

INTERACTIVITY AND INTERACTIVE ACTS

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ofIntroduction

The recognition that the production of speakers of any language consists of segments which are connected to each other in some way has always been part of our grammatical legacy. Traditional grammars invariably contain sections on conjunction, coordination, subordination and the like. But the treatment of this recognition, irrespective of the nature and extent of the segments, had until recently been for the most part purely semantic, sentence-based, and consequently neglectful of the speaker or the user and the context within which s/he is operating. This semantic treatment of 'relations' includes the works of the traditional grammarians, as well as the more recent writing. Such literature presents connection as being between sentences or clauses in texts. The clauses or sentences express 'meanings' (Curme 1935:162) or 'thoughts' (Mason 1901:120). Here relations are treated under structural descriptions of 'coordination' or 'subordination'. The classification of relations in all traditional grammars is in fact carried out under the sections on 'adverbial clauses', a consequence of their treatment in sentence grammars.

Adverbial clauses are categorised according to their 'meaning', giving rise to clauses of reason, purpose, result, concession, condition and so on. There is no explicit explanation of the criteria leading to the classification. Instead, it is assumed that the copious examples supplied will help the reader to distinguish one class from another (Curme 1935, Kennedy 1935, Kruisinga 1932, Zandvoort 1962). The class names are also assumed to be self-explanatory, i.e. the second clause expresses a result or reason etc, in relation to the first.

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The implication is therefore clearly that the nature of the relation is to be understood from the meaning of the two members. If we know the meaning of the two parts, then we know what kind of relation is being expressed. However, the relation is often expressed 'more exactly' (Kruisinga 1932:404) by the use of connecting words.

The more recent literature differs from the traditional grammars in the attempt made to characterise the conditions under which two clauses are connected. For instance, Lakoff (1971) states that two clauses are semantically related by the presence of a 'common topic'. Lakoff does not explicate what we should understand by 'common topic', but she does consider some of the factors which make conjoining possible, and notes that these include: similarity of clause subjects in form and meaning, same category verbs, and similar tenses. In addition, the hearer must make his own presuppositions in order to establish a link between the two clauses. Lakoff is concerned mainly with the conjunctions and, but, or, and the similarities and differences between them.

A view which is shared by several writers is that a relation exists between two specified parts when the information in the second part can only be decoded or interpreted with reference to information in the first part. This decoding is dependent on the meanings expressed in the two parts. This 'cohesion' view of relations is shared by Arapöff (1968), Halliday and Hasan (1976), Lee (1978) Quirk et al (1972) and Winter (1971). Winter, for example, describes clause relations as:

the way in which the information of one clause is understood in the light of the information in the other clause (1971:42)

In contrast to the works mentioned above there is a smaller but growing body of research which views discourse relations as phenomena which are governed by factors of the situation of utterance. From a certain level of discourse organisation, relations are seen not only as links between meanings, but also as links between speech acts. Speakers perform speech acts which they link with other speech acts according to conversational norms of discourse production. Thus, for instance, a question is likely to be followed by a reply, an assertion may be followed by an explanation, a statement may be linked to another, contrasting statement, and so on. Two bits of discourse may be linked as acts without having any direct semantic relation in terms of the meanings that are actually expressed. Two propositions expressed in sentences and treated simply as ~~sentences~~-as-objects, as Brown and Yule (1983) would call them, that is, outside of any context, real or imagined, may appear totally unrelated. But when a context is supplied, and the sequence is treated as a sequence of acts, then a pragmatic connection may be discerned.

It is obvious that a pragmatic approach to relations calls for a substantially different perspective on language in general and how it operates from that which would serve a semantic approach. Language is then treated not as a static product which is 'there', an object regarded in isolation from its uses and its users, but a process in which the users and the constraints which operate on them are paramount (Brown and Yule 1983, Carrell 1982). This difference of approach is indicated in the works of Mountford (1975), Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), Urquhart (1977), van Dijk (1977) and (1979), Edmondson (1981). The last two works in particular examine large stretches of naturally-occurring discourse. This enables the writers to analyse the hierarchical structure of the pieces of discourse. In addition their analyses are carried out in terms of illocutions, not sentences or propositions. The acts performed are analysed in relation to the context and the hearer, in other words, the concern is with interaction as a series of responses between participants in a speech situation. These analyses are thus essentially pragmatic.

The view of discourse relations to be presented here is an extension of this approach, as it is of the theory of language developed by the language philosophers, particularly Searle. Here I propose a speech act approach to discourse relations, that is, one in which it is the speaker who is viewed as performing a certain action of connecting two segments of discourse within a particular context. This relation-establishing act I shall call the interactive act.

