

Culture & Communication

Alessandro Duranti

Anthropology 4, Winter 2021

Lecture # 5: From Words to Acts

Today

1. Pragmatic power of words (Malinowski)
2. Performative utterances (Austin)
3. Utterances = speech acts
4. Types of speech acts
5. Greetings
6. From individual speech acts to sequences of acts (e.g., turns of conversation)

Greetings

Good morning

Good afternoon

Good evening

Good night

Hi.

How are you?

How are you doing?

What's up (man/dude/...)?

Zup?

Hey.

(Name).

Greetings change over time

Closing salutations:

Good-bye.

Bye.

See you.

Take it easy.

Have a good day

Have a good one.

Have a wonderful day.

Have a wonderful rest of the day.

have a good weekend

Have a wonderful weekend.

Have a wonderful rest of the weekend.

Malinowski on meaning

1. Meaning is not just contained in an utterance, it is tied to the “context of situation.” (1923)
2. Collect information on culturally meaningful activities (e.g., how magic formulae helped in the cultivation of gardens). (1935)
3. The “pragmatic use of speech” is its primary meaning (=function). (1935)

“we paddle in place”

[this expression] “can only be properly understood by realizing that the word *paddle* has here the function, not of describing what the crew are doing, but of indicating their immediate proximity to the village of their destination.”
(Malinowski 1923: 304)

“Whenever the natives arrive near the shore of one of the overseas villages, they have to fold the sail and to use the paddles, since the water is deep, even quite close to the shore, and punting impossible.” (305)

“So ‘to paddle’ means ‘to arrive at the overseas village.’” (ib.)
(In another lecture we will see how “means” is used here)

Pragmatic Power of Words

“Two peaks of this **pragmatic power of words**: one of them is to be found in certain sacred uses, that is in magical formulae, sacramental utterances, exorcisms, curses and blessings and most prayers.” (Malinowski 1935: 52, emphasis added)

“The second climax of speech dynamism is to be found obviously in the direct **pragmatic effect of words**. An order given in battle, an instruction issued by the master of a sailing ship, a cry for help, are as powerful in modifying the course of events as any other bodily act.” (ib. 53, emphasis added)

Intermission: *Zeitgeist*

Zeitgeist = lit. *Geist* ‘spirit’, *Zeit* ‘time’, ‘spirit of the time/era’

Certain ideas pop up at around the same time in different places.

Coincidence?

Borrowing?

Stealing?

A product of what was said/discussed/studied in a given context?

J. L. Austin (1962; 1955 Harvard Lectures)

"the assumption of philosophers [has been] that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely." (Austin 1962: 1)

Examples of "statements" (also called "propositions"):

1. Los Angeles is in California.
2. UCLA is in Los Angeles.
3. UCLA is in California.

If (1) and (2) are true, then (3) is true.

We can say that (2) entails (3).

J. L. Austin (1955 Harvard Lectures)

“Grammarians ... have regularly pointed out that not all ‘sentences’ are (used in making statements: there are ... also questions and exclamations, and ... expressing commands or wishes or concessions.” (ib.)

“the view ... that a statement (of fact) out to be ‘verifiable’ [but] many ‘statements’ are [not].” (ib. p. 2)

Verifiable = they can be evaluated as either true or false

Statements that do not actually state

There are ‘statements’ that do not actually describe or report and cannot be said to be ‘true’ or ‘false’.

Instead, “the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action” (ib. p. 5)

Examples of acts done by saying something: marrying (“I do/will”), naming a ship, nominating someone in a will, betting. [These tend to be “formulas” in “rituals”]

Performative sentence/utterance = performative, “the issuing of the utterance is the **performing of an action**” (p. 6)

But uttering is not the only thing necessary for an act to be performed. There are the **circumstances**, which must be appropriate.

The words must be spoken ‘seriously’ or ‘in good faith’

How many types of speech acts?

For Austin, there are **5 classes of performative verbs**, which are used in the syntactic form “I VERB ...”, e.g., *I promise to ... I request that ... I inform you that...*)

John Searle (Austin’s student) also postulated **5 types of speech acts**

Ludwig Wittgenstein (Austin’s contemporary) also thought utterances are acts, ways of doing things, talked about “types,” but for him there are “countless types.”

