LIN241

Introduction to Semantics

Lecture 4

Limitations of truth-conditional semantics

Doing things with words

- Truth-conditional semantics:

Meaning as Truth-Conditions:
To know the meaning of a declarative sentence is to know the conditions in which it is true.

Doing things with words

- Obvious problem: sentences that have no truth-conditions.

    - Using imperatives to give orders:

      Go get me a coffee!

    - Using interrogative sentences to ask questions:

      Are you okay?

Doing things with words

- Hypothesis (to be rejected!):

    - The meaning of imperative and interrogative sentences consists in the kind of action that they can be used to perform.

    - The meaning of declarative sentences is completely captured by their truth-conditions.

Doing things with words

- According to this hypothesis (to be rejected!):

  - Imperatives and interrogatives are used to perform actions, and this is what their meaning consists in.

  - Declaratives are not used to perform actions, they are merely statements that are true or false.

Problem: performative sentences

- Some declarative sentences are used to perform actions:

  I apologize.

  I hereby christen this ship the H.M.S. Flounder.

  I warn you that trespassers will be prosecuted.

  I sentence you to ten years of hard labor.

- These are called performative sentences.

Problem: performative sentences

- Performative sentences appear to have truth-conditions:

  - "I apologize" is true iff the speaker apologizes.

- Yet they are used to perform actions.

  - Saying "I apologize" sincerely **is in itself** an apology.

Problem: performative sentences

- Performative sentences have a particular form:

  - First person subject:

    Performative: **I apologize.**
    Not performative: **He apologizes.**

  - Present tense:

    Performative: **I apologize.**
    Not performative: **I apologized.**

  - Performative verb:

    Performative: **I hereby apologize!**
    Not performative: #**I hereby make you love semantics!**

Performative and constative sentences

- A tempting conclusion (to be rejected):

  - Performative declaratives are used to perform actions.

  - Non-performative declaratives are not.

- Non-performative declarative sentences are called **constatives**.

Performative and constative sentences

- Even constative sentences are used to perform actions.

- By asserting a proposition, a speaker commits herself to behave as if she believed the proposition was true.

- If it can be shown that the speaker did not believe in the truth of the proposition, the speaker can be accused of lying.

- Asserting a proposition is an action with social consequences.

Conclusion

- All types of sentences are used to perform actions:

    - declaratives (constatives and performatives)

    - imperatives,

    - interrogatives.

- We call these actions **speech acts.**

Questions

- How is the truth-conditional meaning of S used in a speech act performed by uttering S?

- Does the truth-conditional meaning of a sentence S constrain which speech act S can be used to perform?

- What is the relation between sentence types and speech acts?

  - Is this relation one to one?

  - What is the nature of this relation? Is it purely conventional?

  - Do speech acts interact with grammar?

Describing Speech Acts

Three kinds of speech acts

- When a sentence is uttered, three kinds of acts are performed:

  - **Locutionary act**: the act of uttering the sentence.

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

  - **Perlocutionary act**: the act(s) that are realized as a consequence of the locutionary and illocutionary acts.

Three kinds of speech acts

- Example:

  [Jess shouts at Chris:]

  (S) Go get me a coffee right now!

  [Chris punches Jess in the nose.]

- Jess's locutionary act: the act of uttering (S).

- Jess's illocutionary act: Jess's giving an order to Chris.

- Chris's perlocutionary act: Jess angers Chris.

Three kinds of speech acts

- Linguists are mostly interested in illocutionary acts.

- **Speech act** has become synonymous with **illocutionary act**.

Describing Illocutionary Acts

- What conditions must be satisfied for an utterance of the following sentences to count as a promise?

  - I promise I will come tomorrow.

Rules of promising (Searle 1969)

1 P is to be uttered only in the context of a sentence (or larger stretch of discourse) the utterance of which predicates some future act A of the speaker S.

2 P is to be uttered only if the hearer H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A, and S believes H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A.

3 P is to be uttered only if it is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events.

4 P is to be uttered only if S intends to do A.

5 The utterance of P counts as the undertaking of an obligation to do A.

1 is a **propositional content rule**

2-3 are **preparatory rules**

4 is a **sincerity rules**

5 is the **essential rule**

Constitutive rules for speech acts

These rules are constitutive: they define what the Speech Act is.

