I. THE MAIN POINT. In Chapter 8, we are continuing our study of language in conversational context. Chapter 7 concerned the interpretation of language in a conversational context. Chapter 8 concerns the use of language in conversational context. J.L. Austin and John Searle established that language is not used only for talking about the world. It is also used for accomplishing things in the world.

II. THE BIG (INTERRELATED) QUESTIONS

A. What kinds of things do people accomplish with language?

- Austin and Searle emphasize functions like directives, requests, promises, apologies.
- But we’re not just negotiating with people and seeking things from them.
- Language is also used to BUILD SOLIDARITY and ENHANCE INTIMACY.
- Examples: uptalk, speech demonstrations, appreciations, non-turn responses, presequences, cooperative completions.
- INTERACTIVITY: conversation is a coordinated activity.
  - Example: telephone conversations. Telephone conversations have a three-part structure: entry, body and exit, in which the participants behave in a coordinated fashion.
  - The entry: The entry begins when one party picks up the phone, thereby indicating a readiness to enter into conversation with an as yet unspecified caller. The callers identify each other and may exchange greetings, depending on their relationship. If they know each other, the call ends a separation, and is often marked by an exchange of news (reestablishing continuity).
  - The body: Many calls are made for a purpose, e.g., discussing a joint plan. By initiating talk about the joint plan, the participants enter the body.
  - The exit: When one caller determines that there is nothing more to say, she doesn’t just hang up. Rather, she signals this with a preclosing move, e.g., okay. If the other caller agrees that the conversation has reached a terminal point she signals agreement by saying okay. The callers then move into the exit phase, in which the callers disengage from the encounter by performing ritual functions, e.g., expressing pleasure at the conversation (“It was nice talking to you”), expressing regret at the upcoming separation (“I’m sorry I can’t talk longer”), making continuity statements (“I’ll see you”), and well-wishing (“Good-bye”). The callers then manage to hang up at approximately the same time. (Bangerter et al. 2004)

Sample: Conversation between LBJ and Jackie Kennedy, December 23, 1963
B. How did speech act theory challenge existing assumptions?

- Many philosophers think only about the REPRESENTATIONAL function of language.
- These philosophers think mostly of isolated sentences to which one could assign a value of true or false.
- Speech act theory says that representatives are a subcase of speech acts, with their own felicity (appropriateness) conditions.

C. How much language is formulaic rather than creative?

- Think about a naive speaker of English—someone who can only use English to make assertions, give directives and ask questions. What would that person lack socially?
- Think about what you know about the following formulas. What context calls for each?

  *Don’t sugarcoat it.*
  *Just looking.*
  *Fancy meeting YOU here!*
  *Thank YOU.*
  *Careful!*
  *Get a life!*
  *My bad.*
  *No worries.*
  *Sure don’t.*
  *Don’t spend it all in one place!*
  *Can I ask you a question?*
  *I’d better run.*

D. What is the most basic setting in which language is used?

- People tend to think of scientific writing, journalism, fiction, poetry, law.
- Austin himself originally focused on ceremonial/judicial/contractual uses of language (christening, marrying, pronouncing sentence, promising, betting).
- What about conversation?

E. Does the form of a speech act always tell us what its function is?

- QUESTIONS, IMPERATIVES, DECLARATIVES are speech acts which occur with specific forms in language after language.
- But there are indirect ways of conveying these speech acts:
I wonder where Mom went. 
Would you mind getting us an extra menu? 
Who wouldn’t want a job like that? 

• And some speech acts can have many grammatical realizations:

I can’t believe how much nerve that guy has. 
What nerve!
The nerve of that guy! 
It’s amazing the nerve of that guy. 
He’s got so much nerve! 
Has he got nerve!

• And sometimes only your relationship to the speaker tells you what act is being performed:

Can we remove those shelves? (spoken by tenant vs. spoken by apartment manager) 
How do you spell fluorescent? (spoken by a friend vs. by your teacher) 
Guess how many jelly beans are in my jar! (spoken by carnival huckster vs. small child)

III. SPEECH ACT THEORY

A. Austin focused on a type of speech act that he called a PERFORMATIVE.

• Here are examples of performative sentences:

I choose to exercise my right against self-incrimination under the Fifth Amendment, your Honor. 
I now pronounce you domestic partners under the law of the state of Hawaii. 
I christen this ship the Alaskan Princess. 
I declare the Mall of America open. 
I bet you five bucks it won’t snow. 
I promise never to touch another glass of booze. 
As of this moment, your contract is terminated.

• A FELICITOUS performative requires (a) certain institutional facts to obtain, (b) sincerity on the part of the participants, or (c) appropriate UPTAKE on the part of the hearer (e.g., You’re on!). Uptake is not always crucial (Miranda rights, process service, orders).

