

# **SPEECH ACT THEORY**

**Philosophy of language**

# Philosophy of Language

- **Aristotel**'s concept to language studies was to study true or false sentences - propositions;
- **Thomas Reid** described utterances of promising, warning, forgiving as “social operations” or “social acts”;

He believed that human's language's primary purpose is to express these social operations of the mind;

# Language function

- Leibniz, Frege, Russel, Wittgenstein, Carnap: understanding the structure of language could illuminate the structure of reality;
- Many thinkers believed that the main language function is to “describe some state of affairs” or “to state some facts;

# Speech Act Theory by J. Austin

- J. Austin “How to do things with words”, 1962;
- Language is not only a system of representation; We perform all sorts of speech acts besides making statements;
- Wittgenstein conflated meaning and use; Austin distinguished the meaning of the words from the speech acts;
- Austin focused on explicit performative utterances - “I apologize”; “I promise” etc. which are neither true nor false;

# Constatives and performatives

- Constative should be true or false;
- Performatives have value of happiness/unhappiness (felicitous or infelicitous); the criterion for felicitous is that the circumstances in which it is uttered should be appropriate;

# Conditions for performative appropriate functioning

- **Uttering of particular words by particular people in particular circumstances;**
- **A conventional procedure must be carried out correctly and completely;**
- **There is convention that the participants must have certain thoughts, feelings and intentions;**
- **Any participant must behave in a certain way;**

# Speech Act Structure

- Locutionary act – the process of saying itself;
- Illocutionary act – the intention of saying smth;
- Perlocutionary act – the effect of saying smth;

locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary force;

# Speech Act Classification by John Austin

- **Verdictives:** giving a verdict, estimate, appraisal, finding
- **Excersitives:** exercising of power, rights or influence, advising, warning
- **Commissives:** promising or undertaking, they commit you to doing something;
- **Behavitives:** which have to do with social behaviour and attitudes, apologizing, congratulating, commending, condoling, cursing;
- **Expositives:** I argue, I concede, I illustrate – could be classed as metalinguistic;

There could be marginal cases, they could overlap.



# John Searle's Speech Act Structure

- 1. Utterance act:** uttering words (morphemes, sentences).
- 2. Propositional act:** referring and predicating.
  - (a) Will Peter leave the room?
  - (b) Peter will leave the room.
  - (c) Peter, leave the room.
  - (d) Would that Peter left the room

# Searle's Speech Act Structure (continued)

- **3. Illocutionary Acts: questions, statements, orders etc. (many utterances contain indicators of illocutionary force – word order, stress, punctuation, mood of the verb, performative verbs);**
- **4. Perlocutionary Acts: persuading, getting smb. to do smth. (results of speech act);**

# Speech Act Classification

## by John Searle

- ***Assertives***: suggesting, putting forward, concluding, boasting etc.,
- ***Directives***: asking ordering, requesting, advising etc.;
- ***Commissives***: promising, planning, vowing, betting, opposing;
- ***Expressives***: thanking, apologising, welcoming, deploring;
- ***Declarations***: *You are fired, I swear, I beg you;*

# Direct and Indirect Speech Act

- Distinction between speaker's utterance meaning and speaker's meaning;
- Literal utterance – speaker's and utterance meaning coincide;
- Metaphorical utterance – a speaker says S is P, but means S is R;
- Open-ended metaphorical utterance – S is P, but meanings could be infinite;
- Dead metaphor –the utterance has the meaning that used to be its metaphorical one;
- Ironical utterance – speaker means the opposite of what the sentence means;

# Philosophical and linguistic importance of SA Theory

- Philosophy of Language – SAT underscores the importance of the distinction between language use and linguistic meaning;
- Exploration into the nature of linguistic knowledge;

# SAT Theory and Linguistics

- SAT made a great contribution to linguistic analysis;
- Analysis of utterance from the perspective of their function rather than form;
- Contributed to the development of Discourse analysis, Pragmatics;

# PAUL GRICE

## (1913-1988)

- British philosopher, famous for his innovative work in philosophy of language;
- His Theory of Implicature is important contribution to pragmatics;
- Conversational Implicature - meaning beyond the literal sense which must be inferred from non-linguistic features of a conversational situation together with general principle of communication and cooperation;

# Cooperative Principle

**Cooperative principle of communication in  
“Logic and Conversation” 1975;**

**Cooperative principle is a norm governing all  
cooperative interactions among humans:**

***“Make your conversational contribution what is  
required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the  
accepted purpose or direction of the talk  
exchange in which you are engaged”***



# Grice's Maxims

## **1. The maxim of quantity**

**“Make your contribution as informative as required”**

**“Don’t make your contribution more informative than is required”**

## **2. The maxim of quality: Be truthful;**

**“Don’t say what you believe to be false”**

**“Don’t say what you lack adequate evidence for”**

## **3. The maxim of relation**

**“Be relevant”**

## **4. The maxim of manner: “Be perspicuous”**

**“Avoid obscurity of expression”**

**“Avoid ambiguity”**

**“Be brief”**

**“Be orderly”**