- propositional content rule:

  - What kind proposition can be used to make the SA?

- preparatory rules

  - In what kind of context can one make the SA?

- sincerity rule

  - What should be the intention of the speaker?

- essential rule

  - What does the SA commit the speaker to?

Classes of Illocutionary acts (Searle 1976)

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 ...)

From Sentence Type to Illocutionary Force

Force Conventionalism

- Searle argued that the form of sentences is conventionally associated with a typical illocutionary force:

the semantic structure of a language may be regarded as a conventional realization of a series of sets of underlying constitutive rules, and (…) speech acts are acts characteristically performed by uttering sentences in accordance with these sets of constitutive rules. (Searle 1969)

Challenges to conventionalism

- Conventionalism about sentence types and speech acts is complicated by the fact that a single sentence may be used to perform different kinds of speech acts.

Challenges to conventionalism

Sentence type	Examples	Force
Declarative	Turtles are amazing.	assertion
	I wonder where Kim is.	question
	You should move your bicycle.	suggestion
	You can have a cookie.	invitation
	It would be a shame if something happened to your store.	threat
Interrogative	Is today Tuesday?	question
	What day is today?	question
	What on earth are you doing?	accusation
	Do you want to have ice-cream?	invitation
	Could you help me?	request
Imperative	Move your bicycle!	command
	Have a cookie.	invitation
	Please rain!	plea
	Get well soon!	well-wish
	Turn right here.	request

Challenges to conventionalism

- Searle (1975): each sentence type is associated with a conventional illocutionary force; deviations from these norms are **indirect speech acts**.

  - **You should move your bycicle.**

    Direct speech act: assertion.

    Indirect speech act: suggestion.

- Indirect speech acts must be inferred from direct speech acts.

- Searle argues that indirect speech acts arise by implicature.

Searle on Indirect Speech Acts

- Let us have a look at how Searle analyses a concrete example:

  - Can you pass the salt?

    Direct SA: question

    Indirect SA: request

Can you pass the salt?

Step 1: Y has asked me a question as to whether I have the ability to pass the salt (fact about the conversation).

Step 2: 1 assume that he is cooperating in the conversation and that therefore his utterance has some aim or point (principles of conversational cooperation).

Step 3: The conversational setting is not such as to indicate a theoretical interest in my salt-passing ability (factual background information).

Step 4: Furthermore, he probably already knows that the answer to the question is yes (factual background information). (This step facilitates the move to Step 5, but is not essential).

Can you pass the salt?

Step 5: Therefore, his utterance is probably not just a question. It probably has some ulterior illocutionary point (inference from Steps 1, 2, 3, and 4). What can it be ?

Step 6: A preparatory condition for any directive illocutionary act is the ability of H to perform the act predicated in the propositional content condition (theory of speech acts).

Step 7: Therefore, X has asked me a question the affirmative answer to which would entail that the preparatory condition for requesting me to pass the salt is satisfied (inference from Steps 1 and 6).

Can you pass the salt?

Step 8: We are now at dinner and people normally use salt at dinner; they pass it back and forth, try to get others to pass it back and forth, etc. (background information).

Step 9: He has therefore alluded to the satisfaction of a preparatory condition for a request whose obedience conditions it is quite likely he wants me to bring about (inference from Steps 7 and 8).

Step 10: Therefore, in the absence of any other plausible illocutionary point, he is probably requesting me to pass him the salt (inference from Steps 5 and 9).

Conventional Implicatures

Grice on Conventional Implicatures

In some cases, the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said. If I say (smugly), *He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave*, I have certainly committed myself, by virtue of the meaning of my words, to its being the case that his being brave is a consequence of (follows from) his being an Englishman. But while I have said that he is an Englishman, and said that he is brave, I do not want to say that I have said (in the favored sense) that it follows from his being an Englishman that he is brave, though I have certainly indicated, and so implicated, that this is so. I do not want to say that my utterance of this sentence would be, strictly speaking, false should the consequence in question fail to hold.

