

PBI408  
Advance Linguistics 1<sup>st</sup> half year 2012

# Pragmatics

## Speech Act Theory

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"Oh! It's you!"

Contexts:

- Annoying boss at party
- 2 friends with the same name
- Meeting a famous person
- Last words before getting murdered...

An infinite number of possibilities...

Oh! It's you!



Different meaning – different phonology

Hi Stephen

I wanted to post my ppts on the site for the students, but I can't find a way in.  
Can you do it?

Hi Stephen

I wanted to post my ppts on the site for the students, but I can't find a way in.  
**Can you do it?**

Hi Stephen

I wanted to post my ppts on the site for the students, but I can't find a way in.

**Do you know how to do it?**

I'm attaching the file - **perhaps you could upload it for me?**

Thanks

Jill

Dear Dr Murray,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to know whether LING904 will be available externally semester 1 2008. If so, would you use both web ct and i-lectures for distance students. ....

I hope to hear from you soon.

Regards \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Dr Murray,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to know whether LING904 will be available externally semester 1 2008. **If so, would you use both web ct and i-lectures for distance students.....**

I hope to hear from you soon

Regards \_\_\_\_\_

In this session we will consider...

- Key figures in speech act theory
- Speech acts and speech events
- Felicity conditions
- Direct and indirect speech acts
- Classifying speech acts
- Applying speech act analysis to texts
- Cross cultural implications of speech act theory

Major figures in Speech Act Theory

John Austin



*How to Do Things with Words*. The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955. (published in 1962)

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"When may we hope to see your Harvard lectures published sir?"

Major figures in Speech Act Theory

John Austin



*How to Do Things with Words*. The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955. (published in 1962)

"When may we hope to see your Harvard lectures published sir?"  
"You may *hope* to see them published any time"

Major figures in Speech Act Theory

John Searle



*Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, published in 1969. – extended Austin's work.

Constative and performative utterances

**Constative utterances**  
can be true or false

e.g. "There's a bull in the field."

uttering the words does not usually affect the truth of the utterance.



Constative and performative utterances

**Performative utterances**  
cannot be true or false

**The uttering of the words is part of doing the action.**

e.g. "I now pronounce you man and wife."

*"I hereby name this ship the Titanic"*

Constative and performative utterances

**Performative utterances**  
cannot be true or false

**The uttering of the words is part of doing the action.**

e.g. "I now pronounce you man and wife."

*"I hereby name this ship the Titanic"*

**But can be felicitous or infelicitous**

**Felicitous** means that they are uttered by someone who has the power to utter them, in a context in which they have the power to function effectively.

A speech act has three different kinds of FORCE

- locutionary
- illocutionary
- perlocutionary

"There's a bull in the field." can mean....



- **Locutionary act** – the act of making meaning (meaning in the traditional, literal sense - the propositional content of an utterance.)

"There's a bull in the field." can perform the speech act that goes beyond just stating the fact.



- **Illocutionary act** – that act of making an utterance with a certain **force** contributing a particular type of interactional move to a conversation: warning, advising, suggesting, promising, requesting

"There's a bull in the field." can result in the action...



- **Perlocutionary act** : the psychological consequences of the utterance
- what is achieved by the utterance – e.g. the utterance results in deterring the listener from doing something, or in influencing them to do it... (in this case to leave the field quickly)

A speech act has three different kinds of FORCE

To sum up:

- Locutionary – propositional meaning(s)
- Illocutionary- speakers intended effect(s)
- Perlocutionary – the psychological effect(s) on the hearer (intended or not)

Discussion: Consider the utterances:

1. "You're fired"
2. "I sentence you to ten years hard labour"
3. "The weather will be fine tomorrow"
4. "Would you like to come to my party"

Imagine a context where these could be said.

For 3 and 4, what is the probable speaker intent? (Illocutionary force)

What are the probable effects on the hearer? (perlocutionary force)

**Who would the speaker have to be**, for the speech acts to be to be effective?

**Under what circumstances** would they have to be said to be effective?

Four types of felicity conditions

- **Propositional content** (Searle) rules, which specify the kind of meaning expressed by the propositional part of the utterance (e.g., promises refer to future acts by speakers)
- **Preparatory** rules, which specify the prerequisites to the performance of a speech act (e.g., *thanking* depends on the speaker being aware of a past benefit); the speaker having the right to perform the speech act

- **Sincerity** rules, which specify what must obtain if the speech act is to be sincerely performed (e.g., *apologies* presume being sorry);
- **Essential** rules, which specify what the speech act must conventionally 'count as' (e.g., *warnings* count as undertakings that some future event is not in your best interest).

