

Setting Felicity Conditions and Deriving Logical Semantic Rules for the Commissive Speech Acts

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ABSTRACT

Speech act can be defined as a verbal action that takes place in the reality. This means by uttering a speech act, the speaker "does" something with his word. The speaker performs an activity that brings about a change in the world of reality. As for the felicity conditions, they have been defined as the criteria that must be fulfilled if the speech act is to achieve its purpose. They are used to judge whether a certain utterance is a speech act, genuine speech act or none. This paper aims at setting some felicity conditions for the commissive speech acts category in the light of the illocutionary force components that set by Searle (1969 and 1983), Searle and Vanderveken (1985) as well as Vanderveken (1990 and 1994). It is hypothesized in this study that once felicity conditions are established for the commissive speech acts category, a set of logical semantic rules can be derived for determining the illocutionary forces indicating device of any commissive speech act. The procedure for achieving this paper will be based on the theoretical review of what Searle and Vanderveken have done in this area. The basic conclusions the study arrived at are setting some logical semantic rules for determining the illocutionary force indicating device of the

commissive speech acts category.

Introduction

Contrary to what de Saussure (1966) tried to draw a distinction between *langue* and *parole*, the nature of the primary speech acts that are performed in the use of a natural language is determined by the semantic structure of that language. Actual natural languages such as English and Arabic have in their lexicons a large number of speech act verbs whose meaning serve to determine the possible illocutionary forces of the utterances of their sentences (see Al-Sulaimaan, 1997:5, 2002:86, Aguilar and Machuca, 2008:75).

Vanderveken (1990:166) believes that in analyzing English speech act verbs, the first aim is to study how the set of illocutionary forces is lexicalized in English vocabulary. As is the case for the set of truth conditions, the set of illocutionary forces is not lexicalized in the same way in different actual natural languages. Each human has its own genius in the ways in which it categorizes the actual illocutionary kinds of use to which its sentences can be put in the world of speech, and that categorization is appropriate to the natural environment and the social forms of life of linguistic community of speakers who speak that language. The second aim of lexical analysis of speech act verbs is to predict and explain the semantic relations of entailment and of incompatibility that exist between English performative sentences in virtue of the meaning of their performative verbs (see also Austin, 1962:85, Searle and Vanderveken, 1985:90 and Davis and Gillon (2004:214).

1. Sentence Types Illocutionarily Oriented

Unlike logicians, semanticists, pragmatists, linguists and grammarians have long acknowledged the illocutionary aspects of sentence meaning in their classification of the different syntactic types of sentence in natural languages (Cruse, 2000:18). They commonly recognize the following illocutionary significant syntactic types of sentence in their grammar of English and of other actual natural languages.

1. Declarative sentences such as : “The car is in the garage”, which are conventionally used to say how things are (Goddard, 1998:92).
2. Conditional sentences such as “She would buy it, if he had enough money”, and “I would like to tell you about that”, which are used to say with reservation and without a high commitment to the truth of the propositional content how things will be later if certain specified or unspecified future facts exist (Goddard, 1998:92, Eriskoon, 2001:75).
3. Imperative sentences such as “Write on the board.” which is an attempt to get the addressee to do something.
4. Interrogative sentences such as “ Do you want that?” which are used to ask questions.
5. Exclamatory sentences such “What a nice weather it is!”, which are used to express the speaker’s mental states.

6. Optative sentences such as “If only they would succeed.”, which are used to express the speaker’s wish.
7. Subjunctive sentences such as “ May God save the queen!” which are used to express the speaker’s will (Vanderveken, 1990:14-15, Gass and Neu, 1996:45, Kadmon, 2001:102, Jucker and Taavitsainen, 2008:87).

3.Components of Illocutionary Forces

Vanderveken (1990:104) established a set of illocutionary components for the speech act verbs category. They are as follows:

3.1. Illocutionary Point

In the performance of an illocutionary act, the speaker always relate in a certain way the propositional content to the world of the utterances so as to determine a direction of fit between language and the world.

There are four possible directions of fit of utterances:

a. The Words-to World Direction of Fit

When the illocutionary act is satisfied, its propositional contents fits a state of affairs existing in general independently in the world. Speech acts with the assertive point such as, for example, predictions, conjectures, statements, and objections have the words-to-world direction of fit.

b. The World-to-Words Direction of Fit

When the illocutionary act is satisfied, the world is transformed to fit the propositional content. Speech acts with commissives or directives point such as, for example, promises, vows, and demands have the world-to- words direction of fit.

c. The Double Direction of Fit

When the illocutionary act is satisfied, the world is transformed by the present action of the speaker to fit the propositional content by the fact of that the speaker represents it as being transformed. Speech acts with the declarative illocutionary point such as, for example, acts of appointing, nominating, and naming have the double direction of fit.

d. The Null or Empty Direction of Fit

For some illocutionary acts, there is no question of success or failure of fit, and their propositional content is in general presupposed to be true. Speech acts with expressive point such as, for example, apologies, thanks, and condolences have the null or empty direction of fit.

