Speech Act Theory

言　语　行　为　　理　论

"How to do things with words"

"如何以言行事？"

30 October 2023

0. A recap of Gricean theory of Conversational Implicature

- Grice's theory of conversational implicature aims to account for why people are able to further a conversation (as long as they want it to be), even though they don't always speak their minds. For Grice, the answer is simple: **People are generally being co-operative** in that they are trying to make some contribution to the topic of conversation.

- He proposed the Co-operative Principle, which was fleshed out (详细说明) in four maxims of conversation.
  - Maxim of quality
  - Maxim of quantity
  - Maxim of relation
  - Maxim of manner
  - **In one word,** Conversationalists are trying to speak informatively (quantity), truthfully (quality), relevantly (relation) and appropriately (manner).
    交际双方所说的话要信息量充足、真实、相关、恰当

Today

- **Speech act**: its definition
  - Speech can be used to do things, e.g., 言出必行；说话算数

- **Speech act theory**

  - What is language used for? It is generally assumed that it is used to communicate information. But this is not the whole story.

  - For pragmaticists, language is used **NOT ONLY** to communicate messages, **BUT ALSO to do things, i.e., perform acts**.

- **Dimensions** of a speech act, i.e., speech can be looked at from different perspectives

- **Classification** of speech acts
  - function-based
  - structure-based

Speech (sometimes) amounts to action!
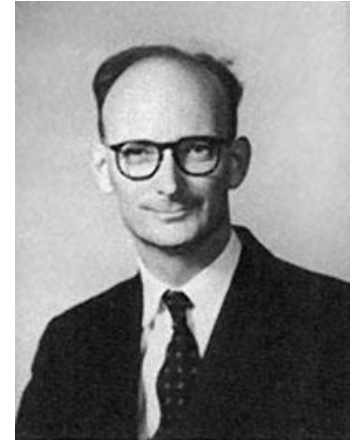
- ## 伟大领袖毛主席宣布新中国成立了

  - 时间：1949年10月1日下午3时
  - 地点：天安门城楼

After Chairman Mao's speech, a new country came into being!

1. Some background

- **Speech Act Theory** was proposed by the British philosopher **John Austin** (1911-1960) and has been developed by the American philosopher **John Searle** (1932 -). 言语行为理论首先由英国哲学家奥斯汀创建，后经美国哲学家约翰·赛尔发展，延续至今。

- In his 1962 book "**How to do things with words**" Austin first introduces the idea of "speech act", analysing the **relationships between utterance and performance**. He argues that language is not merely used to inform or to describe things, it is also used to "do things", to perform acts, e.g. *You're fired*.

   奥斯汀认为，语言不仅可以用来传递信息，还常常用来实施某种行为。

1. Some background

- We can do a wide range of things with words, e.g.,

  借助语言，我们可以做各种各样的事情

  - **Conveying information** 传递信息: 克强总理去世了。

  - **Giving orders** 发号施令: *Freeze!*

  - **Making threats** 威胁: 再不听话，我就揍你。

  - **Giving warnings** 警示告诫: *There's a hornet (*黄蜂*) on your shoulder.*

  - **Giving advice** 忠告建议: 你该成家了。

  - **Making requests** 提出请求：*Could I use your pencil*?

  …

- **Animals like parrots can learn to talk like humans.**

  ❑ ***ALEX*** *– A Wonderful African Grey Parrot*

  Question: how many requests did the parrot make in the video clip?

2. Speech acts

- As you can see, people use language with a variety of communicative intentions. **Speech acts are acts of communication that express those intentions**. 人们使用语言可以表达各种各样的交际意图，而**言语行为**就是能够**表达这些意图的交际行为**。

  - **Speech acts** generally refer to the actions performed **via** utterances. 言语行为通常是指通过话语实施的行为。

  - Sentences (or utterances) that can be used to perform actions are called **performatives** (or performative sentences/utterances). 用来实施行为的句子称为"施为句"。

3. Speech Act Theory

- Austin proposes that a speech act can be divided into three different smaller acts, if it is examined carefuly:

