



NORMATIVE PRAGMATICS AND SPEECH ACTS

Bart Geurts

Barcelona Lectures — Part 1

1. Normative pragmatics, speech acts
2. Common ground, cooperation, implicatures
3. Implicatures, sincerity
4. Evolutionary pragmatics
5. Folk psychology and mind reading

Lev Vygotsky

Paul Grice

John Searle

Herbert Clark

David Lewis

Robert Brandom

Esther Pascual

Kirsty Graham

Everybody goes on about norms.
Cows go “moo!”, philosophers go “norm!”
(Fodor 2008)

- ❑ Dancing, dating, eating, ping pong, sex, shopping, singing, talking, teaching, traffic, ...
- ❑ Normativity is a style of social behaviour.
- ❑ It serves to coordinate our activities.
- ❑ It involves treating each other as having normative statuses:
rights, duties, commitments, responsibilities, ...
- ❑ These emerge from our social interactions (broadly construed).

Three ideas that tend to go together:

1. The primary function of language is to convey mental states, notably beliefs and intentions.
2. Overt and covert attribution of mental states is essential to all our social interactions.
3. Pragmatics is a psychological discipline.

sociality

folk psychology



psychology

social cognition

mind reading

SPEECH ACTS AND COMMITMENTS

1. Speech acts are based on **conventions**.
2. Speech acts convey **mental states**: what the speaker thinks, intends, wants, ...
3. Speech acts are **social acts** that bring about commitments and other **normative** facts.
4. Speech acts change the **common ground**.

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MENTALIST
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NORMATIVE
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The semantical rules for the use of any function indicating device P for promising are:

PROPOSITIONAL CONTENT RULE

1. The utterance of P predicates some future act A of S.

PREPARATORY RULES

2. S rightly believes H would prefer S's doing A to his not doing A.
3. It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events.

SINCERITY RULE

4. S intends to do A.

ESSENTIAL RULE

5. The utterance of P counts as the undertaking of an obligation to do A.

Human communication is a special form of social interaction.

- A speech act changes the interlocutors' normative statuses (i.e. their common ground),
- and thus constrains their future interactions,
- helping them to coordinate their actions (broadly construed).

Key idea : The primary purpose of communication is to share commitments.

- Commitments are social relationships.
- We share commitments in order to coordinate our actions.
 1. Let's do the dishes together.
 2. I'll do the dishes.
 3. Will you do the dishes?
- Commitments are normative.

$C_{a,b}p$: a is committed to b to act on p

- Commitments are **relations** between individuals.
- $C_{a,b}p$ is not a psychological state, and it does not require that a believes or even entertains p .
- “Acting on” includes speech acts.
- Two ways of acting on p :
 1. Helping to **make** p true. TELIC – “*commitment to a goal*”
 2. Taking p to **be** true. ATELIC – “*commitment to the truth of...*”

Alice to Bruce:

1. I'll do the dishes. $\rightsquigarrow C_{a,b}Da$ (commissive, telic)
2. You do the dishes. $\rightsquigarrow C_{a,b}Db$ (directive, telic)
3. Clyde did the dishes. $\rightsquigarrow C_{a,b}Dc$ (constative, atelic)

	Speech act type	Sentence type
1. Bruce is doing the dishes.	assertion	declarative
2. I'll do the dishes.	promise	declarative
3. Is Bruce doing the dishes?	question	interrogative
4. Will you do the dishes?	request	interrogative
5. Do the dishes!	request	imperative
⋮	⋮	

- While there are (perhaps indefinitely) many speech act types, the number of sentence types is quite small.

- Sentence types (“declarative”, “interrogative”, ...) are theoretical concepts.
- It is not self-evident that speech act types are too.
- There have been many attempts to define and taxonomise speech act types on the basis of their English names.
- Most taxonomies look like this:
 - constatives : assertions, suggestions, ...
 - commissives : promises, threats, ...
 - directives : requests, orders, questions, ...
 - other : “Ouch”, “I christen this ship Melania II”, ...
- It is doubtful that this will work.

- Widely held view: there is a dichotomy between constatives (asserting) and commissives (promising).
- Ways of motivating this split:
 - Assertions express beliefs; promises express intentions.
 - The purpose of an assertion is to picture a state of affairs; the purpose of a promise is something else.
 - Assertions have a word-to-world direction of fit; promises have a world-to-word direction of fit. (Searle)
- Background notions:
 - Assertions are essentially epistemic tools.
 - Communication is information sharing.

1. Pre-theoretically, there doesn't seem to be a dichotomy:
 - A: Is that a statement or a promise?
 - B: Both!
2. Promissive gap: across languages, promises don't receive distinctive grammatical marking.

In a commitment-based framework, the dichotomy is avoidable:

- If $C_{a,b}p_{(a)}$, then a is committed to the truth of $p_{(a)}$, no matter whether the commitment is telic or not.
- If coordination is the main purpose of communication, the telic/atelic distinction need not matter to b .
- Directives are different: they call on b to act. This is why directives tend ~~not~~ to be marked linguistically.

a and b SHARE a commitment to act on p iff $C_{a,b}p$ and $C_{b,a}p$.

1. Alice: I'll do the dishes. $\rightsquigarrow C_{a,b}Da$ (telic)
 Bruce: Great, thanks! $\rightsquigarrow C_{b,a}Da$ (atelic)
2. Alice: I did the dishes. $\rightsquigarrow C_{a,b}Da$ (atelic)
 Bruce: Great, thanks! $\rightsquigarrow C_{b,a}Da$ (atelic)

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- Generally speaking, commitments are shared.
That's what they're for.
- If b fails to share a 's commitment, b may still accept that $C_{a,b}p$.
 - b ACCEPTS that a is committed to p iff $C_{b,a}C_{a,b}p$.
- **Conceptually**, three stages must be distinguished:
 1. a offers $C_{a,b}p$ to b
 2. b accepts the offered commitment: $C_{a,b}p$ and $C_{b,a}C_{a,b}p$
 3. b shares the offered commitment: $C_{a,b}p$ and $C_{b,a}p$
- Acceptance and sharing may but need not be signalled by b .

- 1. A:** I'll do the dishes.
B: Great, thanks!
- 2. A:** I did the dishes.
B: Great, thanks!
- 3. A:** There's parmesan on the table.
B: Where did you buy it?
- 4. A:** There's beer in the fridge.
B: Okay / Really? / Nice! / Mhmm

1. If $C_{x,y}p$, then $\neg C_{x,y}\neg p$ “If you are committed to p , you are not committed to not- p ”
 2. If $C_{x,y}p$, then $C_{x,y}C_{x,y}p$ “If you are committed to p , you are committed to being committed to p ”
 3. If $p \Rightarrow q$ and $C_{x,y}p$, then $C_{x,y}q$ “If p entails q and you are committed to p , then you are committed to q ”
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ACCEPTANCE

- 4 If $C_{x,y}p$, then $C_{y,x}C_{x,y}p$ “I cannot have a commitment to you unless you accept that I have that commitment”