Types of Speech Acts (Searle & Vanderveken 1985)

- (i) **Assertives:** *assert, claim, affirm, state, deny, disclaim, assure, argue, rebut, inform, notify, remind, object, predict, report, retrodict, suggest, insist, conjecture, hypothesize, guess, swear, accuse, blame, criticize, praise, complain, boast, lament.*
- (ii) **Directives:** *direct, request, ask, urge, tell, require, demand, command, order, forbid, prohibit, enjoin, permit, suggest, insist, warn, advise, recommend, beg, supplicate, entreat, beseech, implore, pray.*
- (iii) **Expressives:** *apologize, thank, condole, congratulate, complain, lament, protest, deplore, boast, compliment, praise, welcome, greet.*
- (iv) **Declaratives:** *declare, resign, adjourn, appoint, nominate, approve, confirm, disapprove, endorse, renounce, disclaim, denounce, repudiate, bless, curse, excommunicate, consecrate, christen, abbreviate, name, call.*
- (v) **Commissives:** *commit, promise, threaten, vow, pledge, swear, accept, consent, refuse, offer, bid, assure, guarantee, warrant, contract, covenant, bet.*

(from A. Duranti. 1997. *Linguistic Anthropology*, Ch. 7)

What's a greeting?

Malinowski (1923) an example of phatic communion.

Wittgenstein (1953) an example of “language game.”

Austin (1962) a type of performative verb (“behabitve”).

Searle (1975) [based on Austin’s] a type of illocutionary act (“expressive”).

Sacks (1975) a minimal proper conversation.

Malinowski (1923)

If language use is a **mode of action**, what is the **action** of a greeting?

Greetings are an example of “**phatic communion**” (= establishing, maintaining “contact”)

“A mere phrase of politeness ... fulfils a function to which **the meaning of its words is almost completely irrelevant.**”

Is there “information” (“content”) in a greeting?

Good morning

Good afternoon

Good evening

Good night

We could say that when we use any of the above utterances, both us and our addressees already know that it is “morning”, “afternoon,” etc. There is no NEW information.

What are we doing then?

For Malinowski, we are establishing contact,
(re)establishing social bonds, sociality.

in-class exercise

Transcribe what you hear in this audio clip



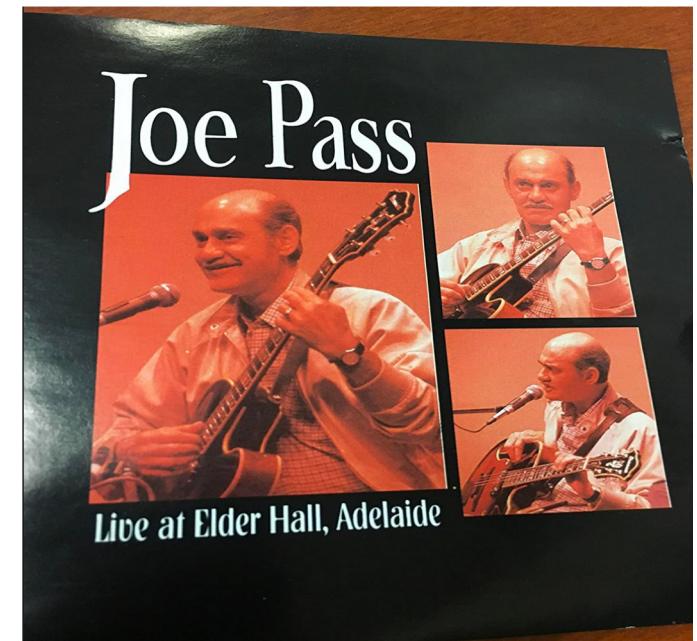
Context of situation



From Joe Pass, *Live At
Elder Hall-Adelaide.*
"Blues In A".



{At 3m:54s, end of applause}



Linguistic context



{At 3m:54s, applause}

((softly)) thank you.

From Joe Pass, *Live At Elder Hall-Adelaide*.

(oh)

“Blues In A”.

thank you. (4:07)

thank you very much.

good afternoon. (4:10)

(it's an) afternoon concert.



Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

“Here the term “language-game” is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.

Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples:

Giving orders, and obeying them –

Describing the appearance of an object [...]

Reporting an event –

[...]

Asking, thanking, cursing, **greeting**, praying.”

Greeting as a Speech Act

Austin classifies them as “behabitatives”, together with apologies, thanks, expressions of sympathy (e.g., compliment, congratulate, condole), attitudes (e.g., criticize, complain, blame, approve), wishes (e.g., bless, curse, toast, drink to, wish).

His student John Searle (UC Berkeley) adopted the same typology but changed the name of the type to “expressives.”

Austin: Behabitives

“Behabitives include the notion of reaction to other people’s behavior and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else’s past conduct or imminent conduct.” (1962: 159)

Examples:

Apologies, thanks, expressions of sympathy (e.g., *compliment*, *condole*, *felicitate*), attitudes (e.g., *complain of*, *applaud*, *deprecate*), wishes, **greetings**, etc.

