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LACUS FORUM XXXVII

COMMUNICATION AND COGNITION: MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

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Pragmatics

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TOWARD A LOGIC OF PERFORMATIVES:
THE CASE OF REQUESTIVES

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Abstract. This paper examines the idea that inference relations can hold between performative sentences and looks at two alternative approaches to a logic of such inferences: an approach that makes a sharp distinction between competence and performance and then develops the outlines of a logic for a competence theory of performatives; and a theory that focuses instead on the use of language, and then develops a logic of speech acts. Both of these approaches are then looked at in the context of a larger theory of pragmatics. The paper concludes that the competence approach offers a better foundation for a pragmatic theory than does the speech act approach.

Keywords: Semantics, Speech Acts, Performatives, Logic, Entailment

Languages: English

THE POINT OF THIS PAPER is to put into the context of more recent developments in speech act theory one of the central themes of Katz's *Propositional structure and illocutionary force; A study of the contribution of sentence meaning to speech acts* (1977). This theme is the development of a logic of both constatives and performatives from within Katz's semantic theory. The logic would account for the inference relations between the two types of sentences. According to Katz (1977:5), "the sentences between which valid implications can hold are not restricted to those that can be either true or false, but include all the performative sentences in a language." Much later in this text he gives the following among several other examples to illustrate entailment relations between performatives (Katz 1977:232):

(1)   I advise you to buy some tables and chairs.

(2)   I advise you to buy some furniture.

While Katz (1977) develops a large number of the foundational elements of a logic of performatives for his semantic theory, it does not finish the job. However, more recent work in speech act theory, most of which is generally unfavorable to Katz's approach, nevertheless suggests important guidelines for developing such a logic of performatives. Principle among these is Daniel Vanderveken's monumental two-volume work in developing a logic for John R. Searle's speech act theory. Like Katz, Vanderveken believes that it is essential for logic to account for implications involving performatives.

He says (Vanderveken 1990:60):

> For example, it [a logical theory of language] must also derive valid inferences
> for the following:
>> Please, if you go to the bedroom, do not smoke there!
>> I advise you to go to the bedroom.
>> Do not smoke there!

It is useful to look at these two approaches to a logic of speech acts in the light of Jacob L. Mey's work (2001) in pragmatics, which, while in some respects contradicting the approaches of both Katz and Searle, does nevertheless provide us with the important goal of casting a larger net for a logical theory of performatives or speech acts, one that will include the larger social context of what Mey calls "situated utterances."[1] Katz's approach to the logic of performatives abstracts away from language use, restricting itself to meaning based on linguistic competence as opposed to linguistic performance; on the other hand, the approach of Searle and Vanderveken embraces language use, essentially developing a theory of utterance meaning for speech acts. It seems fair to ask, then, which of these two approaches, the competence meaning approach or the utterance meaning approach, is better suited as the basis for a logic of performatives that will take into consideration the wider pragmatics of situated utterances.

1. Developing criteria for performatives. J. L. Austin (1962:5) was the first to point out that utterances like the following are not appropriately considered to have truth values—to be either true or false.

(3)   I give and bequeath my watch to my brother (as occurring in a will).

(4)   I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.

Rather, they both involve doing something, in the first case bequeathing something to a survivor, and in the second making a bet. Austin called utterances like these performatives, and distinguished them from utterances of sentences like "it is raining," which, unlike performatives do indeed have truth values because they describe a state of affairs in the world. He referred to the utterances that have truth values as constatives. However, after failing to come up with a satisfactory set of criteria for distinguishing between constatives and performatives, he developed another set of distinctions between three kinds of speech acts that are involved in every utterance:

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[1] Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, a "model of ostensive-inferential communication" (Sperber & Wilson 1986:59) offers an alternative to Mey's theory of pragmatics that is more restricted in its scope in that "considerations of culture and society are notably absent in the characterizations of individuals' cognitive environments" (Talbot 1994:3526). Moreover, perhaps partly as a consequence of this exclusion of matters having to do with culture and society, Sperber and Wilson (1986:243) claim that "the vast range of data that speech act theorists have been concerned with is of no special interest to pragmatics." In contrast, Mey (2006:94) thinks that "one should ask how a speech act functions in society" and goes even further into investigating cross-cultural differences in the use of speech acts. Mey's theory of pragmatics thus seems better suited than relevance theory for this brief look at the logical aspects of speech acts or performatives.

a locutionary act (the act **of** saying something), an illocutionary act (the act **in** saying something), and a perlocutionary act (the act **by** saying something). Interestingly enough, it is the illocutionary acts, the kind most resembling his original notion of performatives, that have received the most attention in later developments of speech act theory.

