

Introduction to Linguistics (CL1.102)

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Speech Acts

Sentence Types (contd.)

Typically, the literal meaning is backgrounded or secondary and the non-literal meaning is primary.

Politeness (face needs) is the chief motivation for the indirect use of speech acts. For example, the difference between *Leave me alone!* and *I wonder if you would mind leaving me alone.* is one of saving face.

Categorising Speech Acts

Searle gives 5 types of speech acts:

- representatives: these commit the speaker to the truth of the statement (assertions or conclusions)
- directives: these are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (requests or questions)
- commissives: the speaker commits to some future course of action (promises or threats)
- expressives: these express a psychological state (thanks, apologies or congratulations)
- declarations: these effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs – they typically rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (declaring war, christening, marrying, excommunicating or firing)

Searle also developed Austin's felicity conditions into a classification of conditions necessary for a successful speech act: preparatory, propositional, sincerity and essential. For example, for the act of promising, the conditions are:

- preparatory –
 - H would prefer S's doing A to S's not doing A, and S believes this.
 - it is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events.
- propositional – in expressing P, S predicates a future act A of S.
- sincerity – S intends to do A.
- essential – the utterance e counts as an undertaking to do A.

The study of speech acts is important as it allows us to understand better how interactions combine linguistic and other forms of knowledge to communicate unconsciously and seamlessly.

Conversational Implicature

Literal Meaning vs Conveyed Meaning

Normal conversation involves many inferences which are not made explicit. It allows more to be expressed than what is literally intended. For example, consider the following exchange:

X: Can you tell me the time?

Y: Well, the class has already started.

Semantics gives us the interpretation:

X: Do you have the ability to tell me the time?

Y: The class started at some time prior to the time of speaking.

However, what is interpreted ordinarily is:

X: Do you have the ability to tell me the time, of the present moment, as standardly indicated on a watch, and if so please tell me.

Y: No, I don't know the exact time of the present moment, but I can provide some information from which you may be able to deduce the approximate time, *i.e.*, the class has already started.

The notion of implicature is intended to bridge this gap between what is said and what is in fact conveyed.

Advantages of Implicature

The meaning of *and* in the two sentences *Modi is the PM and Shah is the HM.* and *She wore a nightdress and went to bed.* are not apparently the same, as the second one cannot be reversed. Semanticists could deal with this in two ways:

- propose two senses of “and”, or
- claim that meanings of words are influenced by collocational environments.

The first option leads to an endless list of senses for the simplest words: consider, for instance, the two sentences *The flag is white.* and *The flag is white, red and blue.*, where “white” would have to have two different senses.

The second option doesn't allow us to explain how to determine the sense of the word in question.

Implicature provides a way out of this dilemma, by bringing in pragmatics to explain the difference in meaning.

Implicature claims that natural language expressions have simple, stable and unitary senses, but this stable core has an unstable, context-sensitive pragmatic overlay. This overlay is nothing but a set of implicatures.

The principles that generate implicatures have a very general explanatory power – for example, how tautologies convey meaning, or how metaphors work.