• Honest people can disagree about whether a performative has been performed or can be performed. Apologies yield many such controversies:
  • Is there a difference between an expression of regret and an apology?
  • Can you apologize if you didn’t personally participate in the wrongdoing?
- Are there some acts so egregious that you can’t appropriately apologize for them?
- Can you apologize if you personally believe that the conduct was justified?
- Is a performative a REPORT upon what one is doing? Think about the ASPECTUAL facts.
- Isn’t a performative a fairly special use of language?
- Might it be a little backwards to refer to speech acts which don’t pass the hereby test as IMPLICIT PERFORMATIVES?

B. Searle threw out analysis based on the idea of performatives and classified speech acts in 5 basic types. Give an example for each.

1. Representatives.
2. Directives.
3. Commissives.
4. Expressives.
5. Declarations.

- Which of these appear to require UPTAKE by the hearer?

- Searle classified speech acts in term of FELICITY CONDITIONS. There are 4 types of felicity conditions. Give an example of each for APOLOGIZING.

1. Preparatory. The conditions that have to be in place before the speech act can be uttered. For example, for a request, the hearer has to be capable of performing the request.
2. Propositional content. The proposition that the speech act concerns. For requests, this is the state of affairs that the speaker is trying to achieve. For questions, this is the proposition that the question is inquiring about. For example, for the yes-no question Is it raining?, the propositional content is It’s raining. For the information question What are you eating? the propositional content is You’re eating something (this kind of proposition is called a propositional function, because there’s a missing argument, the object).
3. Sincerity. The feelings that you have to perform the speech act sincerely. For example, if I ask you what time it is, that question satisfies the sincerity condition only if I actually want to know the answer.
4. Essential. What the speech act counts as, e.g., an undertaking by the speaker that she will be home on time.

E. Searle also recognized the existence of INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS.

- The essential insight of indirect speech act theory is a simple one: sometimes we’re embarrassed do something in a direct way.
• One reason is that we’re afraid of rejection. Another is that we want to be friendly. Another is that we don’t want to behave in an authoritarian way toward somebody.
• So we camouflage our speech acts.
• In problem 8.3, you have to identify the form of the direct act and the form of the indirect act for which it stands. The easiest way to do this is to use the speech-act categories in 8.19 on p. 228: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations with more specific descriptions in parentheses.

Example 1: Parent to misbehaving children on car trip: *Do you want me to turn around right now?*
Direct act: directive (question); Indirect act: commissive (threat)

Example 2: Customer to barista: *Could I get a large nonfat latte?*
Direct act: directive (question); Indirect act: directive (order)

• Searle aims to explain why Form A should be used to convey the meaning of Form B. His generalization is that one forms an indirect speech act by stating or questioning a felicity condition on the corresponding direct speech act.

• For each of the following examples answer these questions: (a) What is the corresponding direct speech act? (b) Which felicity condition is being invoked?

_Can you pass the salt?
Would you like to join me?
I wonder what time it is.
I regret what happened.
Are you going to change my oil?
I will be home by 10._

• **Recipes.** Problems 8.4–8.5 require you to create an indirect speech act by stating or questioning a felicity condition on the corresponding direct act (request 8.26, promise 8.20, question 8.21). To do this, you need to consult the felicity conditions for each of these speech acts. Sometimes the recipes will yield a form that doesn’t convey the speech act it’s supposed to or is otherwise bizarre. That’s OK. Simply comment on this fact. **Hint: for 8.5, when you do questioning, use an information question for your example rather than a yes-no question.**

  o **Example 1:** Form an indirect question by **stating** the preparatory condition of the direct question (pp. 229-230): _I don’t know where Pat is._
  o **Example 2:** Form an indirect question by **querying** the preparatory condition of the direct question: *Do I know where Pat is?* (Make a note that this strategy gives you a weird result.)
  o **Example 3:** Form an indirect question by querying the propositional content of the direct question: _Is Pat somewhere?

• There are two accounts of indirect speech acts: **The Gricean (inference) account** and the idiom account.
• A big problem with the theory of indirect speech acts is that there are some speech
acts, particularly those that produce lots of anxiety for the speaker, for which there is no clear direct act. Good cases of this are apologies and invitations.

IV. THE CONCEPT OF ‘FACE’ AND SPEECH ACTS


B. NEGATIVE FACE is one’s status as an independent party, someone deserving of respect. POSITIVE FACE is one’s status as a socially connected being, an intimate. Can we preserve both faces at once?

C. When framing speech acts, we are always conscious of the double bind.

Hold on a second.
Would you mind holding on for a moment?

Grab the phone, would you?
Could you please answer the phone?

I hate to disturb you, but would you mind if I made up the sofa bed?
Off!

What’s up?
How are you?

OK. Catch you later.
Thank you for your time.