In *Propositional structure and illocutionary force*, Katz developed a set of semantic criteria for distinguishing between constative and performative sentence types based on his conception of semantic markers and the readings of the sense structures of sentences. Elsewhere I have summarized informally Katz's criteria for a sentence to have a performative sense as follows:

> **Definition #1:** The reading of a performative sentence type has a component that specifies a sentient agent doing something that has a nature and a purpose. The nature of the agent's act is physical—namely the articulation of a proposition that carries information—and also psychological—namely the intention of the agent to thereby try to get the addressee to understand this proposition. The purpose of the act depends on the particular performative verb used. For the proposition to be performative the agent reading must be the concept of the speaker of the sentence, and the time of the act must coincide with and be restricted to the speech point of the sentence (Gonsalves 2004:139).

Using this definition we can easily see that the readings of sentences (3) and (4) will qualify them as performatives. It is noticeable that the criteria that failed Austin in his efforts to secure a distinction between constatives and performatives had to do with grammatical features of the syntax of sentences such as the indicative mood, a first person subject, and the simple present tense. In definition 1, however, what we have are criteria that have to do with the meaning of the sentence instead of its grammatical syntactic features.

Now consider the following utterances:

(5)   There is a bull in the field—said by one friend to another as a warning.

(6)   Will you please pass me the salt?—said at the dinner table as a request.

In order to account for so-called indirect performatives such as these, in which either, as in (5), a constative sentence is uttered with the meaning of a performative, or as in (6), a certain type of performative sentence, here a question, is uttered with the meaning of another type of performative, here a request, Katz (1977:16) developed the following definition of a function PRAG which formalizes in general terms the way in which a pragmatic component might account for the utterance meanings of sentence types.

(7) PRAG$(D(S_i),I(C(t))) = \{R_1, \ldots, R_n\}$

What the function PRAG does is that it takes as input grammatical and semantic information about the sentence type, $D(S_i)$, together with information about the use of the sentence type in a specific context, $I(C(t))$, and gives as output a set of readings for the meaning of the use of the sentence in that context, $\{R_1, \ldots, R_n\}$. This PRAG function would appropriately transform (5) into a warning and (6) into a request. Of course, the function PRAG is like a promissory note here, suggesting a pragmatic theory that was barely being developed, mostly perhaps on the basis of the work of Paul

Grice on conversational implicatures at that time. My suggestion is that a more fully developed pragmatic theory, such as the one outlined by Mey, could be thought of as substituting for PRAG here, providing the sentence readings that take into account both the local and larger social context of the utterance of the sentence.

2. THREE APPROACHES TO SPEECH ACT THEORY. Now consider sentence (8):

(8) Jeffrey, will you please read the poem?

Let us suppose that this sentence is uttered by a teacher speaking to a student in a class of about twenty students on an occasion when the activity in which the class is engaged requires the students from time to time to read portions of various texts out loud. However, let's imagine that on this specific occasion when addressed in this way and asked to read the poem, the student so addressed, instead of reading the poem out loud, reads it quietly to himself.

I would like to use this situation and narrative first to illustrate each of the three different approaches to the theory of speech acts already mentioned. The first approach, based on Searle & Vanderveken (1985), I will refer to as the use theory of speech acts. This approach is the one that is most closely related to the work of the originator of speech act theory, J. L. Austin, in the sense that it builds directly on Austin's analysis of speech acts generally, and in particular on his analysis of what he called illocutionary acts, which he described as the speech act performed **in** saying something. For example, we might say that in uttering (8) the teacher was performing the illocutionary act, in the terminology of Vanderveken, of directing the student to do something. (Katz uses the alternative name **requestive** for this category of illocutionary acts.) Even though here the teacher uses a question, this counts eventually as a directive in the context described on the basis, perhaps, of conversational maxims. Vanderveken (1990:75) asserts that he will "not multiply unnecessarily literal meanings and semantic ambiguity, but will appeal as much as possible to conversational maxims and conversational background." So sentence (8) has the literal meaning of a regular interrogative, which "strongly entails an imperative sentence" (Vanderveken 1990:149). The imperative entailed by (8) would be something like "Please tell me whether you will read the poem." However, it would seem that some conversational maxim will transform the initial question into a regular request to read the poem. So this utterance of sentence (8) ultimately succeeds in carrying out what Vanderveken calls the directive illocutionary point in this context. We will refer to the Searle and Vanderveken approach as the use theory of speech acts, because it seems to owe much of its strength to the use theory of meaning, according to which, in a nutshell, the meaning of a sentence is to be determined by how it is used in a context in which a person utters the sentence to someone else.

