

PHIL 4233: Philosophy of Language
Prof. Funkhouser
Searle, “A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts”

- Distinguish illocutionary force from propositional content: $F(p)$

Compare ‘F’ to modal operators: How many F’s are there? That is, how many uses of language are there? Compare: How many modalities are there?

- One of Searle’s big points:

The most important conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is this. There is not, as Wittgenstein (on one possible interpretation) and many others have claimed, an infinite or indefinite number of language games or uses of language.

- Contrast Searle with Austin:

Early on Austin contrasted constatives with performatives. (‘Hereby’ is the mark of a performative . . . and a declarative, on Searle’s view.) The former were supposed to be utterances that are mere sayings, and the latter doings. But Austin later came to recognize, as did Searle, that we are *always doing* things with language.

- Why Speech Act Theory? Because you cannot study language without studying what language is used for or what we do with language. Linguistic meaning and communication cannot be studied apart from studying and classifying speech acts. Recall that Austin criticized the Logical Positivists for focusing too much on the descriptive/assertive component of language.

- Searle claims that Austin confuses illocutionary verbs with illocutionary acts — see his example of “insists” and “suggests”. The same illocutionary verb can be used in performing different types of illocutionary acts.

- Searle argues that there are many different dimensions along which utterances can differ in their illocutionary force. The main 3 are: illocutionary point, direction of fit, and sincerity. His symbolization of illocutionary acts will only utilize these 3 factors. Searle also goes on to list 9 other dimensions,

though.

- Contrast Searle's taxonomy with Austin's 5 categories of illocutionary acts. Searle claims that Austin's categorization is unsystematic and also miscategorizes many acts. Also note Searle's disagreement with Austin in his objection 1.

IV.

- In this section Searle presents his own taxonomy of illocutionary acts.

Assertives

- For these acts, the illocutionary point is to make a commitment to the truth of the expressed proposition. So, one way in which an assertive is assessed is with respect to the truth or falsity of this proposition.
 - Examples include: suggesting, hypothesizing, insisting, flatly stating, etc. Searle claims that these are all determinates of a common determinable.
 - "The simplest test of an assertive is this: can you literally characterize it (inter alia) as true or false."

Directives

- The illocutionary point of these acts is to get the hearer to do something.
 - Examples include: inviting or suggesting that someone do something, insisting that someone do something, begging, pleading, ordering, daring, defying, and challenging. Questions are a special case of directives.

Commissives

- The illocutionary point of these acts is to commit the speaker to some future action.
 - Examples include: promising, swearing, pledging, 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.

- Examples include: thanking, apologizing, congratulating, deploring, welcoming, etc.
- There is no direction of fit for these illocutionary acts, and this is indicated by the fact that they do not allow of “that” clauses. Alternatively, the “word-to-world” direction of fit is *presupposed*.

Declaratives

- The essence of these illocutionary acts is that the performance of a declarative makes whatever is declared so (“saying makes it so”). These normally require some extralinguistic institution.

○ Examples include: firing, appointing, resigning, christening, declaring war, marrying, etc.

○ Searle offers the following translations:

You’re fired. = I declare: your employment is (hereby) terminated.

I resign. = I declare: my position is (hereby) terminated.

○ Declaratives are a species of what Austin originally called ‘performatives’. Austin (in *How to Do Things with Words*) and Searle both agree, however, that the constatives/performatives distinction collapses. “Any utterance will consist in performing one or more illocutionary acts.” In other words, we are *always doing something* with language.

○ The direction of fit for declarations goes both ways, and there is no sincerity condition.

Q: Is there something funny about Searle’s examples of the judge and umpire?

V.–VI.

Let’s not worry about this.