Essays in

Speech Act Theory

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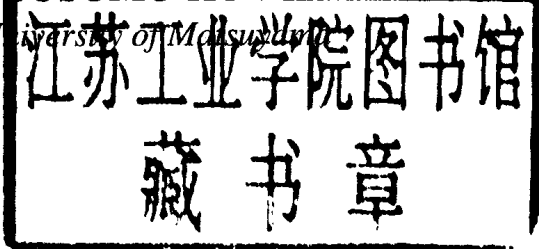## and Susumu Kubo

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SPEECH ACT THEORY

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Introduction

Daniel Vanderveken & Susumu Kubo

In order to act together with success, several agents engaged in a common activity often have to communicate to each other in order to coordinate intelligently their efforts. Communication is at the centre of sciences like philosophy, psychology, linguistics and cognitive and computer sciences which deal with language, thought and action. As ordinary language philosophers have pointed out, any study of communication must take into account the nature of speech acts that agents perform in discourse (their utterance acts, their acts of reference and predication, their illocutionary and perlocutionary acts) as well as the structure of their language games, the forms of life into which they are engaged and the conversational background. This book contains a series of contributions by philosophers, psychologists, computer scientists and linguists on language use and comprehension in general and speech acts in particular. In this introduction we will offer a brief historic survey and present current issues of speech act theory regarding the structure and functions of language. We will also present the contents of the contributions.

Philosophers and grammarians have long acknowledged the role of speech acts in their explanation of verbal mood and sentential types. According to Aristotle, only declarative sentences can be true or false (cf 1979: 17a). Other sentence types like the interrogative and optative types serve to make other kinds of speech. During the classical age, philosophical grammarians developed an ideational theory of meaning according to which sentence utterances serve to make acts of thought like judgements, requests and commands for the purpose of communication. In the second chapter *Verbal Moods and Sentence Moods in the Tradition of Universal Grammar*, André Leclerc presents the treatment of *aspects of meaning* determining the types of speakers' acts of

thought in classical Universal Grammar (c. 1660–1800). Leclerc's interpretation of the theory of verbal moods explains why the indicative is more fundamental than other verbal moods and also why it is not really a mood according to Port-Royal's grammar. There are two approaches in the classical theory of verbal moods defended in the philosophical grammars of the XVIIIth century. According to the first approach that Arnault and Lancelot (1966) defended, grammatical moods are characteristic *markers of the speaker's acts of thought* (which can be social as well as solitary). So the various types of sentences that language distinguishes express conventionally various types of acts of thought that speakers can entertain for the purpose of communication. This first approach recognizes a relative autonomy to the non declarative fragment of natural language. The second approach is *reductionistic*: it considers that non declarative sentences only serve to express judgements of the speaker about himself. Both approaches still exist in contemporary philosophy of language.

More recently, Frege, in the logical trend of contemporary philosophy of language, acknowledged that all kinds of sentences contain expressions whose meaning serve to determine the *force* of their utterances. According to Frege (1977[1918]), force, sense and denotation are the three basic components of sentence meaning. Thus literal utterances of declarative sentences have the force of assertion; they serve to acknowledge the truth of the expressed proposition. Literal utterances of interrogative sentences have the force of a question; they serve to request an answer. Unfortunately, Frege, whose main objective was to derive mathematics from logic, did not formulate an elaborated semantic theory of force and of sense as he did for denotation. For a purely extensional ideographic object language was sufficient for his logicist purposes. Sentences have a truth value but no sense in his logical ideography. However force markers were so indispensable to language according to Frege that he felt the need to introduce force markers, the assertion and the definition signs, in the object-language of logic. All theorems are asserted in the *Begriffschrift*. Frege's interest for the force of utterances was abandoned[1] by his successors in the logical trend. They were much more interested by his remarks about sense and the need of a general logic of sense and denotation for an adequate semantic theory of truth of declarative sentences. So there are no force markers in the object language of modal, temporal and intensional logics that Church, Carnap, Prior, Montague, Marcus, Kaplan, Kripke and others have formulated. These philosophers only

contributed to the theory of meaning by analyzing how certain words serve to determine the truth conditions of propositions expressed by declarative sentences in which they occur.

