

Speech Acts and Speech Events

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Speech Situation: at the bus stop

- Speech event (asking the time)

Speaker A: *What is the time* (speech act 1)

Speaker B: *It's 1 o'clock* (speech act 2)

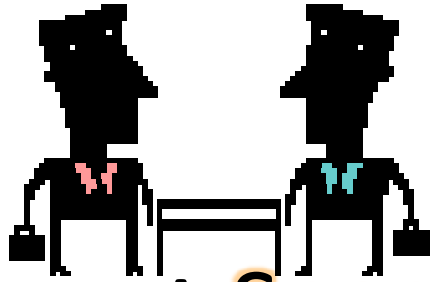
Speaker A: *Thanks* (speech act 3)



Speech Situation

contexts of language use such as ceremonies, fights, hunts, classrooms, conferences, parties.





Speech Events

A **Speech Event** can be defined by a unified set of components through out:

- same purpose of communication
- same topic
- same participants
- same language variety (generally).



For example: exchanging greetings, telling jokes, giving speeches.

Speech Events

Communicative rule governed sequences.

Knock knock jokes

“Knock Knock”

“Who’s There?”

“Abby”

“Abby who?”

“Abby Birthday to you.”



Speech Acts

Speech Acts are group of utterances with a single interactional function.

For example: a request, a command, a greeting, a promise, an apology.



Speech Acts & Speech Events

Speech Acts

- Functional unit at utterance level (e.g., thanking, requesting, etc.) (Cohen, 2002)

Speech Events

- Larger unit with multiple turns (e.g., job interview, etc.) (Hatch, 1992)

People perform actions via utterances.

[1]

“You’re fired.”

The boss’s utterance in [1] can perform the act of ending your employment.



[2]



You're so delicious.

(Compliment performed)



You're welcome.

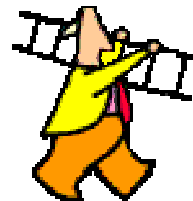
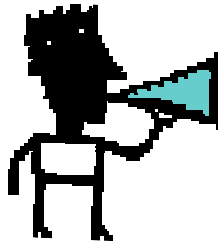
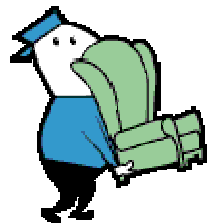
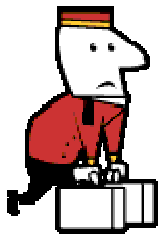
(acknowledgement of thanks performed)



You're crazy.

(the expression of surprise performed)

Actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts.



In How to Do Things with Words, *Austin identifies three distinct levels of action* beyond the act of utterance itself. He distinguishes the **act of saying something**, *what one does in* saying it, and what one does *by saying it*.

☀️ On any occasion, the action performed by producing an utterance will consist of **three** related **acts**.

☀️ *these are **the locutionary**, **the illocutionary**, and **the perlocutionary** acts.*

The locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are, in fact, three basic components with the help of which a speech act is formed. (Leech, 1983: 199)

Leech briefly defines them:

locutionary act: performing an act of saying something

illocutionary act: performing an act in saying something

perlocutionary act: performing an act by saying something.

■ A **locutionary act**, is the basic act of utterance, or producing a meaningful linguistic expressions.

■ The **illocutionary act** is formed via communicative force of an utterance. We form an utterance with some kind of function in mind. This force is known as **illocutionary force**.

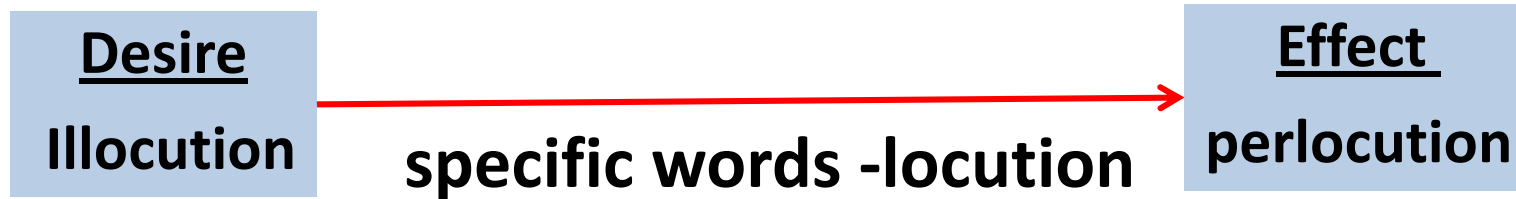
■ The **perlocutionary act** reveals the effect the speaker wants to exercise over the hearer. This is also known as the **perlocutionary effect**.