Also:

- **Conditions of execution**  
the ritual or other action may accompany a speech act, and without it the speech act does not "count".

Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.



"I'll be home before midnight."

Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.




[ I promise that ]

"I'll be home before midnight."



Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.

**Involved in the act are:**

- A speaker - S 

Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.

**Involved in the act are:**

- A speaker - S 
- A hearer – H 

Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.

**Involved in the act are:**

- A speaker - **S**
- A hearer – **H**
- A literal utterance - **T**

Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.

**Involved in the act are:**

- A speaker - **S**
- A hearer – **H**
- A literal utterance - **T**
- A proposition '**that p**'

Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.

**Involved in the act are:**

- A speaker - **S**
- A hearer – **H**
- A literal utterance - **T**
- A proposition '**that p**'
- A future act **A**

Felicity conditions for the speech act of promising.

**Involved in the act are:**

- A speaker - **S**
- A hearer - **H**
- A literal utterance - **T**
- A proposition '**that p**'
- A future act **A**
- Some knowledge **K**

**Conditions that apply are:**

**1. Normal input and output conditions**

Intelligible speaking, absence of deafness, aphasia ....

**2. S expresses the proposition 'that p' in the utterance of T**

The proposition can be isolated from the rest of T and recognised in it.

**3. In expressing 'that p' S predicates a future act A of S**

The speaker says she will perform a future action.

PREPARATORY CONDITIONS

**4.**

**H would prefer S doing A to her not doing A,**

**S believes H would prefer her doing A to her not doing A.**

The speaker thinks *the hearer wants her to do it* (rather than not do it)

**5. It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events.**

*(it is not something she would have done anyway.)*

SINCERITY CONDITION

**6. S intends to do A**

( this also implies a belief that it is possible)

ESSENTIAL CONDITION

**7. S intends that the utterance of T will place her under the obligation to do A.**

Because she has said it, she is obliged to do it.

**8. (slightly simplified from Searle's version) S intends to produce in H the knowledge K that the utterance of T is to count as placing S under an obligation to do A.**

i.e. it's not a promise if the speaker doesn't intend the hearer to understand that it's a promise

**9. The rules of the dialect spoken by S and H are such that T is correctly and sincerely uttered if and only if conditions 1-8 are met.**

i.e. S uses a form such that the words chosen are ones that can be uttered in that language to make a promise and all the above conditions apply.

In everyday language, we can express these conditions as:

- A speaker *says* he will perform a future action.
- He *intends* to do it.
- He *believes* he can do it.
- He thinks *it is not something he would have done anyway* in his normal course of action.
- He thinks *the addressee wants him to do it* (rather than not do it).
- He *intends to place himself under an obligation* to do it by uttering it.
- Speaker and hearer *understand English*; can hear etc.

## TASK 1

Without trying to classify them into types, what would be the felicity conditions – i.e., conditions of situational appropriateness for:

1. Asking a question about proposition P:
2. Making a request (for action A)
3. Commanding H to do an action A
4. Making criticisms of H's past actions

## Asking a question about proposition P:

### Asking a question about proposition P:

- S does not know P

### Asking a question about proposition P:

- S does not know P
- S wants to know P

### Asking a question about proposition P:

- S does not know P
- S wants to know P
- S believes that H knows P

### Asking a question about proposition P:

- S does not know P
- S wants to know P
- S believes that H knows P
- S believes that H is willing to provide information about P



### **Making a request (for action A)**

- S wants A to be done
- S wants H to do A
- S believes that A has not yet been done
- S believes H can do A
- S believes H is willing to do A
- S believes H was not going to do A anyway
- S has the power to ask H to do A
- H has the power to refuse

### **How is this different to commanding H to do an action A?**

- S wants A to be done ( same as request)
- S believes that A has not yet been done (same)
- S believes H can do A (same)
- S believes H is willing to do A (not relevant, so leave this out )
- S believes H was not going to do A anyway (same)
- S has the power to ask H to do A (in the case of a command - to compel)
- H does not have the power to refuse (unlike a request)

### **Making criticisms of H's past actions**

- H has performed A in the past
- S knows H has performed A
- S believes A has or will have a bad consequence
- S has the power to voice her beliefs to H
- H may accept or reject S's expressed belief

### **Defining speech acts**

- A Speech Act is an act performed using language (e.g., to give orders; to make requests; etc.).
- A Speech Act is an utterance which has both a propositional meaning and an illocutionary force (Thus, a Speech Act is an utterance defined in terms of intention and/or effect).
- Speech Acts can be defined by their felicity conditions.

### **Classifying speech acts**

Searle described 5 basic classes of speech act.

Yule (1996) adapted these to show the ***direction of fit*** between the speech act and the world.