The second approach, based on the work of Katz, I will refer to as the competence theory of speech acts. Katz (1977) developed his theory of speech acts in its most complete form, at least in part as a response to Searle (1969). I will refer to Katz's approach as the competence theory of speech acts, because it restricts itself to the competence side of the competence/performance distinction of Chomsky (1965). While

what determines meaning in the use theory of speech acts is the use of sentences in real contexts, what determines meaning in the competence theory of speech acts is the conceptual structures that make up the senses of sentences in a compositional manner from the senses of its words and phrases, as determined by the semantic competence that is part of the ideal speaker-hearer's linguistic knowledge. So as far as the competence theory of speech acts is concerned, (8) is simply a question, asking Jeffrey to predict whether or not he will read the poem, a natural answer to which is either "Yes" or "No." Katz also considers questions to fall under the general category of requestives, because they request an answer. But because of the peculiar nature of their request, questions are placed in the special category of Erotetic Requestives (Katz 1977:205). What happens then in the case of sentence (8) in our classroom scenario is that the pragmatic function PRAG in (7) will convert the erotetic requestive, which has the satisfaction condition of an appropriate answer, into a more ordinary requestive which has instead the satisfaction condition that "the requestee's behavior falls under the concept represented by the reading that substitutes for" the complement predicate (Katz 1977:156)—which in (8) is "read the poem."

But PRAG does something else for us here. In the context of the classroom where the manner of reading, namely out loud, is part of the practice of the class, a feature of the context of the use of (8) here, PRAG adds the concept of reading out loud.

The third approach, which is perhaps best represented by the work of Jacob L. Mey, I will refer to as the pragmatic theory of speech acts. This approach can be seen as reacting to what Mey sees as the limitations of Searle's use theory of speech acts. This approach is spelled out and made accessible through Mey (2001). While Searle's approach focuses on outlining the rules governing the successful performance of various categories of individual illocutionary acts performed by an individual user in a specific context, the pragmatic approach begins with the larger social and cultural context influencing the language user, and focuses mostly on the social and cultural forces affecting the language user in the situation in which the speech act occurs. It focuses on the constraints and choices facing the language user in a particular situation. Mey is concerned with situated speech acts, where the larger social situation surrounding the speech act is what determines what is happening in that situation. In (8), for example, the social situation of the classroom and issues of power regarding the relationships among the students and between the students and the teacher would be considered crucial to a pragmatic analysis.

A quick look at how each of these three approaches fares with respect to our classroom scenario suggests that the pragmatic theory seems to have the most to offer in terms of giving us the full picture of what is going on in the situation. According to Mey, a generalized pragmatic act is referred to as a pragmeme, and a specific instantiation of a pragmeme is called a pract. Further, "since no two practs ever will be identical, . . . every pract is at the same time an allopract." In the terminology of the theory then, I am not sure what pragmeme is being exemplified by the actions of the student Jeffrey in the classroom scenario, but one possible candidate, cited by Mey, is Dennis Kurzon's pragmeme of incitement. According to Kurzon (1998:28, quoted in

Mey 2001:221), "any utterance may constitute an act of incitement if the circumstances are appropriate to allow for such an interpretation." In the classroom scenario, the fact that Jeffrey reads quietly to himself might suggest that there is no utterance and so no incitement. However, body language is an important aspect of pragmatics, and it is discussed and illustrated by Mey at some length. In the classroom scenario let's suppose that Jeffrey indicates his quiet reading by looking down for some time at the page with the poem, and then glancing up to look again at the teacher when he is supposedly done with his reading. So these movements of the student Jeffrey, in response to the teacher's request, could be interpreted in this scenario as constituting an allopract of the pragmeme of incitement. Of course, in order to come up with a more reliable conclusion as to what pragmeme is involved here we would probably need more information about the background of the scenario, information that would help us to situate Jeffrey in the social context of the classroom. Nevertheless, clearly the pragmatic approach seems to have the promise of delivering insight into real world language-based interactions.