In the middle of the XXth century, Wittgenstein pointed out in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) that meaning and use are systematically related in language. "For a large class of cases, ... the meaning of a word is its use in language" (P.I. 43). According to Wittgenstein, we learn the meaning of words by learning how to practise language-games with them. Sentences are instruments that have a role and functions in language-games. "Here the term *"language-game"* is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, of a form of life" (P.I. 23). Influenced by Wittgenstein, Austin, Strawson, Grice, Searle and others formed a new philosophical trend devoted to ordinary language analysis. So the contemporary philosophy of language has come to be divided in two different trends often in polemical terms. On the one hand, the logical trend founded by Frege and Russell mainly studies how words relate to things. It tends to consider that language serves to describe the world and it concentrates on the analysis of truth conditions of propositions expressed by declarative sentences. On the other hand, the ordinary language analysis trend studies how and for which purposes words are used in the conduct of discourse. It considers all kinds of speech activities in language use and it concentrates on the analysis of felicity conditions of speech acts performed by uttering all types of sentences (declarative or not). Austin (1962a) distinguished three main kinds of speech acts in the use of language that he called locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. In Austin's terminology, by uttering sentences, speakers characteristically perform *locutionary acts*: they utter words with a certain sense and reference. They also mean to perform *illocutionary acts* with a certain *force*[2] such as assertions, promises, orders, declarations and apologies. Moreover, when their utterances have effects on the audience, speakers perform *perlocutionary acts*: they can, for example, convince, please, influence, amuse or embarrass the hearer.

Austin discovered illocutionary acts by noticing that successful literal utterances of sentences like "I request you to help me", "You are invited to come" and "I open this session" are *performative*, in the sense that they constitute the performance by the speaker of the illocutionary act named by their main verb. Austin called this kind of sentence *performative sentences* and their main verb *performative verbs*. At first, illocutionary acts were introduced by

Austin (1962b) to analyze the meaning of performative sentences as opposed to other types of sentences that he called *constative sentences*. Utterances of constative sentences are *true* when they represent things as they are in the world. Otherwise, they are *false*. On the other hand, utterances of performative sentences are not true or false but rather happy or unhappy according to Austin. They are *happy* when the speaker does represented things with his words by virtue of uttering them in the right context and they are *unhappy* otherwise. However, as Austin soon came to realize, illocutionary acts are important for the theory of meaning and understanding in general and not just in the analysis of performative sentences. Indeed any speaker who makes a meaningful utterance (whether performative or not) attempts to perform an illocutionary act in the context of his utterance. His attempted performance of an illocutionary act is part of what he primarily means and intends to get the hearer to understand. All kinds of sentences serve to perform illocutionary acts. Constative sentences serve to make statements, interrogative sentences to ask questions and imperative sentences to direct the hearer.

According to ordinary language philosophy, *the primary units of speaker meaning in the use and comprehension of natural languages are therefore illocutionary acts* with felicity conditions *rather than propositions* with truth conditions as it is commonly assumed in the logical trend. It is in the attempted performance of illocutionary acts that speakers express and communicate their thoughts in the conduct of discourse. Austin mainly studied elementary illocutionary acts which have a *force*. Such acts are performed at a moment of utterance by uttering an appropriate sentence in an adequate context of utterance. He attempted to analyze their felicity conditions and drew our attention to words whose meaning serve to determine types of illocutions rather than truth conditions.

In the past three decades, speech act theory has become an important branch of the contemporary theory of language thanks mainly to the influence of Searle (1969, 1979) and Grice (1975) whose ideas on meaning and communication have stimulated research in philosophy and in human and cognitive sciences. Simultaneously, Wittgenstein's anti-theoretical approach to language has been increasingly abandoned. Thus, Wittgenstein's claim that there are "countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences'" (PI, sec.11) was strongly criticized by Searle (1975b) who proposed instead a classification of basic kinds of meaningful utterances based on the clear and distinct notion of illocutionary point. From Searle's

view, there are only five illocutionary points that speakers can achieve on propositions in an utterance, namely: the *assertive, commissive, directive, declaratory* and *expressive illocutionary points*. Speakers achieve the *assertive point* when they represent how things are in the world, the *commissive point* when they commit themselves to doing something, the *directive point* when they make an attempt to get hearers to do something, the *declaratory point* when they do things in the world at the moment of the utterance solely by virtue of saying that they do and the *expressive point* when they express their attitudes about objects and facts of the world.