  奥斯汀将言语行为一分为三

  - **locutionary act** 言内行为

  - **illocutionary act** 言外行为

  - **perlocutionary act** 言后行为

3.1 Locutionary act 言内行为

- A locutionary act is the act of saying/uttering itself, i.e., **the literal meaning** of an utterance 言内行为是指说话这一行为本身，即话语字面意思的传达。

  - This is usually *the act of producing an utterance (or uttering a sentence)*通常指说出话语的行为。

    - **Locution: A form of expression**; a phrase, an expression (Oxford Talking Dictionary, 1998) 语言的表达形式，比如词组、句子

3.2 Illocutionary act 言外行为

- An illocutionary act is the communicative **intention** of an utterance. 言外行为是指说话人通过话语表达其真正的意图。

  - **Illocution: An action** performed by saying or writing something, e.g., asserting, ordering, warning, and promising, etc. (Oxford Talking Dictionary 1998) 通过口头或书面等语言表达形式实施的行为，比如断言、命令、警告、承诺

3.3 Perlocutionary act 言后行为

- A perlocutionary act is **result or effect** that is produced by an utterance. 言后行为是指话语造成的结果或影响

  - This is usually the effect an utterance has on the hearer, e.g., **advising someone to do something** is *illocutionary (intention)*, but **s/he doing it is perlocutionary (effect)** (if the advice is taken). 通常是指话语对听话人造成的影响，比如规劝某人做某事是一种言外行为（意图），而他/她付诸行动就是言后行为（结果）。

3.4 Dimensions of a speech act 言语行为的维度

- **A speech act = *locutionary act***
  + *illocutionary act*
  + *perlocutionary act*

  一个言语行为是言内行为、言外行为和言后行为的加合

- These are the **three dimensions** of a speech act, which means that they are not performed separately. 这三种行为是言语行为的三个维度，不是单独实施的。

- In an utterance, **usually** we are likely to find these different aspects. 在话语中，我们常常可以发现话语的这三种维度。

3.5 Illustrative example

- (1) *It's stuffy here.*

  - *The locutionary act* is **the saying of it** with its literal meaning *"There isn't enough fresh air in here".* 言内行为是说这句话本身的行为，它的字面意义"这里没有足够的新鲜空气"。

  - *The illocutionary act* (i.e. **the speaker's intention**) can be a *request* of the hearer to open the window. 其言外行为（意图）很可能是"请求听话人打开窗户"。

  - *The perlocutionary act* (i.e. *the result or effect*) can be the hearer's opening the window or his/her refusal to do so, that is, there are two possible results. 其言后行为（结果）既可能是"是听话人打开窗户"也可能是"听话人拒绝请求"。

3.6 Illocutionary force（语力）

In fact, we might utter (1) to make a statement, a request, an explanation, or for some other communicative purposes. These different **communicative purposes or social functions** are what is also generally known as the **illocutionary force** of the utterance. 我们可以通过例 (1) 实现多种交际意图，这些不同的**交际意图或社交功能**统称为话语的**"语力"**。

- ❑ **Pragmaticists often use the term "speech act" quite narrowly to mean** only the illocutionary force of an utterance. 语用学家们常常狭义地用"言语行为"指"语力"。

- ❑ Quite often, the same utterance can have different illocutionary forces **in different contexts**. 语境不同，同样一句话表达的语力也会不同。

Illocutionary force

- A same utterance, if it occurs in different situational contexts, may have different illocutionary forces(/communicative purposes / communicative functions).

A: *Do you think I'm a good cook?*
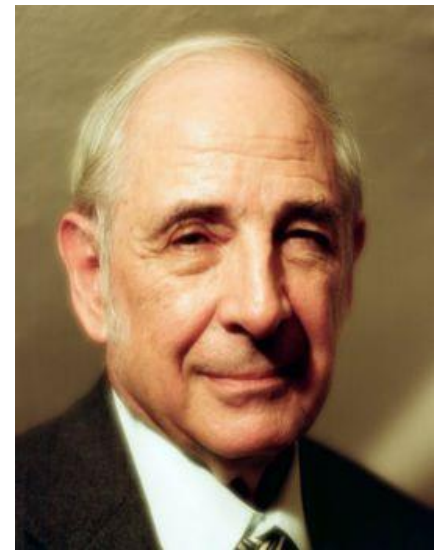B: ***You make good coffee****.*

A: *It's your turn to make coffee.*
B: ***You make good coffee****.*

4. Classification of speech acts 言语行为分类

■ In general, there are **two approaches** to distinguishing the types of speech acts people perform in everyday conversations: **function-based** vs **structure-based.** 一般来说，言语行为的分类方法有两种：基于功能的划分和基于结构的划分。

❑ By **function** here, we mean **what** **a speech act** **is used for**.