Turning to Searle and Vanderveken's use theory of speech acts we see first, as already mentioned, that this approach will eventually interpret (8) as a regular directive, a request to read the poem. In fact, both Vanderveken's logical theory and Katz's competence theory start by assigning (8) the literal meaning of a question, and then, relying on conversational maxims or aspects of pragmatics, derive the intended meaning of a request to read the poem. However, that is essentially the end of the story for both of these approaches: while Austin provides the concept of a perlocutionary act, which is the act of having an effect on the addressee, this is not developed at any great length in the work of Katz, Searle, or Vanderveken, where the focus is understandably on illocutionary acts.

Katz's competence theory of speech acts in one sense fares the worst in my hypothetical scenario. Because it deliberately divorces itself from the contexts of speech acts and derives meaning only from within the language, the competence theory will interpret sentence (8) as nothing more than a question addressed to Jeffrey, to which an appropriate response is either "yes" or "no." This is to be expected, since this is a theory of sentence meaning.

Nevertheless, what is most significant about the competence theory of speech acts is that it is part of a larger semantic theory that attempts to account for the meanings of sentences from the ground up: that is, beginning with an account of the meanings of words in the lexicon, and going on to an account of how the meanings of words can be combined to give the meanings of phrases and sentences, it sets out to account for the semantic properties and relations of sentence types. As part of a larger linguistic theory of the phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects of language, this theory offers a foundation for an investigation into such important issues as how language is acquired and how sentences are produced and understood in real time by language users. While Searle and Vanderveken's use theory begins at the level of the meanings of the utterances of sentences and Mey's pragmatic theory goes even further to take into account the larger social context of situated speech, Katz's

competence theory looks inside the meanings of words and builds its account of sentence meaning from within. Searle has argued at some length that sentences have no meaning independent of context (1978). The argument has something to do with the meaning of the sentence "The cat is on the mat" in a context in which both mat and cat are floating in outer space. Katz has responded to this attack on the notion of context-free meaning (Katz 1981). What I find more interesting, however, is that Mey takes Searle's attack on context-free meaning one step further. According to Mey (2001:220), "there are, strictly speaking, no such things as speech acts." There are, properly speaking for Mey, only pragmatic acts or practs. Perhaps there is an appropriate pragmeme that covers and explains both Searle's attack on context-free meaning and Mey's attack on speech acts. I am sure that whatever it is, this pragmeme will suggest to us that we need to look beyond such disagreements to find ways in which these differing approaches can inform and build upon each other.

There are several important differences between the theories of Katz and Vanderveken with respect to the logic of performatives, but perhaps the most significant of these is the way each of these theories deals with the closely corresponding issues of the illocutionary forces and the satisfaction conditions and values of performative sentences. First, while for Katz performative sentences have just the illocutionary force named by the performative verb used, for Vanderveken (1990:19), "performative sentences ... express ... a literal declaration by the speaker that he performs the illocutionary act named by the performative verb." So a performative sentence like "I promise to finish soon" has the "secondary illocutionary force of" a promise "by way of having the primary illocutionary force of a declaration" (Vanderveken 1990:20). This analysis would seem to entail that a sentence like "I declare this meeting adjourned" has both a primary and a secondary illocutionary force of a declaration—a sort of double declaration. This might or might not be an unfortunate consequence of this analysis. Second, both Katz and Vanderveken recognize similar satisfaction conditions for illocutionary forces. According to Vanderveken (1990:27), "a condition of satisfaction of a request is that the hearer carry out in the world of the utterance the future course of action represented by the propositional content," while for Katz the compliance condition for requests contains something like this and also the condition that there is in fact a requestee. Nevertheless, while the satisfaction conditions of illocutionary forces are similar for Katz and Vanderveken, they come to different conclusions as to what constitutes the satisfaction value of an illocutionary act. For Vanderveken, the satisfaction values of an illocutionary act are "the set U_t of truth values which are truth and falsehood" (Vanderveken 1990:42). On the other hand, for Katz (1977:229) "in requestive propositions, the counterpart of truth is obviously compliance."

He continues:

Consider the argument from (6.59) to (6.60).
(6.59) I request that you eat breakfast.
(6.60) I request that you eat a meal.
Here validity has to be understood as preservation of compliance.

So what is inherited in going from the premise in (6.59) to the conclusion in (6.60) is compliance, not truth. Similarly, for arguments that involve advisives, what is inherited is heeding, and for arguments that involve promises, what is inherited is fulfillment.

What we are left with, then, are two kinds of logical systems: the first admitting only truth, the second allowing also for satisfaction values like compliance, heeding and fulfillment. Since the satisfaction values of the second system seem to imply a social dimension, my conclusion is that this second logical system is better prepared than the first to handle a full-fledged pragmatic theory like Mey's that hopes to take into account the larger social context.

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