considerations which might favour the second option:
- I promise that I was there.
  - I promised that I was there.
  - I will promise that I was there.
  - Mary promises that she was there.
14. Perhaps the difference between these four cases is that in uttering the first I am performing *two* illocutionary acts.
- Concern: my utterance makes itself true – I cannot utter the sentence falsely. Is that right? Compare: 'I am speaking' – cannot be uttered falsely. What about 'I state that I was there'?
15. Another possibility: there are at least two truth-evaluable entities associated with the utterance. One argument in favour of this: A speaker can say something true using 'I assert that grass is green', so she must at the same time be asserting that grass is green.
16. Final question: should illocutionary force be included in a theory of meaning?