Insofar as it is possible to 'exemplify' acts, the following sequences can be considered examples of interactive acts:

- 1) Europeans were anxious to acquire gold in Africa because there was a pressing need for gold coins within the growing capitalist economy.
- 2) The UN report shows that two-thirds of all food processing by multi-national companies is controlled by 25 firms. Unilever and Nestle account for more than a quarter.
- 3) Fred is a linguist. However, he is quite a decent chap really.

In addition to those acts discussed by Searle (next section) which would be performed in the utterance of (1) - (3), I would argue that the interactive acts of stating a reason, providing evidence, and making a concession, are being performed in (1) - (3) respectively. A more detailed discussion of the interactivity of examples such as these is provided in the following sections.

Utterance acts, propositional acts, illocutionary acts,
and perlocutionary acts

The nature of language as a 'mode of action' is now well recognised (Hymes 1972). Much of the work on speech acts has been done by language philosophers such as Austin and Searle. In what follows I shall keep very close to Searle's formulation of speech acts since his is the most widely recognised, but reference to Austin and others will also be made.

According to Searle (1969), producing an utterance is engaging in a form of rule-governed behaviour. In talking, the speaker performs 'speech acts', of which there are three types - utterance acts, propositional acts, and illocutionary acts. Although these acts are distinguished for analytical purposes, in the actual utterance the speaker performs all three simultaneously. Utterance acts are acts of producing various sounds, words, and sentences; propositional acts are acts of referring and predicating; illocutionary acts are those which specify the purpose of the speaker in uttering what he does - whether s/he is asking, threatening, promising, betting etc. In addition, Austin (1962) also introduced the notion of the perlocutionary act, which I shall come to presently,

In Searle's formulation, the full-blown illocutionary act has a 'locution' (Austin's term) that is, its words, sentences etc., a proposition, and an illocutionary force, that is, the way the speaker wants the utterance to be taken. This latter may be indicated by an illocutionary force indicating device, which include:

word order, stress, intonation contour,
punctuation, the mood of the verb,
and the so-called performative verbs.
(Searle 1969:30)

The performative verb, within a performative formula such as 'I state to you that ...', makes explicit the illocutionary force of the utterance. Otherwise, each speech act is given that interpretation which the locution, the proposition and the context allows. Such an interpretation may or may not correspond to that intended by the speaker, and in the treatment of this aspect Searle differs from Austin. Austin insists that the illocutionary act can be considered to have been performed only if the addressee recognises that illocutionary force intended by the speaker, that is, if there is what he calls 'uptake'. Otherwise, no illocutionary act has been performed. Austin thus implies that each illocutionary act has attached to it only one illocutionary force. In contrast, Searle argues that for one illocutionary act, several forces may be intended by the speaker and several recognised by the addressee. He notes that:

Both because there are several different dimensions of illocutionary force, and because the same utterance act may be performed with a variety of different intentions, it is important to realise that one and the same utterance may constitute the performance of several different illocutionary acts. (Searle 1969:70)

The question of 'uptake' is therefore not as significant for Searle: the illocutionary force of an utterance is that interpreted by the addressee, but this may differ from that intended by the speaker. In the latter case, the illocutionary act, though still taken to have been performed, is considered to be defective, since Searle believes that the act is fully successful only if the speaker gets the addressee to recognise what he (the speaker) is trying to do (Searle 1969:47).

A fourth class of speech acts, included in Austin's three types but given only incidental consideration by Searle, is that of perlocutionary acts. These are the acts performed by saying something, the effects or responses produced in the addressee by the performance of a particular illocutionary act by the speaker. Perlocutionary acts give rise to several perlocutionary effects. However, the distinction between acts and effects is rather uncertain. Austin himself seems to say that perlocutionary acts are the same as their effects (Austin 1962:109), and others in their definitions also make the same suggestion. Coulthard, for instance, says:

The (perlocutionary) act is the effect of the utterance on the listener.... (Coulthard 1977:19)

Certainly, it can be argued that no separate act is performed apart from the illocutionary, the utterance, and the propositional acts. Nevertheless, there is clearly a difference between the addressee, for example, getting worried, and the speaker's causing the addressee to get worried. Davis (1980) refers to the first as the 'perlocutionary effect', and the second as the 'perlocutionary act', and suggests that the perlocutionary effect is brought about by the speaker 'saying something', the 'perlocutionary cause' (Davis 1980:39). In addition, there are instances in which intended perlocutionary effects are standardly linked with particular illocutionary acts (Davis 1980 Fraser 1983, Searle 1969). For example, in asking a question, it is the intended perlocutionary effect of the speaker that a reply be provided, and in making a request the speaker intends that the request be carried out. Following Davis, we can say that:

Some perlocutionary acts...are conventional, namely those perlocutionary acts which are a purpose of some illocutionary act (Davis 1980:235).

