Speech Act
Action performed via utterance

J. L. Austin (1911-1960)

- a British philosopher of language
- widely associated with the concept of the speech act and the idea that speech is itself a form of action.
- *How to Do Things With Words.* Oxford : Clarendon, 1962, (Written version of Austin's William James Lectures delivered at Harvard in 1955)

- The appearance of the most influential collection of Austin's paper (*How to do things with words*, published posthumously in 1962) coinciding as it did with a growing frustration within linguistics with the limitations of truth conditional semantics.

- Austin's lectures were mainly given at Oxford between 1952 to 1954, and 1955 at Harvard. Then he suddenly died in 1960. His follower J. O. Urmson collected Austin's lecture and published the collection after Austin's death

- Austin, his almost equally influential pupil H. P. Grice and a group of like-minded philosophers working at Oxford and elsewhere came to be known as 'ordinary language philosophers'.

- Ordinary Language Philosophy

- The ordinary language philosophers were mainly reacting against "Logical Positivists" such as Oxford-based philosophers Moore and Russell. These positivists' aim was to refine language, removing its perceived imperfections and illogicalities, and to create an ideal language.

- Ordinary language philosophers: People communicate effectively and unproblematically with the language just the way it is.
- · To understand how people manage the meaning of language while they are using it is the main concern, instead of refining the language
- Ordinary Language Philosophy vs. Logical Positivism
- Ordinary Language Philosophy   Logical Posivitism

Language can be used Effectively Unproblematically	Language is deficient, defective, ambiguous, vague. Contradictory And need to be refined
Interest: how people do things with words	
Austin, Grice	Moore, Russell

- Logical positivism and truth conditional semantics Logical positivist philosophers of language (such as Russell) claimed that unless a sentence can be verified to be *true* or *false,* it is *meaningless* (Truth Conditional Semantics)

- There are seven words in this sentence.

- · An invisible car came out of nowhere, hit my car and vanished.

- Knowing the meaning of a sentence means knowing under what conditions the sentence can be judged true or false.

- Truth-conditional Semantics

- There is a restricted number of sentences that are always true, no matter which situation you utter them in. They are called **tautologies** or **analytic sentences**.

- Circles are round.

- A person who is single is not married.

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- Some sentences are always false. These are called **contraditions**.

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- Women are male.

- A bachelor is married

- The Performative Hypothesis
- To ordinary language philosophers like Austin, they believe that some utterances are used not just to state things (to make statements) but to do things (to perform actions), so Austin develop the 'Performative Hypothesis'.

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- · The significance of this hypothesis:
- In some utterances, there is no truth condition at all. Especially in cases where a performative verb is used.

- I drive a white car.
- I apologize.
- I name this ship The Albatross.
- Take a book
- I now pronounce you Husband and Wife
- I sentence you for 06 months imprisonment
- I bet you 1000/-, India wins the World Cup
- Muslim marriage (Kabul Hai?   !!!)

Syntactically:
All are with first person
Declarative(not interrogative)
Indicative (not subjunctive)
Active (not passive)
Simple Present tense

- Pragmatically
- Verbs like 'apologize' and 'name' belong to '**performatives**.' They can not be judged as true or false, but are understood as performing an **action**
- How to know if a word is a performative or not?
- → See if we can meaningfully insert the adverb **hereby** between subject and verb.
- 1. I hereby apologize.
- 2. I hereby bet you five dollars that CSK wins.
- 3. I hereby name this ship The Albatross.
- 4. I hereby pronounce you husband and wife.
- Does it really make sense when I name the ship "The Albatross"?

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- Constatives vs. Performatives
- Two types of Utterances:
- · Constatives: can be true / false.
- · There is a book on the desk.
- · I drive a white car.
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- · Performatives: Can be felicitous (successful) or not
- · protest, object, apologize, deny, promise, withdraw,
- declare, plead, vote, thank
- Felicity Conditions
- Felicity conditions make performatives (speech acts) successful.
- · **Condition A**: There must be a conventional procedure
- having a conventional effect; the circumstances and persons must be appropriate
- **Condition B**: The procedure must be executed (1) correctly, (2) completely
- **Condition C**: The persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions and; if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must do it.