This typology of possible illocutionary points enabled Searle to improve Austin's classification of performative verbs and to proceed to a reasoned classification of illocutionary forces of utterances which is not as language-dependent as that of Austin. As Searle pointed out, the five illocutionary points correspond to the four different directions of fit that can exist between words and things. Assertive utterances like assertions and predictions have the words-to-things direction of fit. Commissive utterances like promises and threats and directive utterances like requests and commands have the things-to-words direction of fit. Declaratory utterances like appointments and definitions have the double direction of fit and expressive utterances like thanks and congratulations the empty direction of fit. Searle also revised Austin's trilogy of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts by replacing the notion of locutionary act by those of *utterance* and *propositional acts*. In language use, speakers make oral or graphic utterances: they pronounce the sounds or write the marks of sentences. Furthermore, in their attempted performance of elementary illocutionary acts, they express propositions with forces. They refer to objects under concepts, they make acts of predication and they express a propositional content with certain truth conditions. In this view, *elementary illocutionary acts are* of the form F(P): they are *composed of a force* F *and of a proposition* P. On the one hand, sentences like "Please, help me!" and "You will help me", whose clauses are synonymous, express in the same contexts of utterance illocutionary acts with the same propositional content but different forces. On the other hand, elementary sentences like "Is it snowing?" and "Are you coming?" with the same force marker express illocutionary acts with the same force but different propositional contents. Thanks to this new analysis, Searle has established a bridge between speech act theory and the theory of sense and denotation of Frege and his successors. It has become possible to exploit in speech act theory the resources of the theory of truth developed in

the logical trend in contemporary philosophy.

An attempt of performance of an illocutionary act can be more or less felicitous. The speaker can succeed or fail to perform that act. He can perform that act with or without defect. (An illocutionary act is defective when the speaker is not sincere or speaks in a wrong context). Furthermore the illocutionary act can be satisfied or not depending on what is happening in the world. An assertion can be true or false, a promise kept or violated, a request granted or refused. By attempting to analyze rigorously the felicity conditions of illocutionary acts in *Speech Acts* and *Expression and Meaning*, Searle has raised up an irreversible theoretical movement in the trend of ordinary language philosophy against the original anti-theoretical will of his founder Wittgenstein. Later, in *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*, Searle and Vanderveken have used the resources of logic in order to analyze the logical form of illocutionary acts and to formulate the basic laws of speech act theory. Unlike Austin whose notion of illocutionary force was primitive, Searle and Vanderveken have decomposed illocutionary forces into their various components (illocutionary point, mode of achievement, degree of strength and propositional, preparatory and sincerity conditions). They have formulated a recursive definition of the set of all possible illocutionary forces of utterances instead of giving a simple list of actual forces. The five primitive illocutionary forces are the five simplest forces with an illocutionary point: the force of *assertion*, the force of a *commitment to a future action*, the force of a *linguistic attempt to get someone to act*, the force of *declaration* and that of *expression of an attitude*. All other forces are obtained from the primitives by a finite number of applications of six logical operations on their components. They have a more restricted mode of achievement of their illocutionary point, special propositional content, preparatory or sincerity conditions or a smaller or greater degree of strength. Furthermore, Searle and Vanderveken have defined recursively by induction the conditions of success, non defective performance and satisfaction of elementary and complex illocutionary acts. Unlike Austin, they have distinguished between successful utterances which are defective illocutionary acts (like successful promises that the speaker is unable or does not intend to keep) and utterances which are not even successful (like failed promises where the speaker does not succeed in putting himself under an obligation to do something). In addition to elementary illocutionary acts of the form F(P), Searle and Vanderveken have also studied complex *illocutionary acts of denegation* like refusals which are denegations of accep-

tances, *conditional illocutionary acts* like offers which are promises made on the condition of the hearer's acceptance and *illocutionary conjunctions* like warnings which contain both an assertion and a directive.