Conventional Implicatures

- Unlike simple entailments:

  - They are **not at-issue**

  - They **survive negation and questioning**

- Unlike presuppositions:

  - They are **speaker oriented**

- Unlike conversational implicatures:

  - They are **not cancellable**

  - They are **not reinforceable**

  - They are **not calculated** but conventional

Not at-issue meaning

- At-issue meaning is part of the main point of an utterance.

- Not at-issue meaning isn't targeted by simple denials:

    - A: Chris is English and therefore brave.

      B: That's not true!

    - A: That jerk Winston survived the incident.

      B: That's not true!

Not at-issue meaning

- At-issue meaning is part of the main point of an utterance.

- Not at-issue meaning isn't targeted by simple assent:

  - A: Chris is English and therefore brave.

    B: I agree!

  - A: That jerk Winston survived the incident.

    B: That's correct!

Not at-issue meaning

- At-issue meaning is part of the main point of an utterance.

- Not at-issue meaning isn't questioned in interrogatives:

  - Is Chris English and therefore brave?

  - Did that jerk Winston survive the incident?

Surviving negation

- Conventional implicatures survive negation:

  - Chris is English and therefore brave.

    - It's not true that Chris is English and therefore brave.

  - That jerk Winston survived the incident.

    - That jerk Winston didn't survive the incident.

Surviving questioning

- Conventional implicatures survive questioning:

  - Chris is English and therefore brave.

    - Is Chris English and therefore brave?

  - That jerk Winston survived the incident.

    - Did that jerk Winston survive the incident?

Speaker orientedness

- Conventional implicatures are speaker oriented:

  - Chris is English and therefore brave.

    - The relation between being English and being brave is presented as the speaker's opinion

  - That jerk Winston survived the incident.

    - That Winston is a jerk is presented as the speaker's opinion

Speaker orientedness

- Presuppositions are presented as part of the common ground:

  - Jess stopped smoking.

    - Presupposition: Jess used to smoke.

    - Speaker assumes it is shared knowledge that Jess used to smoke.

  - Chris knows that Jess is a professional curler.

    - Presupposition: Jess is a professional curler.

    - Speaker assumes it is shared knowledge that Jess is a professional curler.

Not cancellable

- Conventional implicatures are not cancellable:

  - Chris is English and therefore brave, # although I don't think that English people tend to be brave.

  - That jerk Winston survived the incident, #but I don't think he's a jerk.

Not reinforceable

- Conventional implicatures are not reinforceable without redundancy:

  - Chris is English and therefore brave, #and I think English people are brave.

  - That jerk Winston survived the incident, #and he's a jerk!

Not calculable

- Conventional implicatures are not calculated but conventional

- Consider the concessive conventional implicature of "but":

  - This car is cheap but good.

- We can't calculate the concessive meaning of "but" from its at-issue meaning and the cooperative principle:

  - indeed, its at-issue meaning is just that of conjunction

  - so if its concessive meaning were calculable from its at-issue meaning, we'd expect it to arise with "and"

Appositives and Parentheticals

- Nominal appositives:

    - Ames, the former spy, is now behind bars.

- Parenthetical adverbial clauses:

    - Ames was, as the press reported, a successful spy.

Sources: Potts, C. 2005. The logic of conventional implicatures; Coppock, E. 2012. Conventional Implicatures.

Non-restrictive relative clauses

- Ed's claim, which is based on extensive research, is highly controversial.

- I spent part of every summer until I was ten with my grandmother, who lived in a working-class suburb of Boston.

Sources: Potts, C. 2005. The logic of conventional implicatures; Coppock, E. 2012. Conventional Implicatures.

Speaker-oriented adverbs

- Evaluative adverbs:

  - Fortunately, Jess lucked out.

  - Inexplicably, Chris wrote a cristal clear report.

- Speech act adverbials:

  - Honestly, he's a crook.

  - Truthfully, this is a lie.

Expressives

- Expressive attributive adjectives:

  - My friggin' bike tire is flat again!

- Epithets:

  - Every politician advocating a proposal for reform says the stupid thing is worthwhile.

Sources: Potts, C. 2005. The logic of conventional implicatures; Coppock, E. 2012. Conventional Implicatures.