

Introduction to Linguistics (CL1.102)

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Speech Acts

Performatives and Constantives (contd.)

Performatives cannot be true or false, but they can be infelicitous or unhappy (or misfire). Austin provides a typology of conditions which performatives must meet:

1. There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect. The circumstances and persons must be appropriate.
2. The procedure must be executed correctly and completely.
3. The persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions as specified in the procedure. If consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must do so.

Features and Types of Performatives

Performatives are characterised by special features:

- They tend to begin with a first-person verb in the simple present tense.
- The verb belongs to a special class describing verbal activities.
- Their performative nature can be emphasised by the adverb *hereby*.

These, however, are explicit performatives. In another class of performatives, the implicit ones, some of these characteristics are relaxed. Examples of these are *You are arrested.*, *They are requested not to snore.*, etc.

Force

Austin gives 3 basic senses in which “saying something” is “doing something”:

- Locutionary act/force: the speaker utters a sentence with determinate sense and reference.
- Illocutionary act/force: It is the action intended by the speaker. This is what the term “speech acts” often refers to.
- Perlocutionary act/force: It is the effect or “take-up” of an illocutionary act on the participants.

Perlocutionary force is not particularly linguistic in nature. For example, for the utterance *Shoot her!*, the illocutionary force is of ordering the the addressee. But it has the perlocutionary effect of forcing or frightening the addressee into shooting her.

Sentence Types

There is a matching between sentence types and speech acts:

- Interrogative – the act of questioning
- Imperative – the act of ordering/requesting
- Declarative – the act of making a statement

However, this conventional matching (direct speech acts) is often superseded by an “extra” or more immediate interpretation (indirect speech acts). For example, *Would you mind passing the salt?*, although syntactically a question, has the illocutionary force of a request.