3.1.1 Types of Illocutionary Point

As Searle and Vanderveken (1985) argued at length elsewhere, there are five and only five basic illocutionary points of utterances. These are:

1. The assertive point which consists in representing as an actual state of affairs.
2. The commissive point which consists in committing the speaker to a future course of action.
3. The directive point which consists in making an attempt to get the addressee to do something.
4. The declarative point which consists in performing an action which brings into existence a state of affairs by representing oneself as performing that action.
5. The expressive point which consists of expressing propositional attitudes of the speaker about a state of affairs (see also, Searle, 1975:350, Searle, Kiefer and Bierwisch, 1980:37, Leech, 1980 90 and 1983:45, and Mey, 1993:85).

3.2 Mode of Achievement

Illocutionary points, like most purposes of our actions, can be achieved in various ways and by different means. The mode of achievement of the illocutionary point of an illocutionary force is the component of that force which determines how its point must be achieved on the propositional content in a successful performance of an act with that force. For example, in a request, the speaker must have the option of refusal to the hearer in making his attempt to get him to do something (for further examples, see Recanati, 2004:77).

3.3 Propositional Content Conditions

Some illocutionary forces impose conditions on the set of propositions that can be taken as propositional contents of acts with that force in a context of utterance. For example, the propositional content of promise must represent a speaker's future course of action (for further examples see Rose and Kasper, 2001:112).

3.4 Preparatory Conditions

Whenever a speaker attempts to perform an illocutionary act, he presupposes the truth of certain proposition in the context of his utterance, and, although he might succeed in certain cases in performing this speech act even if these presupposed propositions are false, his performance of that illocutionary act would still be defective in these contexts.

3.5 Sincerity Conditions

By performing an illocutionary act, the speaker also expresses mental states of certain psychological modes about the state of affairs represented by the propositional content. For example, a speaker who promises something expresses an intention to do what he promises, and a speaker who requests a hearer to do something expresses a desire that he does it (for further examples, see Verchueren 1980:28, Wierzbica, 1996:79 and Yule, 1996:92).

3.6 Degree of Strength

The mental states which enter into the sincerity conditions of speech acts are expressed with different degrees of strength depending on the illocutionary force. For example, the degree of strength of sincerity conditions of a supplication is greater than that of a request, because a speaker who supplicates expresses a strong desire than a speaker who requests (Vanderveken, 1990:96 and 1994:10).

3.7. Other Components of Illocutionary Force

Vanderveken (1990:21): made two general remarks concerning the logical form and the actual realization of the illocutionary forces.

3.7.1 The Logical Form of the Illocutionary Force

It is important to notice that, from a logical point of view, an illocutionary force is more than a simple juxtaposition or sequence of its six components. Indeed, components of one type can determine components of another type.

3.7.2 The Actual Realization of the Illocutionary Forces

Among all possible modes of achievements, and propositional content, preparatory and sincerity conditions which can be considered in illocutionary logic, only a few are linguistically significant and are needed in order to analyze the actual illocutionary forces expressed or named by the illocutionary force markers and performative verbs of English and other actual natural languages.

3.8 Distinctions in the Analysis of English Speech Act Verbs

As Searle and Vanderveken (1985) pointed out in **Foundations of Illocutionary Logic** , it is necessary to make a few theoretical distinctions in the analysis of English speech act verbs. Some of these distinctions derive from the fact that there is no one-to-one correspondence between actual illocutionary forces and speech act verbs. Others are relative to linguistically important aspect utterances.

1. Many performative verbs do not name illocutionary force, but rather a kind or a set of illocutionary force of forbidding. A speaker who forbids someone to do something just orders that person not to do it. Moreover, certain performative verbs like “answer” or “reply” name sets of speech acts that can have any illocutionary point.
2. Some performative verbs like “state” and “assert”, which name the same illocutionary force, are not synonymous. Their difference of meaning derives from conversational features which are independent of their logical forms.
3. Some speech act verbs which name illocutionary forces do not have a performative use. For example, one cannot use performatively the verb “threaten” in order that a proposition is true.
4. Many speech act verbs have several uses and can name different illocutionary forces. For example, the verb “swear” has both an assertive and a commissive use. A speaker can answer that a proposition is true (assertive) and he can also swear to a hearer that he will do something in the future (commissive).
5. Some performative verbs are systematically ambiguous between several illocutionary points. For example, an alert is the conjunction of an assertion that some danger is imminent and of directive suggestion to the hearer to prepare for action in order to avoid misfortune.