Would you close the door, please?



Theory of Speech Acts



A speech act has 3 aspects:

- **locution** = physical utterance by the speaker
- **illocution** = the intended meaning of the utterance by the speaker (performative)
- **prelocution** = the action that results from the locution

Alice told Tom **Would you please close the door**

J. Austin - How to do things with words, 1962.

J. Searle - Speech acts, 1969.

ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE INDICATING DEVICES (IFIDS)

'illocutionary force indicating devices' (IFIDs), are supposed to be elements, or aspects of linguistic devices which indicate either (dependent on which conceptions of "illocutionary force" and "illocutionary act" are adopted) that the utterance is made with a certain illocutionary force, or else that it constitutes the performance of a certain illocutionary act. In English, for example, the **interrogative** mood is supposed to indicate that the utterance is (intended as) a **question**; the **directive** mood indicates that the utterance is (intended as) a directive illocutionary act (**an order, a request, etc.**); the words "I promise" are supposed to indicate that the utterance is (intended as) a promise. Possible **IFIDs in English** include: **word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation, the mood of the verb, and performative verbs.**

Felicity Conditions

Felicity conditions cover expected or appropriate circumstances for the performance of a speech act to be recognized as intended.

■ **I sentence you to six months in prison.**

The performance will be **infelicitous** (inappropriate) if the speaker is not a specific person in a special context (in this case, **a judge in a courtroom**).



Yule proposes further **classification of felicity conditions** into **five classes**:

- **general conditions,**
- **content conditions,**
- **preparatory conditions,**
- **sincerity conditions and**
- **essential conditions. (Yule, 1996: 50)**

- **General conditions** presuppose the participants' knowledge of the language being used and his non-playacting,
- **content conditions** concern the appropriate content of an utterance,
- **preparatory conditions** deal with differences of various illocutionary acts (e.g. those of promising or warning),
- **sincerity conditions** count with speaker's intention to carry out a certain act, and
- **essential conditions** combine with a specification of what must be in the utterance content, the context, and the speaker's intentions, in order for a specific act to be appropriately (**feliculously**) performed. (Yule,1996:50)

It is Austin who comes up with a new category of utterances – **the performatives**.

Austin defines a **performative** as an utterance which contains a special type of verb (a **performative verb**) by force of which it performs an action. In other words, in using a **performative**, a person **is not just saying something but is actually doing something** (Wardhaugh: 1992: 283). Austin further states that **a performative, unlike a constative, cannot be true or false (it can only be felicitous or infelicitous)** and that **it does not describe, report or constate anything**.



THE PERFORMATIVE HYPOTHESIS

He also claims that from the grammatical point of view, **a performative is a first person indicative active sentence in the simple present tense.** In order to distinguish the **performative use** from other possible uses of first person indicative active pattern, Austin introduces **a hereby test** since he finds out that **performative verbs only can collocate with this adverb.**

U (utterance)

I (**hereby**) Vp you (**that**) U

1. a. I hereby resign from the post of the Manager of the Sport Club.
- b. I hereby get up at seven o'clock in the morning every day.

While the first sentence would make **sense** under specific conditions, uttering of the second would be rather strange. From this it follows that (1a) is a performative, (1b) is not.



EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT PERFORMATIVES

■ Having defined **performatives**, Austin then draws a basic distinction between them. He distinguishes two general groups - **explicit** and **implicit performatives**.

