Week 4 summary: Speech Acts and Conventional Implicatures

1. Speech acts and sentence types

(1)   When a speaker utters a sentence, three types of actions are performed:

Locutionary act: the act of uttering the sentence.

Illocutionary act: the act that is performed in uttering the sentence.

Perlocutionary act: the acts that are realized as a consequence of the locutionary and illocutionary acts

Example:

(Chris to Jess): Leave!
(Jess leaves).

Locutionary act: The physical act of Chris uttering "Leave!"

Illocutionary act: the act of Chris giving an order to Jess.

Perlocutionary act: the act of Jess leaving.

(2)   Speech act theory is mostly concerned with the study of illocutionary acts and their relation to sentence types.

(3)   There are three major sentence types:

Declaratives: Jess left.

Interrogatives: Did Jess leave?

Imperatives: Leave!

Sentences of each type can be used to realize different illocutionary acts.

(4)   (Jess makes an assertion by uttering a declarative): Chris left.

(Jess asks question by uttering an interrogative): Did Chris leave?

(Jess gives an order by uttering an imperative): Leave!

(5)   Here are some important types of illocutionary acts:

> Assertion
>
> Question
>
> Suggestion
>
> Invitation
>
> Request
>
> Order
>
> Threat
>
> Accusation
>
> Promise
>
> Greeting
>
> Congratulations

(6)   Types of illocutionary acts are defined by constitutive rules

(7)   Rules for promising to do an act A by a speaker S to a hearer H (simplified):

Propositional content rule:		the sentence describes a future act by S
Preparatory rules:	(i)	H wants S to perform A, and S believes that H wants S to perform A
	(ii)	it is not obvious to H and A that S will perform A
Sincerity condition:		S intends to perform A
Essential condition:		through the utterance, S commits herself to do A

(8)   Searle calls these kind of rules *constitutive* rules, because they are conventions that define what the relevant illocutionary act is: a promise is just the kind of act that conforms to the rules above.

For Searle, the rules in (7) do not *regulate* acts of promising, they *define* what it means to be a promise, like the rules of chess define the game of chess.

(9)   Searle argued that illocutionary acts can be grouped into fives classes:

1. Representatives: commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (asserting, concluding, etc.)

2. Directives: attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (requesting, questioning)

3. Commissives: commit the speaker to some future course of action (promising, threatening, offering)

4. Expressives: express a psychological state (thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating)

5. Declarations: effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (excommunicating, declaring war ...)

2. Performative Sentences

(10)   A performative sentence is a sentence that describes a speech act A that is performed by virtue of uttering the sentence.

(11)   For instance, by virtue of saying "I apologize to you", a speaker performs an act of apologizing to the addressee.

(12)   A verb that can be used to create a performative sentence is called a performative verb.

(13)   Not all verbs are performative. For instance, "win" cannot be used to create performative sentences. I cannot win the lottery simply by saying "I win the lottery".

(14)   In addition, performative sentences are always in the present tense, and have first person subjects (like "I" or "we") in the active voice.[1]

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[1]It is also possible to form passive performative sentences, such as "You are hereby sentenced to 10 years of hard labor." In that case, the logical subject is first person, although the grammatical subject might not be.

3. Conventional implicatures

(15)   Conventional implicatures are inferences that are conventionally associated with certain words (e.g. *but*) or with certain constructions (e.g. appositives, as in *Jeff, <u>that jerk</u>, forgot to turn off the stove*).

This car is good but cheap.
Conventionally implicatures that good cars are not expected to be cheap

Jeff, that jerk, forgot to turn off the stove.
Conventionally implicates that Jeff is a jerk.

3.1 Conventional implicatures and at-issue entailments

(16)   Conventional implicatures differ from simple entailments because they are **not at issue**: they are not part of the main point of an utterance.

Not at-issue inferences aren't targeted by denials, by assent, or by questioning (slides 34-36).

(17)   In addition, conventional implicatures also differ from simple entailments because they survive negation and questioning (slides 37-38).

3.2 Conventional implicatures and presuppositions

(18)   Conventional implicatures differ from presuppositions because they are speaker oriented: conventional implicatures are presented as opinions of the speaker, while presuppositions are presented as shared knowledge (slides 39-40).

3.3 Conventional implicatures and conversational implicatures

(19)   Conventional implicatures differ from conversational implicatures because:

- They are not cancellable (slide 41)
- They are not reinforceable without redundancy (slide 42)
- They are not calculable (slide 43)

(20)   Examples of conventional implicatures (the expression or construction that triggers the CI is underlined)

- nominal appositives:

Ames, <u>the former spy</u>, is now behind bars.
CI: Ames is a former spy

- parenthetical adverbial clauses:

  Ames was, <u>as the press reported</u>, a successful spy.
  CI: the press reported that Ames was a successful spy

- Non-restrictive relative clauses

  Ed's claim, <u>which is based on extensive research</u>, is highly controversial.
  CI: Ed's claim is based on extensive research

- Evaluative adverbs (adverbs used to express a judgment about the situation described by the sentence):

  <u>Fortunately</u>, Jess lucked out.
  CI: It is fortunate that Jess lucked out.

- Speech act adverbs (adverbs used to comment on the speech act):

  <u>Honestly</u>, he's a crook.
  CI: the speaker's assertion is honest

- Expressive attributive adjectives:

  My <u>friggin'</u> bike tire is flat again.
  CI: the speaker is not happy with their bike tire

- Epithets:

  Every politician advocating a proposal for reform says <u>the stupid thing</u> is worthwhile.
  CI: every proposal for reform advocated by a politician is stupid