Expressives

“The illocutionary point of this class is to **express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs** specified in the propositional content. The paradigms of Expressive verbs are 'thank', 'congratulate', 'apologize', 'condole', 'deplore', and 'welcome'.” (Searle 1976:12, emphasis added)

Examples: *apologize, thank, condole, congratulate, complain, lament, protest, deplore, boast, compliment, praise, welcome, greet.*

Conversation Analysis

A group of sociologists in the 1960s started to study spontaneous conversations as forms of social organization.

They showed some remarkable regularities in the ways conversations are structured, their turn-taking rules, pauses and overlaps, and repair mechanisms for self- or other correcting.

Some of the major scholars in this field have been in the UCLA Sociology Department (Schegloff, Heritage) (check out currently offered courses by Profs. Clayman, Stivers, Rossi).

Greetings in spontaneous interaction

From “Walter Capps for Congress”

Research project on political discourse, 1995-96 campaign for the House of Representatives, Santa Barbara-San Louis Obispo District.

Some CONVENTIONS for transcription of conversation:

[square brackets show point of overlap

= Equal sign means “latching” (tightly linked turns, no pause)

__ Underlying marks emphasis, e.g., higher volume.

() Parentheses indicate doubt about accuracy of transcription



Lompoc, California, 1996

File: Greet-WC-3-2-96-a&b.mov

Transcript # 1

Woman1;

Hi.

WCapps;

Hey=Hey. Hi. How're you doing?

Woman1:

Good. [Very good.

[

Wcapps;

[(Here we are)

Woman2;

Hi. How're you doing?

WCapps;

[We're fine.

[

Woman2;

[so (good) to see you.

WCapps;

Nice to see you.

Transcript # 2

WCapps; (Hi!)

Woman; Hi Walter. How you're doing?

WCapps ((extends Right Arm))

Woman; ((reaches with RT Arm to shake hand))
(Nice to see) you again.

WCapps; Nice to see you=nice to see you.
((turns away to his Right))

Woman; ((turns away to her Left))



"WC-Nancy&Introducer-3-2-
96.mov" Lompoc, CA

Transcript # 3

WC; Nancy. Nice to see you come by this morning.

Nancy; It's nice to see you.

((WC turns left & extends hand to other woman))

WC; Hi.

[

Wo4; I'm gonna be introducing you.

Hi.

WC; Hi.



"WC-JOC-NB-3-2-96.mov"
Lompoc, CA

Transcript # 4

NB; Hey Jack!

WC; Hey Jack!

JOC; Hey fellows=How're you doing guys=Walter how're you
doing guy? How are you?

Good=Good=Good. How goes the battle?

WC; (Do you remember)?

JOC; Sure=sure. Nice to see you. Yeah. Yeah.

WC; Who is- who is taller now?

JOC; I talked to your old boss here some weeks ago.

NB; Oh really?



"Hi-Everybody-WC-3-2-96.mov"
Lompoc, CA

“Hi everybody”

((woman hits spoon on a glass to attract attention))

Hi everybody. This is a big room. So::
Jack O’Connell Walter Capps are going to speak
now. [...]

Harvey Sacks (1975)

- 1) Greetings are **ahistorically relevant** (no matter how long you have known each other, you still have to exchange greetings).
- 2) Greetings occur at the **beginning** of a conversation.
- 3) Greetings identify the category "**proper conversationalists**" (i.e., who can have a conversation)

H. Sacks (1975) Everyone has to lie. In *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Use*, ed. By B. Blount & M. Sanchez. Academic Press.

- 4) There are “greeting substitutes”
- 5) Greetings are typically a sequence of two or more turns, e.g.,
A: Greets, B: Greets (back)
- 6) If you are not a possible asker of *how are you?*, you should not ask, because you would not know how to reply to B saying *lousy*
- 7) Therefore B needs to control his/her answer.
Lying is a solution.

“Proper conversationalists”

What does Sacks mean when he writes that the use of greetings defines the set of proper conversationalists?

Proper conversationalists = those who are entitled to have a conversation given the context of the situation.



Meeting the First Lady - Santa Barbara Community College, 1996

HC; hi::! ((walks toward Walter Capps))

hi Walter.

[

WC; oh very nice to see you again.

thanks again for being here.

[

HC; oh I'm- glad to <be here>. {<>= falsetto}

WC; that was a great program.

HC; wasn't that interesting?

WC; it was really interesting.

HC; there's a lot of good things

happening.=hi::!

WC; do you remember Lois my wife?

HC; I do::: [...]

Not all greetings are about health

In the US:

“how are you?” (health, wellbeing question)

In the Trobriands “where are you coming from?”

In Samoa: “Where are you going” (*e te alu `i fea?*)
(movement, whereabouts)

That's all. See you Wednesday.