- Felicity Conditions (An Application) Priest/ Judge/ Referee/ Umpire
- · **Condition A**:
- · There is a conventional procedure for a couple to get married. This involves a man and a woman, in an authorized place, at an approved time, accompanied by a minimum of two witnesses.
- **Condition B**:
- · At a marriage ceremony, the words have to be the precise ones laid down. The person conducting the wedding and the couple getting
- married must sign the register before witness.
- **Condition C**:
- A marriage is not a 'shotgun wedding'. Subsequent conduct would be that the marriage must

- Three different classes of Performatives

- 1) Metalinguistics Performatives
- 2) Ritual Performatives
- 3) Collaborative Performatives

- Metalinguistics Performatives
- I say / I protest / I apologize /I withdraw (my complaint) / I plead (not guilty)
- These are the most straightforward examples of performatives:
- Self-referential
- The verb refers to what the speaker of the utterance is doing.
- Self-verifying
- They contain their own truth conditions
- Non-falsifiable
- They can never be untrue

- Ritual Performatives
- A: I hereby name this ship *The Albatross.*
- B: Who do you think you are?
- Some of the performatives won't make sense if the felicity conditions are not observed
- Felicity conditions apply particularly to performatives associated with various rituals or very formal events.
- In the above example, the utterance can only appropriately and successfully be uttered by a special person in a specified situation.
- Collaborative Performatives
- 1. I bet you five dollars that India wins
- 2. I bequeath you my car.
- Other than ritual performatives, there are some that require, for their success, the 'collaboration' or particular uptake of another person.

- Development of Austin's ideas
- In chapter 11 of his book, Austin abandons completely the original distinction between 'constative' and all forms of performative utterance.
- Utterances do not only have sense but also force. Austin made a three-fold distinction:
- **Locution**:   the actual words uttered
- **Illocution**:   the force or intention behind the words
- **Perlocution**:   the effect of the illocution on the hearer
- Austin originally used the term 'speech act' to refer to an utterance and the 'total situation in which the utterance is issued'. Today the term 'speech act' is used to mean the same as 'illocutionary act'
- IFID- Illocutionary Force Indicating Device
- 1. Performative verb 2. Word Order 3. Intonation
- 4. Lowered voice quality (threat)
- I'll see you later(prediction/ promise/ threat)
- You are going- (I tell you to go)
- You are going- (request confirmation)
- Are you going ? (asking)

- Locutionary Act: this is the act of simply uttering a sentence from a language; it is a description of what the speaker says.
- You must stop smoking
- Illocutionary Act: this is what the speaker does in uttering a sentence. Illocutionary acts include such acts as stating, requesting, questioning, promising, apologizing, and appointing.
- You must stop smoking. (An ordering)
- Perlocutionary Act: the effect of an illocutionary act upon the hearer. The patient takes the doctor's order to quit smoking.
- Explicit vs. Implicit Performatives
- Characteristics of explicit performative utterances (Austin):
- contain a performative verb;
- present simple;
- It may be negative; may be exclamatory;
- The speaker must be the one responsible for enforcing the
- action expressed by the utterance
- *I apologize.*
- · *I'm sorry*

- John R. Searle
- John R. Searle had studied under Austin in the fifties. He further developed and codified Austin's Speech Acts Theory, and subsequently became the main proponent and defender of the former's ideas
- For a speech act to happen 'felicitously' or 'happily', the so called 'felicity conditions' have to be met; otherwise, the act would be misfired.
- · **I'll bet you ten dollars that the buses won't run on Thanksgiving.**
- (The speaker can only claim his money if the hearer has '**taken on**' the bet by performing a corresponding speech act expressing **'uptake**' such as: You're on.)
- Without this uptake, there is no felicitous act of betting.

- Searle's classification of speech acts
- **5 basic types of speech acts**:
- Representatives: A representative is an utterance used to describe some state of affairs.
- · *I have five toes on my right foot.*
- Directives: A directive is an utterance used to try to get the hearer to do something.
- · *Shut the door.*
- Commissives: A commissive is an utterance used to commit the speaker to do something.
- · *I'll meet you at the library at 10:00 p.m.*
- Expressives: An expressive is an utterance used to express the emotional state of the speaker.
- · *I'm sorry for calling you a dweeb.*
- Declarations: A declaration is an utterance used to change the status of some entity.
- · *You're out!*

- Indirect speech acts
- (Levinson, 1983: 264-265)
- Most usages are indirect. Directives are rarely used to issue requests In English, instead we use utterances that request indirectly:
- · Could you pass me the salt, please?
- Surface structure: interrogative. Normally interrogative sentences are used to request information· The speaker is not requesting any information; s/he wants the hearer to pass him the salt. It is a directive speech act expressed <u>indirectly</u>
- Indirect speech acts are frequently motivated by politeness.
- Could you please open the window? / Open the window.
- (request to close the door) Did you forget the door?
- · Do us a favor with the door, love.
- · How about a bit less breeze?
- · Now, Johnny, what do big people do when they come in?
- Other reasons for using indirect speech acts: reasonableness of the task; the formality of the context; social distance (different status, age, gender, education, class, occupation, etc.). Less dominant role – indirect speech acts.

Thank You