6. One must distinguish between speech act verbs “order” and “promise” that are essentially hearer directed and others like “assert” and others like “assert” and “conjecture” which name illocutionary forces of speech acts that are not necessarily aimed at someone in particular.
7. One must also distinguish between speech act verbs like in public and those like “blame” which be performed in thought alone and in silent soliloquy.
8. Some illocutionary verbs like “bet” and “contract” name speech acts which cannot be performed by the speaker alone but which require a mutual joint performance by both a speaker and a hearer.
9. Finally, performative verbs can have non-illocutionary meanings. For example, the verb “allow”, which has performative uses, can also name events which are not speech acts (for further details, see Blakemore, 1993: 34, Carston, 1998: 95, and Cavell, 2002:75).

4. Felicity Conditions

Felicity conditions are used to refer to the criteria which must be fulfilled if the speech act is to achieve its purpose. They are regarded as a part of the meaning of the performative verbs which express an illocution, but whether they are fulfilled or not must be judged by pragmatic inference. They are needed for success or achievement of a performative utterance (Al-Sulaimaan, 1997:90, 2002: 99 and 2016: 287-288).

4.1 Searle’s Felicity Conditions:

Searle (1969) makes out a significant contribution to the speech act theory concerning the **Felicity Conditions**. For Searle, felicity conditions form a group of necessary conditions for the performance of a certain act. If these conditions are all present, the act will be performed successfully. He classifies the felicity conditions into four types:

1. Propositional Content Conditions:

These conditions specify what can be expressed by the utterance uttered to perform the illocutionary act. For example, all directives speech acts make an attempt to get the hearer to do or not to do something.

2. Preparatory Conditions:

They refer to the intention and knowledge of the speaker and the hearer (i.e. contextual requirements). They tell us what the speaker implies in the performance of the act. In the performance of any illocutionary act, the speaker implies that the preparatory conditions of the act are satisfied. For example, a speaker who warns a person not to do something presupposes that his future action is bad for the hearer.

3. Sincerity Conditions:

They tell us what the speaker believes, intends, and desires in the performance of the act. One cannot greet insincerely, but one can state or promise insincerely.

4. Essential Conditions:

They are the constitutive rules that determine the type of illocutionary act. For example; in making a promise, the speaker intends the utterance to 'count as a promise, etc., and the hearer should know that intention.

4.2 Our Own Felicity Conditions For Specifying Commissive Speech Acts

Searle (1969) refined Austin's set of felicity conditions. He gives four types of felicity conditions and he introduces propositional content condition. Both of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) have preparatory and sincerity conditions. In the light of what have been reviewed, such as Searle's felicity conditions and Vanderveken's illocutionary components, a set of felicity conditions will be established for the commissive speech acts. They are as follows:

1.The Content Code Condition

Both speaker and hearer know the language, can understand each other are aware of what they are doing and do not have any serious handicaps (such as complete deafness, aphasia or laryngitis). This condition seems to be applicable to all speech acts.

2. The Propositional Content Condition

- a. Speaker expresses the proposition of his committing in his utterance, and
- b. predicates a future act which he will do.

3. The Preparatory Condition

- a. Speaker prefers the act of committing to be done, and speaker knows this.
- b. The content of the committing does not happen, unless it is thought about speaker.

4. The Sincerity Condition

Speaker intends that the utterances of T will make him responsible for intending to do A (i.e., speaker may be sincere or insincere).

5.The Essential Condition

Speaker intends to make the hearer believe that speaker intends to put himself under the obligation to do the act (hearer oriented).

6.The Wrap-up-Condition

The sentence used should be one which, the semantic rule of the language, is used to make commitment.

5. Conclusions

From our literature review and our own felicity conditions the study concludes with deriving some logical semantic rules, in the form of the imperative sentences, for determining the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) of the commissive speech act category. They are as follows:

(1) The Propositional Content Rule

Only use an IFID when the utterance is about something that will happen in the future.

(2) The Preparatory Rules

- a. Only use the IFID of committing when the commitment contains what the addressee usually wants to happen to him
- b. Only use the IFID for committing when the content of the commitment does not concern the occurrence of an already scheduled , self-justification or natural happening.

(3) The Sincerity Rule

Only use the IFID if and only if you intend to fulfil your commitment.

(4) The Essential Rule

Only use the IFID if and only if the commitment is uttered and recognized or accepted as creating an obligation from the addressor to the addressee.

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