<b>Speech act type</b>	<b>Direction of fit</b>	<b>S = speaker X = situation</b>	
Declarations	Words change the world	S causes X	Words change the state of the world - as in performatives
Representatives	Make words fit the world	S believes X	Describe a state of affairs in the world – a claim, an assertion, a report

Expressives	Make words fit the world	S feels X	S expresses feelings or attitudes, thanks, congratulations
Directives	Make the world fit words	S wants X	Has the function of getting H to do something - request, order
Commissives	Make the world fit words	S intends X	Action as result of S having uttered the words - promise

When the felicity conditions for a speech act are not met:


- Either some misunderstanding has occurred

or

- the real meaning is something else.


➔ INDIRECT SPEECH ACT

### Indirect speech acts

- *Can I get a lift home with you?*
- *Would you mind giving me a lift home?*
- *I'm not sure how I'm going to get home....I've missed the bus.*
- *Is that your car?* 

### Identifying indirect speech acts

- A performative cannot be an indirect speech act.
- An indirect speech act has a literal meaning which is different from its intended meaning.
- Felicity conditions are violated for the literal meaning but not for the intended meaning.

 *Could you give me a lift home?*

Literally, S questions H about P

but the felicity conditions

- S does not know the truth about P.
- S wants to know the truth about P.

are not met.

However the felicity conditions on **requests** are not violated.

- S requests H to do A (action):
- S believes A has not yet been done.
- S believes that H is able to do A.
- S believes that H is willing to do A-type things for S.
- S wants A to be done.

Why use indirect speech acts?

- Framing the request as a question thus allows the hearer the opportunity to more gracefully decline.
- Perhaps the speaker has the power to make the hearer do the action but does not want to make a show of that power by making a direct request.
- Perhaps the speaker is unsure about whether the hearer will be willing to do the action and doesn't want to risk losing face

## TASK 2

- Consider the dialogue from the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*
- Look at the most basic meaning of each utterance in terms of the speech acts it could perform.
- Is this how it is used in the dialogue?
- For each one, identify what the speaker really means to convey.

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Excuse me Sorry to interrupt	Apologising Apologising	
Do you have the wedding list for Banks?		
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Certainly, sir.		
Lots of beautiful things for around about the thousand pound mark.		?

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Excuse me Sorry to interrupt	Apologising Apologising	Attracting attention (slight irony??)
Do you have the wedding list for Banks?		
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Certainly, sir.		
Lots of beautiful things for around about the thousand pound mark.		

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Excuse me Sorry to interrupt	Apologising Apologising	Attracting attention (slight irony??)
Do you have the wedding list for Banks?	Questioning	
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Certainly, sir.		
Lots of beautiful things for around about the thousand pound mark.		

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Excuse me Sorry to interrupt	Apologising Apologising	Attracting attention (slight irony??)
Do you have the wedding list for Banks?	Questioning	Requesting
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Certainly, sir.		
Lots of beautiful things for around about the thousand pound mark.		

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Excuse me Sorry to interrupt	Apologising Apologising	Attracting attention (slight irony??)
Do you have the wedding list for Banks?	Questioning	Requesting
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Certainly, sir.	Agreeing	
Lots of beautiful things for around about the thousand pound mark.		

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Excuse me Sorry to interrupt	Apologising Apologising	Attracting attention (slight irony??)
Do you have the wedding list for Banks?	Questioning	Requesting
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Certainly, sir.	Agreeing	Complying with request
Lots of beautiful things for around about the thousand pound mark.		

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Excuse me Sorry to interrupt	Apologising Apologising	Attracting attention (slight irony??)
Do you have the wedding list for Banks?	Questioning	Requesting
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Certainly, sir.	Agreeing	Complying with request
Lots of beautiful things for around about the thousand pound mark.	Providing information/ Commenting	Suggesting

- **Charles:** What about things around the sort of fifty pound mark?  
Is there much?
- **Shop assistant:** Well, you could get that Pygmy warrior over there.
- **Charles:** This? Excellent!

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
What about things around the sort of fifty pound mark?	Questioning	Asking for a suggestion?
Is there much?	Questioning	Acknowledging that a suggestion is unlikely?
<b>Shop assistant:</b> Well, you could get that Pygmy warrior over there.	Suggesting	?
<b>Charles:</b> This? Excellent!	Asking for confirmation Accepting a suggestion	?

- **Shop assistant:** ...if you could find someone to chip in the other three thousand nine hundred and fifty pounds.
- Or our carrier bags are one pound fifty each.
- Why don't you just get 33 of them?