1. a. **The work was done by Dalia and myself.**
b. **I hereby tell you that the work was done by Dalia and myself.**
2. a. **Clean up this mess!**
b. **I hereby order you that you clean up this mess.**

An explicit performative

$\left(\begin{array}{l} 1. \text{ b.} \\ 2. \text{ b.} \end{array} \right)$

An implicit performative

$\left(\begin{array}{l} 1. \text{ a.} \\ 2. \text{ a.} \end{array} \right)$

Summary

An **Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)** is a piece of language that signals what kind of speech act is being performed.

Example:

Would you pass me the salt, please?

Performatives are sentences or expressions that make the kind of illocutionary force of an utterance explicit.

Examples:

- *I hereby name this ship H.M.S. Titanic.*
- *The United Nations condemns this terrible act.*
- *We declare the winner to be Mr. John Smith of Springfield*

Felicity conditions

Felicity conditions determine whether or not a speech act is successful.

A speech act is **infelicitous** when...

...it is illogical: *I promise to call you last year.*

...requirements aren't met: *I will buy you a Porsche, honey.*

...it is a lie: *I really like your new jacket.*



Direct and indirect speech acts

An **indirect speech** act masks one type of act (the **primary** one) as something else (the **secondary** one).

Example:

■ *It's pretty cold in here*

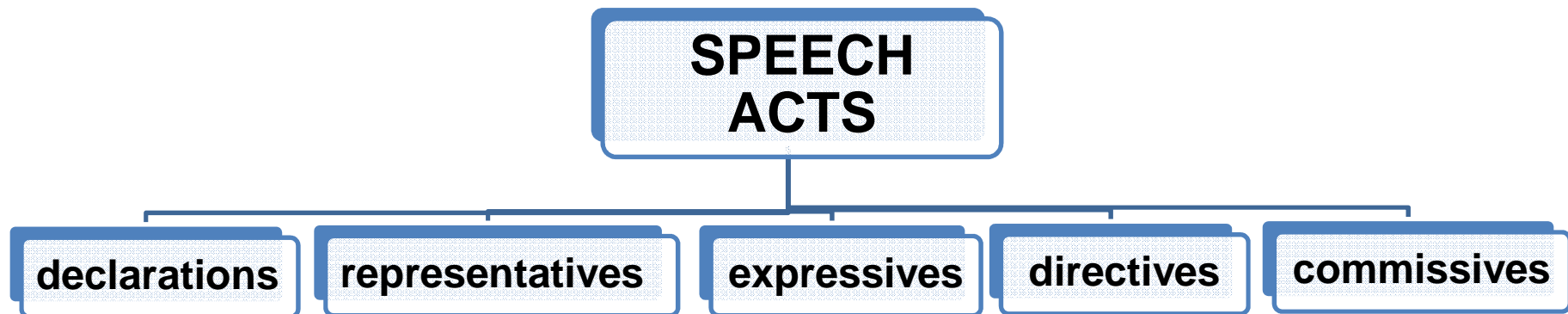
secondary speech act: assertion about temperature

primary speech act: request to close the window



Speech Acts Classification

There are **five types** of general **functions** performed by speech acts: **declarations**, **representatives**, **expressives**, **directives**, and **commissives**.

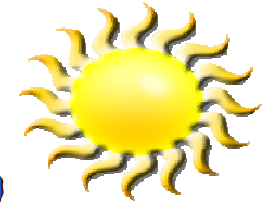


EXAMPLES:

DECLARATIVES: *We find the defendant guilty.*



REPRESENTATIVES: *It was a warm sunny day.*



EXPRESSIVES: *I'm really sorry!*



DIRECTIVES: *Don't touch that!*



COMMISSIVES: *I'll be back.*



Searle (1969) identified the various different types of speech act:

- **REPRESENTATIVES:**

such as *informing*, e.g., 'It is raining'



- **DIRECTIVES:**

attempts to get the hearer to do something e.g., 'please make the tea'



- **COMMISSIVES:**

which commit the speaker to doing something, e.g., 'I promise to...'



- **EXPRESSIVES:**

whereby a speaker expresses a mental state, e.g., 'thank you!'

- **DECLARATIONS:**

such as declaring war.