Searle and Vanderveken have also proposed a new declaratory analysis of performative sentences. According to them, performative utterances are primarily a *declaration* by the speaker that he is performing at the moment of utterance the illocutionary act named by the performative verb. In their view, any successful literal utterance of an explicit performative sentence is performative because a successful declaration makes its propositional content true and the propositional content in this case is that the speaker performs the illocutionary act named by the performative verb. Thus by a successful literal utterance of sentence (1) "I hereby ask you if it is snowing", the speaker asks the expressed question by way of primarily declaring that he asks that question. On this account, such a performative utterance is primarily a declaration and secondarily a question. Searle and Vanderveken's declaratory semantic analysis of performative sentences is in opposition to the two views that were current before. First, according to the so-called *performative hypothesis,* (Ross 1970) the main feature of the force marker of performative sentences was considered to be the performative verb itself. In such a view, any successful literal utterance of a performative sentence just constitutes the performance by the speaker of the illocutionary act named by the performative verb. For example, by a literal utterance of (1), the speaker means to ask the question whether it is snowing just as when he uses literally the corresponding interrogative sentence (2) "Is it snowing?" Performative and corresponding non performative sentences are then analyzed as synonymous. Second, according to the assertive hypothesis of Warnock (1973), D. Lewis (1972) and others, performative sentences were considered to be declarative sentences like others. The main feature of their illocutionary force markers is then the indicative mood of the performative verb rather than that verb itself. From this standpoint, a successful utterance of a performative sentence constitutes primarily a literal *assertion* by the speaker that he is performing the illocutionary act named by the performative verb. Thus, by a literal utterance of (1), the speaker means primarily to assert that he is asking a question. Whenever this assertion is true, the utterance is performative. The assertive hypothesis is reductionist just as the second approach of Universal Grammar mentioned above.

Searle in the chapter *How Performatives Work* further explains the declaratory analysis of performative utterances of *Foundations* by asking the

question: How do declarations work? He argues that illocutionary acts are a special kind of action where the expression of the intention to perform the action in an appropriate context is sufficient for the performance of that action. Generally speakers perform literally an illocutionary act of the form F(P) by uttering a sentence whose force marker and clause express respectively the force and propositional content of that act in the context of utterance. However, they can also express their intention of performing such an illocutionary act by making a literal utterance in an appropriate context of a performative sentence whose verb names that very act. Performative utterances are both self referential and executive according to Searle. By declaring that he performs an illocutionary act F(P) the speaker necessarily manifests his intention to perform that act by virtue of his utterance. Such a declaration unlike a simple assertion is sufficient to guarantee the presence of the speaker's intention to perform the act F(P). And the manifestation of that intention is then constitutive of the performance of the expressed illocution. An unexpected consequence of Searle's explanation is that any verb at all that names an intentional action could be uttered performatively. All depends on facts about how the world works and not on the meaning of action verbs. Because of His supernatural powers, God can use performatively many more verbs than we can.

Illocutionary logic is a novelty in the history of logic. For the first time, logic can interpret the whole set of sentences that Aristotle divided in the *De Interpretatione* in declarative and non declarative utterances. Illocutionary logic enables formal semantics to analyze the proper meaning of all types of sentences (whether declarative or not) expressing all kinds of illocutionary acts without any *ad hoc* reduction of non declarative sentences to declarative sentences. Utterances with an illocutionary point cannot be reduced to utterances with another illocutionary point in the framework of illocutionary logic. So the assertive and performative hypotheses are false. We can perform illocutionary acts without asserting or declaring that we perform them. Furthermore, not all illocutionary acts are an expression of the speaker's attitudes. In making assertive, commissive, directive and declaratory utterances speakers do more than express their attitudes. They want to achieve a success of fit between words and things.