In his description of speech acts, Searle also provides certain conditions under which illocutionary acts can be successfully performed. These conditions are provided only for the illocutionary act of 'promising', but Searle suggests that they may be generalisable to other types of speech acts (Searle 1969:64).

Discourse relations and interactive acts

The questions I address myself to here are first, what the nature of the interactive act is, and, secondly, whether, and in what way, within the already established framework of speech acts, the interactive act fits and can be handled. In the course of answering the first question, I shall also say something on what interactive acts are not, that is, how they are different from the other acts in the framework, particularly illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

In speech act theory, both the speaker and the addressee are treated as essential constraints in the speech event. Utterances are addressed, in a manner which is captured in the 'explicit performative' formula I - V - YOU. Thus, the theory establishes clearly that the speech act involves an addressee, whether or not there is 'uptake'. But speech act theory is essentially about individual acts, not about acts in combination.

But acts do occur in combination. This combination of acts produces discourse relations. One bit of discourse does not simply come to be connected with another bit of discourse. The speaker aims to make his discourse connected. He intends, just as he intends to perform an illocutionary act or a propositional act, that one discourse bit be understood as connected in a certain way to another bit of discourse. In other words, apart from the speech acts specified above, the speaker also performs interactive acts, i.e. the acts performed in establishing a relation between two discourse segments.

The expression 'establishing' is significant here, for it serves to underscore the role of the speaker's intention. Discourse relations do not reside in sequences of propositions or sentences. They must be established by the speaker in the performance of interactive acts.²

What is the justification for proposing that relations are established by acts? To begin with, the process of connecting one bit of discourse with another is an intentional one, as I have pointed out. Secondly, discourse relations are meaningful: the speaker's intention is to communicate to the addressee that there is a particular relationship between two parts of discourse. Thirdly, discourse relations are context-dependent. While a relation is always assumed, the addressee is able to work out the type of relation intended only in context.

If we assume that discourse relations are established through the performance of acts, then what sort of acts are these? How, if at all, do they fit into Searle's framework as he presents it? I want to present a position which argues for a separate status for interactive acts, and I shall do this mainly by showing how they differ from illocutionary and perlocutionary acts.

To begin with illocutionary acts:

- a. The discourse relation that is established in the performance of an interactive act is one between illocutionary acts. Consequently, an interactive act is not correspondent with an illocutionary act, but with at least two illocutionary acts.

This has other consequences: (b) and (c).

- b. The speaker in performing an interactive act must express at least two propositions, following from (a). The illocutionary act is typically associated with a single proposition.

- c. Similarly, the discourse relation established through the interactive act must contain at least two clauses, following from (b). In contrast, the illocutionary act is characteristically realised by a single main clause, or a sentence, as Searle himself points out (Searle 1969:25).

I shall provide analyses of some examples in terms of Searle's acts to demonstrate how they fail to account for the establishment of relations. Consider the following:

4. Man is an organism; more specifically he is an animal.
5. I am not attacking committed theatre. Barrie Keefe's Sus, to take one example, was a brilliantly impassioned attack on the radical bias of the sus laws.

Under Searle's analysis, (4) would be considered as two illocutionary acts, both assertions, with two propositions, in which it is predicated of 'man' that he is an organism, and that he is an animal, and meeting the conditions for assertions in the following way:

Preparatory condition: The speaker (S) has evidence for the truth of m ORGANISM, m ANIMAL.
The hearer(H) seems to need to know _____

sincerity condition: S believes that _____

essential condition: Counts as an undertaking to the effect that _____ represents an actual state of affairs.

(5) on the other hand, would be treated as the illocutionary acts - a denial followed by an assertion. The conditions for the assertion are the same as for (4), with the exception of the propositional content. The denial has the following conditions:

propositional content condition: the action 'attacking committed literature' attributed to S.

preparatory conditions: S has reason to believe that H thinks that S is 'attacking committed literature'.
H does not approve of people 'attacking committed literature'

sincerity condition: S believes that 'committed literature is not being attacked'

essential condition: counts as an undertaking to the effect that it is not the case that 'committed literature is being attacked by S'

And that is as far as Searle's analysis would go. There is no indication of how the second illocutionary act in (5) relates to the first illocutionary act.³

Next, what about the class of perlocutionary acts?

Can it be expanded to include interactive acts? I suggest not, on the following grounds:

- a. Although both perlocutionary and interactive acts are dependent on context for their interpretation, they are so in different ways. Perlocutionary acts may be performed by uttering almost any proposition, and there may be a perlocutionary effect even where the addressee has not understood the propositional act or the illocutionary act. Moreover, the effect produced may not be caused by the present propositional or illocutionary act, but by some other, for which the present acts as a trigger. Interactive acts, on the other hand, are largely interpreted in terms of their propositional and illocutionary acts, in addition to the context.

