

A Pragmatic Analysis of Declaratives

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I would like to take up the matter of “indirect speech acts” as exemplified by the utterance like the following:

(1) I'd like a glass of water.

As often pointed out, from the viewpoint of “indirect speech acts” performed by the speaker in producing utterances, the utterance (1) is ambiguous at least in two ways. The one interpretation is that the speaker is requesting a glass of water by uttering (1), for instance, in the restaurant. The other one is considered as a simple report which may correspond to literal linguistic meaning. Language users can distinguish these two interpretations in the current discourse involving (1). That is because they have got not only knowledge of literal meanings of linguistic expressions but also knowledge about the use of particular expressions or classes of expressions. The latter kind of knowledge is closely related to knowledge of shared habit and shared experiences among the participants in the current discourse and also, as Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (hereafter, I refer to it as simply C & M) (1990, p. 4) say, their general expectations about people's motives in speaking to one another. This kind sometimes involves conventions of usage: in the case of (1), language users know that *I'd like* is one of the standard expressions of indirectly making a request. According to Morgan (1978, p. 279), “these two kinds of knowledge are not mutually exclusive, but they are involved simultaneously in the full understanding of many utterances.”

What I am trying to do in this paper is to examine what factors are influential on the ambiguities like the one shown in (1) (I would like to restrict myself to be concerned with the utterances in the declarative form in this small paper), and to sketch some theoretical concepts which I hope

will offer us adequate explanations of pragmatically motivated problems.

2. Traditional Analyses of Speech Acts

Thinking about speech acts, we often cite Austin's classification of acts which can be performed when a person speaks: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act. According to his definition the locutionary act is "roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to 'meaning' in the traditional sense." (Austin: 1962, p. 109) In other words, a locutionary act is the act of saying some meaningful expressions. An illocutionary act is an act performed in saying something. In issuing an utterance, we can simultaneously perform illocutionary acts such as requesting, ordering, warning, promising and so on. We may also perform perlocutionary acts: "what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring." (Ibid.) Austin's main concern seems to consist in explicating the properties of the illocutionary acts.

Trying to refine Austin's analysis of speech acts on the one hand, Searle (1969) deals with the illocutionary acts from the philosophical viewpoint on the other hand. His basic idea, somewhat different from Austin's, is roughly like the following: apart from perlocutionary acts, there is not any useful distinction between locutionary acts and illocutionary acts, but an utterance consists of the two components—i) the propositional content: what a speaker expresses, and ii) the illocutionary force representing semantic effects such as "promise", "request", "command" etc. In the case of English, the illocutionary force can be realized by the word order, stress, intonation, modals and what we call performative verbs.

The primary difference between Austin's analysis and Searle's one is that Austin gives considerations only from the standpoint of the speaker, while Searle, by setting up the illocutionary force, pays attention to the interpretation by the addressee and also to the relationship between the speaker and the addressee. I think that an analysis along this line is at least a good start. In the following sections, therefore, we would like to develop our discussions on the basis of Searle's ideas mentioned above.

3. Illocutionary Acts and Declaratives

Before beginning with our discussion in this section, I have to make a brief mention as to why I take the utterances in the declarative forms (so called “declaratives”) as the data of our study. One of the reasons is that, besides limiting the range of our study, I assume declaratives could be more clearly analyzable, than the other forms, since their propositions and their respective illocutionary force invoking the appropriate illocutionary acts. Now, as I briefly explained in the previous section, by using declaratives the speaker can perform various illocutionary acts. With this regard, C & M (1990, p. 173) says, “what illocutionary act the speaker intends depends on how the utterance fits into the speaker’s purposes for the particular discourse and conceptions of what role this particular utterance might play in advancing those purposes.”

Let us first observe the examples; where I indicate in the notation (“ ”) the conceivable illocutionary force of each underlined utterance given below :

- (2) A: As your guidance counselor, I strongly advise you to take Physics. (“offering advice”)
 B: Do you really think that’s important ?
 A: Definitely! (“offering advice”) [*Expressways*, p. 132]
- (3) A: Well, I’m planning to visit Paris soon, and I was wondering if you could recommend some things to do.
 B: Sure. You should definitely go to Notre Dame Cathedral. You also ought to see The Palace at Versailles. And you must visit The Louvre. (“offering suggestions”)
 A: Those sound like excellent suggestions. Can you recommend any good place to eat ?
 B: Yes. Make it a point to eat at “Maxim’s.” And if you go there, I suggest that you order the duck. (“offering a suggestion”) It’s delicious.
 A: That sounds good. [*Ibid.*, p. 137]
- (4) A: Could you tell me your recipe for chocolate cookies ?