Furthermore, illocutionary logic enables lexical semantics to analyze formally the meaning of performative and illocutionary verbs of ordinary language by way of a systematic breakdown of lexicalized forces into their components. Such a work in lexical semantics has been compiled for English,

French and Portuguese in recent years.[3] It is now under way for other typologically different languages such as Japanese (Kubo 1999), Polish and Spanish.[4] In the tenth chapter *Illocutionary Morphology and Speech Acts*, Susumu Kubo analyzes in the perspective of illocutionary logic the meaning of Japanese sentences with an illocutionary affix. He investigates why the illocutionary force of utterances with an affix is not that of their main verb but that of their affix. He then proposes a general composition mechanism thanks to which one can generally predict the expressed forces within the framework of illocutionary categorial morphology. This clarifies the process of illocutionary force understanding in Japanese. Through the analysis of a particular Japanese illocutionary affix Susumu Kubo observes that the affix is illocutionarily polysemous as regards the preparatory and sincerity conditions of its force even though those polysemous meanings share their core meaning which is a particular mode of achievement of that force.

In speech act theory, propositions are not only senses of sentences with truth conditions. But they are also contents of illocutionary acts with success and satisfaction conditions. Any proposition is in principle expressible in the performance of an illocutionary act. This imposes new conditions of adequacy to propositional logic. For many propositions with the same truth conditions are not substitutable *salva felicitate* within illocutionary acts. So the type of propositions cannot be reduced to truth conditions in illocutionary logic as it has been commonly done since Carnap in philosophical logic. As Vanderveken explains in the first chapter, illocutionary logic requires a non classical predicative propositional logic which distinguishes propositions whose expression requires different acts of predication or whose truth conditions are understood in different ways.

In *Meaning and Speech Acts* Vanderveken has used and further developed illocutionary and intensional logics in order to construct a general formal semantics of success and satisfaction capable of interpreting indirectly via their translation into an ideographic object language all types of sentences (imperative, interrogative, conditional, subjunctive, optative as well as declarative) and of deriving the principles of practical as well as theoretical valid inferences that speakers are able to make in the use of ordinary language. The unified logic of force, sense and denotation of general formal semantics is a generalization and conservative extension of Montague's intensional logic. Its perspicuous and disambiguous object language serves to exhibit the deep logical structure common to all natural languages. Like Montague,

Vanderveken considers that there is no important theoretical difference between natural and formal languages: logical formalisms such as model and proof theories are most useful resources in order to explicate and construct linguistic competence in general and the speaker's ability to perform and understand illocutionary acts in particular. However, the theory of truth advocated by Davidson, Montague and others is not the single most important objective of formal semantics in Vanderveken's view. For success and satisfaction conditions are not reducible to truth conditions. So the theory of truth is now just a part of a more general theory of success and satisfaction of illocutionary acts needed to interpret all kinds of utterances. There is a model-theoretical semantics of success, satisfaction and truth in *Meaning and Speech Acts* as well as a generally complete axiomatization of valid laws. So speech act theory has come to take its place in the logical trend of philosophy of language (cf. Cocchiarella 1997) and that entrance is also a return to Frege's original ideas about the theory of meaning.

All the elementary sentences of the ideographic object language of general semantics contain a force marker: they express in each possible context of utterance an illocutionary act of the form F(P) whose felicity conditions are defined recursively in every possible interpretation. Unlike what happens in classical intensional logic, clauses expressing strictly equivalent propositions are not synonymous any more. Propositions are complex senses with a structure of constituents in the predicative propositional logic of general semantics. Moreover all the fundamental semantic notions of analyticity, consistency and entailment are ramified so as to explain semantic facts like Moore's paradox that were completely ignored before in the theory of linguistic meaning. So general semantics is able to explain and predict illocutionary and truth conditional entailments between sentences that were completely ignored before.

In the eighties, Searle realized that it was necessary to complete and even to found philosophical investigations on language and speech acts by constructing a philosophical theory of intentionality. Searle had spoken quite freely before of mental states like beliefs, desires and intentions that speakers express verbally in language use and of their meaning intentions in attempted performances of illocutionary acts. Searle's main objective in *Intentionality* was to contribute to the philosophy of mind by analyzing rigorously such intentional notions. In the philosophical tradition, intentionality is the intrinsic feature of the mind by which our thoughts are directed at objects and facts of the world other than themselves. In Searle's view, our intentional thoughts are