- b. Perlocutions are hardly ever explicitly marked in discourse in their actual utterance, though there are some perlocutionary verbs which may be used in reporting a perlocution (Davis 1980:237). The speaker normally does not announce what effect he intends to produce in the addressee. In contrast, interactive acts are often marked by speakers through the use of Relational Meta-Comments (RMCs) and other markers.⁴
- c. Perlocutionary acts, though intended, may have unintended effects. This can happen even when the addressee recognises that the speaker's intention is to produce a different effect. For in saying:

You won't see me again

the speaker may intend to produce the perlocutionary effect of frightening the addressee, and the addressee may recognise this intention. But this recognition does not necessarily have to lead to the addressee actually getting frightened (Fraser:1983). He may, instead, be highly amused. In interactive acts, on the other hand, when the addressee recognises that the speaker intends that a particular part of the discourse be understood as being related to another part in a particular way, then the act has been successfully performed. It is unusual for the addressee to recognise the speaker's intention and yet understand some other relationship.

The characteristics above demonstrate how illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts separately differ from interactive acts. But the most important reason for distinguishing interactive acts from both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts involves their status within discourse. Illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are oriented towards socio-psychological relations between participants. They have to do with the process of discourse, and are defined in terms of exchanges and responses by speakers and addressees. They are therefore basically interpersonal in nature. In contrast,

interactive acts are discourse oriented.

They have effects on relations between acts. They have to do with the structure of discourse, and are defined in terms of relations between parts of the discourse, irrespective of addressee responses. We can say that the distinction is between interactional and interactive acts.⁵

Similar distinctions to the one I am making have been made, though with different names, by others. Stubbs (1983) refers to the difference between speech acts and 'discourse acts' and comments:

Speech acts are different from discourse acts. The latter are defined entirely according to their internal function within the discourse, for example initiating, continuing, terminating exchanges. Speech acts, however, are defined according to psychological and social functions outside on-going discourse. (1983:149)

Widdowson uses the terms 'illocutionary' and 'interactive', and also stresses the 'structure' aspect of interactive acts. He says of the distinction:

Illocutionary acts are essentially social activities which relate to the world outside the discourse, whereas interactive acts are essentially ways of organising the discourse itself and are defined by their internal function (1979:138).⁶

There is thus a recognition by others of a difference between illocutionary/perlocutionary acts and interactive acts, and this recognition does not rest on whether the act types involve the expression of one proposition or more, one sentence or more.⁷

Conclusion

I have tried above to present a pragmatic view of interactive acts, one that takes account not only of the semantics of what is said, but also of the users, their intentions, and other features of context. I have also tried to argue that there is sufficient motivation for treating interactive acts as an additional speech act type to those developed in Searle's framework. Characteristics of interactive acts have been briefly mentioned above. Further discussion on these characteristics has to be the subject of another paper.

Notes

- 1) The results are not generalisable for the following reasons: (a) the data are restricted to scientific texts only, and these may have special characteristics (b) the relations analysed are also restricted; for instance, though Winter mentions exemplification, he does not give any further analysis of it.
- 2) Lyons make a similar observation in relation to reference:

'the speaker invests the expression with reference by the act of referring'.

- 3) It should be noted, however, that in his 'Taxonomy of illocutionary acts', Searle specifically introduces the factor of discourse relations in his seventh dimension: Differences in relations to the rest of the discourse; meant to take account of such act as 'I reply', 'I deduce', 'I conclude', etc. But it is not clear how this dimension affects the taxonomy, and how it can be incorporated into the conditions specifying those particular acts.
- 4) For discussion on metacomments, both relational and others, see Yahya-Othman 1986.

- 5) The distinction (first made by Trappes-Lomax 1984) is not necessarily all-embracing and crystal clear. Some acts, such as 'reply', or 'explain', on the one hand are responses to speakers' 'questions' or 'queries', and on the other they connect to the content of those questions or queries. Moreover, most acts are both one and the other at the same time, at least in conversational discourse.

- 6) Although I am in general agreement with Widdowson's distinction as he formulates it, I find his exemplification poses problems. He does not make clear how 'reply' and 'accept', which he treats as interactive; are different from 'excuse' and 'undertake', which are classed as illocutionary.

- 7) Roulet (1984) suggests a correspondence between this distinction and a monologue - dialogue distinction. That is, interactive discourse corresponds with monologue, while interactional discourse relates to dialogue. Such a correspondence cannot be shown to hold. All discourse has structure, monologue or not. However, it can be said that in the monologic discourse, the interactional aspect is subdued, in as much as there is only one active participant. But even this type of discourse has been described by some writers (for instance Nystrand 1982, Widdowson 1978) as a type of interaction between the writer and the reader, with the latter, though absent at the time of writing, still causing the writer to produce discourse as if in response to his reactions and interventions.

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