<b>Shop assistant:</b> ...if you could find someone to chip in the other three thousand nine hundred and fifty pounds.	SURFACE MEANING Providing clarification	UNDERLYING MEANING(S) Expressing derision
Or our carrier bags are one pound fifty each.	Providing information/ Commenting	Expressing derision
Why don't you just get 33 of them?	Suggesting	Expressing derision

- **Charles:**  
  
Well, I think I'll probably leave it.  
  
Thanks very much. You've been very....

<b>Charles:</b>	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
Well, I think I'll probably leave it.	Predicting	Expressing intent
Thanks very much. You've been very....	Thanking complimenting (incomplete)	?

- *Suddenly Carrie appears in the shop.*
- **Carrie:** What did you get?
- **Charles:** Blimey! Well, I never! Nothing yet.
- I'm just, you know, deciding.

	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
<b>Carrie:</b> What did you get?	Questioning	Questioning
<b>Charles:</b> Blimey! Well, I never! Nothing yet.	Expressing surprise Answering a question (providing information)	?
I'm just, you know, deciding.	Elaborating. (providing information)	?

- **Carrie:**  
It's nice to see you.
- **Charles:**  
It's nice to see **you**.
- **Carrie:**  
This present thing is great. I should've gotten married years ago.

	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
<b>Carrie:</b> It's nice to see you.	Greeting/ Expressing feelings	
<b>Charles:</b> It's nice to see <b>you</b> .	Expressing feelings	Indicating that feelings are similar??
<b>Carrie:</b> This present thing is great – I should've got married years ago	Expressing regret about a past action	? Probably just making casual conversation, but there is a slight hint that maybe she should have married Charles...

- (to shop assistant)  
Anybody get the Pygmy?
- **Shop assistant:**
- The young man thought about it...
- **Carrie:**
- No!
- Just get me an ashtray.
- Are you free for about a half-hour?

	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
<b>Carrie:</b> Anybody get the Pygmy?	Questioning	
<b>Shop assistant:</b> The young man thought about it...	Answering	
<b>Carrie:</b> No! Just get me an ashtray.	Expressing surprise/ disbelief  Commanding	Expressing surprise/ disbelief  Commanding/ reassuring?
Are you free for about a half-hour?	Questioning	Preparation for inviting

- **Charles:**  
Yeah.  
I'm meeting my brother, but I can be a bit late....
- **Carrie:**
- Oh good –
- come with me
- I have an important decision to make

	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
<b>Charles:</b>		
Yeah. I'm meeting my brother, but I can be a bit late....	Accepting invitation	
<b>Carrie:</b> Oh good – come with me I have an important decision to make	Commanding  Elaborating	Commanding/ Inviting

	SURFACE MEANING	UNDERLYING MEANING(S)
<b>Charles:</b>		
Yeah. I'm meeting my brother, but I can be a bit late....	Accepting invitation	
<b>Carrie:</b> Oh good – <i>imperative</i> <b>come with me</b> I have an important decision to make	Commanding  Elaborating	Commanding/ Inviting

## TASK 3

### Speech acts and cross cultural communication

( see Task sheet)

## TASK 3

In the light of Wierzbicka's article on Polish and English, consider the following questions.

- Are being "direct" and being "polite" the same thing?
- In English the speech act behind "Would you like a beer?" is most likely to be an offer, but a literal translation into Polish would be interpreted differently. Think about a language you know. How are offers and invitations made?
- What is meant by "polite pessimism?" Does it exist in any other language you know?
- What speech acts in English are made using imperatives? How is this different in other languages you know?
- How would an English exclamation like "Isn't it lovely!" be understood if it were translated literally into Polish? What about other languages?
- How can the different choices in directness and indirectness lead to perceptions that people from some cultures are more polite than others? Why is this not true?

Wierzbicka quotes Searle:

The mechanisms are not peculiar to this language or that, but at the same time the standard forms from one language will not always maintain their indirect speech potential when translated from one language to another ... within the class of idiomatic sentences, some forms tend to become entrenched as conventional devices for indirect speech acts. In the case of directives, in which politeness is the chief motivation for the indirect forms, certain forms are conventionally used as polite requests. Which kinds of forms are selected will, in all likelihood, vary from one language to another. (Searle 1975:76-77)

And disagrees...

But this makes it sound as if the variation were more or less random and accidental, whereas the general mechanisms were universal.

In fact, as I have tried to show, specific differences between languages in the area of so-called 'indirect' speech acts are motivated, to a considerable degree, by differences in cultural norms and cultural assumptions, and the general mechanisms themselves are culture-specific.

Wierzbicka 2002:61

Source:  
Murray, J. (2009). *Week two: Speech Act Theory*  
[Powerpoint slides]. Unpublished manuscript,  
LING904. Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.