The semantics of speech acts

Jessica Rett, Fall 2014

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when: Tuesdays, 10am – 1pm

where: Rolfe 3120

what: The difference between speech acts like *John is home now* (an assertion) and *John is home now?* (a question) has traditionally been characterized as a pragmatic phenomenon. Linguists have, however, observed that these differences in illocutionary force are often explicitly marked across languages: syntactically; intonationally (as in English); or by sentence particles (as in Cheyenne, Murray 2014). This suggests the need for a compositional semantics of speech act markers (i.e. illocutionary mood), and consequently for a formalization of the semantics/pragmatics interface. We begin with a review of the philosophical typology of speech acts and some relevant pragmatic and syntactic considerations. We'll then examine a variety of theories that have found the need to represent speech acts compositionally: Krifka's account of quantifiers in questions; Gunlogson's semantics of intonation; along with analyses of responses in discourse, attitude markers, and illocutionary mood.

schedule:

wk	date	topic	readings *(optional readings italicized)*
1	October 7	introduction	Sadock 2006; Green 2009
2	October 14	philosophical background	Stalnaker 1978; Groenendijk and Stokhof 1994 §1-3 *(MacFarlane 2011)*
3	October 21	speech acts & quantifiers	Krifka 2001 *(Cohen and Krifka 2014)*
4	October 28	intonation & declaratives as questions	Gunlogson 2001 Chs 2-4
5	November 4	responses to speech acts	Farkas and Bruce 2010 *(Murray 2014)*
6	~~November 11~~	Veteran's Day	
7	November 18	commitments & polarity tags	Malamud and Stephenson 2014
8	November 25	commitments & attitude markers	Rett 2014
9	December 2	commitments & transparent FRs	Harris 2014
10	~~December 9~~	student presentations	*(to be rescheduled)*

responsibilities:

Students will be responsible for attending class and doing the readings; I will ask each of you to pick a particular day and topic for which you will be more responsible than usual for facilitating class discussion. Students enrolled in the course for credit will be asked to write a term paper for the course; we will hopefully find time near the end of the quarter for these students to briefly present their work.

readings

Austin, J. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Harvard University Press.

Cohen, A. and Krifka, M. (2014). Superlative quantifiers and meta-speech acts. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 37:41–90.

Farkas, D. and Bruce, K. (2010). On reacting to assertions and polar questions. *Journal of Semantics*, 27:81–118.

Green, M. (2009). Speech acts. In Zalta, E. N., editor, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Spring 2009 edition.

Groenendijk, J. and Stokhof, M. (1994). Questions. In van Benthem, J. and Ter Meulen, A., editors, *Handbook of Logic and Language*. Elsevier.

Gunlogson, C. (2001). *True to Form: Rising and Falling Declaratives as Questions in English*. Routledge.

Harris, J. (2014). Signaling non-speaker commitment in transparent free relatives: A paired speaker-hearer judgment study. Ms., UCLA.

Krifka, M. (2001). Quantifying into question acts. *Natural Language Semantics*, 9:1–40.

MacFarlane, J. (2011). What is assertion? In Brown, J. and Cappelen, H., editors, *Assertion*, pages 79–96. OUP.

Malamud, S. and Stephenson, T. (2014). Three ways to avoid commitments: declarative force modifiers in the conversational scoreboard. *Journal of Semantics*, pages 1–37.

Murray, S. (2014). Varieties of update. *Semantics & Pragmatics*, 7:1–53.

Rett, J. (2014). Sincerity conditions in a Stalnakarian update semantics. Ms., UCLA.

Sadock, J. (2006). Speech acts. In Horn, L. and Ward, G., editors, *The Handbook of Pragmatics*. Blackwell.

Searle, J. (1969). *Speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.

Stalnaker, R. (1978). Assertion. *Syntax and Semantics*, 9:315–332.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical investigations*. John Wiley.