4.1 Function-based classification system

- John **Searle**, a Berkeley philosopher, suggests **five basic types of speech acts**, based on **the functions** performed:

  - **Representatives** 阐述类

  - **Directives** 指令类

  - **Commissives** 承诺类

  - **Expressives** 表达类

  - **Declaratives** 宣告类

4.1.1 Representatives, directives, commissives

- **Representatives** （阐述类）: The speaker asserts a proposition (命题 i.e. the state of affairs described by a sentence) to be true, usually containing or using such verbs as: *affirm, believe, conclude, deny, report,* etc. 说话人断言命题的真实性，这类行为包括**确认、相信、断定、否认、报告**等

- **Directives** (指令类): the speaker tries to make the hearer do something, with such words as: *ask, beg, command, dare, invite, insist, request.* 说话人设法让听话人做某事，这类行为包括**要求、乞求、命令、邀请、请求**等

- **Commissives** （承诺类）: the speaker commits himself/herself to a (future) course of action, with verbs such as: *guarantee, pledge, promise, swear, vow, undertake, warrant.* 说话人对自己将来的行为做出承诺，这类行为包括**保证、发誓、许诺、宣誓、承担、担保**等

4.1.2 Expressives, declaratives

- **Expressives** （表达类）: the speaker expresses an attitude about a state of affairs, using such verbs as: *apologize, appreciate, congratulate, deplore, detest, regret, thank, welcome*. 说话人表达对某一事件的态度，这类行为包括**道歉、感激、祝贺、哀叹、厌恶、后悔、欢迎**等

- **Declaratives** (宣告类): the speaker **alters** the status or condition of an object or situation, solely by making the utterance 说话人的话语能够使客观世界发生变化，如：

  - 我宣布北京冬季奥运会正式开幕。（习书记）

  - *I now pronounce you man and wife.*

  - *I divorce you right now.* (我现在就休了你 in Isam)

4.1.2.1 declaratives 宣告类

- **Minister** (牧师 addressing the groom):

(Groom's Name), do you take (Bride's Name) for your lawful wedded wife, to live together after God's law, in the holy estate of matrimony（婚姻）? Will you love, honour, comfort, and cherish her from this day forward, forsaking（放弃）all others(不作他想), keeping only unto her for as long as you both shall live?

- **Groom : *I will/do.***

   …
- **Bride: *I will.***

王子的婚礼

平民的婚礼

4.2 Structure-based classification system
基于结构的分类系统

- A different approach to distinguishing speech acts is made according to sentence structure: 根据**句子结构**进行区分是言语行为的另外一种**分类方法**

  - **Declarative** 陈述句 (e.g., *You keep your mouth shut.*)

  - **Imperative** 祈使句 (*Keep your mouth shut !*)

  - **Interrogative** 疑问句 (e.g., *Can you keep your mouth shut*?)

References

- Cruse, A. 2004. *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Grice, H.P. 1975. Logic and conversation. In P. Cole & J.L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press.

- **Huang, Y. 2007.** *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Pinker, S. 2007. *The Stuff of Thought*. New York: Penguin Books.

Suggested Reading:

- Yule, George. 1996. *Pragmatics*. OUP.

Homework: WTO

Watch: （有志于语言学研究的人必看）

    1. *The King's Speech*

    2. 《编舟记》

      （参见豆瓣影评：《不要跟职人谈人生 》）

Think:

    Can you identify instances of speech act in the movies?

Other questions?

Student presentation on Nov 6

- **Requirements:**

- Choose *a topic of pragmatics* we've discussed, and tell *a story (better with videos, pictures) and give your own analysis/comments*.

- Time limit: 5 minutes' presentation

  plus 3 minutes' question time

  - Please note that **those who didn't do last time will be given priority to doing it this round**.