

PHIL 4233: Philosophy of Language
Prof. Funkhouser
Searle, "The Structure of Illocutionary Acts"

- First, what is an illocutionary act?

illocutionary act: what one does in saying an utterance (propositional content combined with illocutionary force)

- Searle uses promising as his prime example for generating an analysis (i.e., necessary and sufficient conditions) of 'illocutionary act'.
 - Compare Searle's idea of *defects* in illocutionary acts to Austin's concept of *infelicities*.
 - An analysis of 'illocutionary act' will help generate the rules for illocutionary acts.

By stating a set of conditions for the performance of a particular illocutionary act we shall have offered an explication of that notion and shall also have paved the way for the second step, the formulation of the rules.

3.1

- Searle offers 9 necessary conditions, that are collectively sufficient, for a sincere and nondefective promise, by S to H , that p (by uttering T):
 1. Normal input and output conditions obtain (e.g., conditions for intelligible speaking and understanding).
 2. S expresses the proposition that p in the utterance of T .
 3. In expressing that p , S predicates a future act A of S . ('Act' is to be understood broadly. It is necessary that the act be both in the future and actually performed by S . Searle claims that it is not possible to promise that someone else will do some action A .)

4. *H* would prefer *S*'s doing *A* to his not doing *A*, and *S* believes *H* would prefer his doing *A* to his not doing *A*. (In part, this condition is to distinguish promises from threats. Think of this as a felicity/nondefectivity condition.)
5. It is not obvious to both *S* and *H* that *S* will do *A* in the normal course of events. (Otherwise, why promise?)
6. *S* intends to do *A*. (This is what makes the promise sincere.)
7. *S* intends that the utterance of *T* will place him under an obligation to do *A*. (In effect, this is the very essence of a promise.) Contrast Searle with Austin, however, when Searle writes: "We know, for example, that Mr. Pickwick did not really promise to marry the woman because we know he did not have the appropriate intention."
8. *S* intends (*i*-1) to produce in *H* the knowledge (*K*) that the utterance of *T* is to count as placing *S* under an obligation to do *A*. *S* intends to produce *K* by means of the recognition of *i*-1, and he intends *i*-1 to be recognized in virtue of (by means of) *H*'s knowledge of the meaning of *T*. (Recall Grice's "Meaning" here.)
9. The semantical 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 obtain.

3.2

- With insincere promises, condition 6 is not met. Instead, it is faked.

Q: Why does Searle have a special section just on this possibility? E.g., why not also have a special section for when condition 4 or 5 is not met?

◦ Compare: "I promise to do A, but I have no intention to do A" to Moore's paradox.

3.3

- Conditions 2–7 generate 5 rules specific to the illocutionary act of promising.

◦ Notice, especially, the following general classifications: propositional content rule, preparatory rule, sincerity rule, and essential rule.

3.4

- We can apply the four kinds of rules just listed to other illocutionary acts — e.g., giving an order and asserting. These applications are shown in his tables.

- Based on study of these tables, Searle then considers 9 hypotheses about illocutionary acts.
 1. For illocutionary acts with sincerity conditions that specify a psychological state, the utterance *expresses* the psychological state.
 2. *Only* when such psychological states are expressed, is sincerity/insincerity possible.
 3. The preparatory condition(s) tell us what is *implied* by the utterance.
 4. Context might make it clear that an utterance meets the essential conditions, even though no “illocutionary force-indicating device” is employed (e.g., no explicit use of ‘promise’, ‘order’, etc.).
 5. Illocutionary force can always be made explicit.
 6. Some classes of illocutionary acts are subsets of others. (This might suggest that there are some basic illocutionary acts that all others reduce to.)
 7. The essential conditions are primary, and often set the others.
 8. There are several different dimensions of illocutionary force. (Searle lists 7 of these.) The same utterance can constitute different illocutionary acts.
 9. Some illocutionary verbs are defined in terms of their perlocutionary effects.