- B: Sure. I'll be happy to. But it's pretty complicated. You might want to write this down. ("offering advice") [*ibid.*, p. 36]
- (5) A: Would you be interested in doing something outdoors?
 B: Sure. Any suggestions?
 A: Well, we could go ice skating. ("offering a suggestion") [*Ibid.*, p. 46]
- (6) Jane: (to her brother Tom) ... I just think that if you're planning on staying in San Francisco, it would be good if you got a job and a place of your own. ("offering a suggestion")
 Tom: Oh, really? [*Follow me to San Francisco*, p. 36]
- (7) Pat: Listen, I really am glad you got the job, Tom.
 Tom: I'm really sorry you lost yours, Pat. Hey, look! Maybe you'd feel a lot better if you got out of here for a while. ("offering a suggestion") I have to go over to my apartment to drop off my deposit check, and you're welcome to come along if you like. ("offering an invitation") [*Ibid.*, p. 56]
- (8) A: Will the car be ready by five?
 B: Yes, it will.
 A: Really? Can I depend on that?
 B: Absolutely! I promise it'll be ready by five. ("promising") [*Expressways*, p. 162]
- (9) A: Well, I'm planning to go fishing. Would you like to join me?
 B: Sure. I'd be happy to. ...
 A: Good! I'll pick you up at around one o'clock. ("promising") [*Ibid.*, p. 67]
- (10) Pat: Jane, I just got laid off from work. I can't believe it.
 Jane: ... Oh, Patty! That's terrible.
 Pat: ... I've got to find another job right away.
 Jane: Now listen. Don't worry. I'll take care of all the expenses. ("reporting a decision") [*Follow me to San Francisco*, p. 56]
- (11) Doctor: ... It's just a little bruise. It'll be a little stiff for a few days, but I think that throbbing should subside by tomorrow. If it doesn't, I want you to give me a call.

(“requesting”)

...

By the way, I want you to exercise that arm for a half hour every day. (“offering advice”) [*ibid.*, p. 68]

- (12) A : Excuse me, but I was wondering if you'd be willing to switch seats with me. (“requesting”)
 B : Switch seats ?
 A : Uh ... yes. If you'd be willing to, I'd really appreciate it.
 B : All right. [*Expressways*, p. 122]
- (13) A : I don't mean to be rude, but that's my parking place. (“indirectly requesting”)
 B : Your parking place! Forget it! [*In Tune*, p. 130]
- (14) Nanette : Mom, is it all right if I go out to dinner with Jim tonight?
 Mom : Tomorrow's a school day. You know you should be studying on school nights. (“commanding”) [*Living in Washington*, p. 9]
- (15) A : Well, since the dog hasn't been fed yet, I guess one of us should go and do it. (“expressing obligation”)
 B : Okay. I'll do it. [*Expressways*, p. 23]
- (16) A : I'd like to apologize for behaving rudely at your party last night. (“apologizing”)
 B : It's all right.

Looking through the above examples, we will notice that modals and performative verbs often contribute to making illocutionary aims more explicit. For instance, performative verbs such as promise and apologize are quite often used: they are not only conveying a message but also performing some substantial actions such as promising and apologizing. In the case of a modal, also, its use can be regarded as semantically affecting the utterance in its illocutionary aspect rather than just giving some information to the addressee: for instance the use of *should* and *must* in (3) is thought of as actually giving a suggestion.

On the other hand, there are cases where we find no explicit devices for indicating illocutionary force, as shown in (6) for instance. Its illocutionary force is supposed to be pragmatically understood in the current discourse. That will be touched on at some points in the discussion below. After all, we might as well consider the illocutionary force in the pragmatic framework. Before developing our discussion along this line, however, we would like to look through the analysis tentatively given by C & M (1990) which treats the illocutionary force of a sentence as a matter of linguistic semantics.

4. Performative Hypothesis and Illocutionary Force

Based on the idea that every sentence determines a literal illocutionary force and explicit performative utterances (which involve performative verbs such as *promise* and *request*) overtly indicate this literal illocutionary force, M & C (1990) sets up Performative Hypothesis" which originally comes from Ross (1970). Under this hypothesis, every sentence can be analyzed as having, in relatively deep structure, some performative verb with a first-person subject. Thus, the sentence *I'll be back by 8 o'clock tonight*, when uttered as a promise, will be analyzed at some abstract linguistic level as something like this :

[I_{S₁} promise [I_{S₂} be back by 8 o'clock tonight.]]

It follows that at some abstract linguistic level the illocutionary force is explicitly indicated in the semantic representation of the whole sentence. In other words, the illocutionary force of an utterance is treated as a component of its linguistic meaning. If that is true, however, we would face a problem. As Levinson (1983) points out, a sentence can be used to perform a variety of illocutionary acts; for instance, the sentence like (17) can be used as a promise, a threat, or a report of a decision :

(17) I'll take you there tomorrow morning.

If the illocutionary force were a matter of linguistic meaning, as I already mentioned in the last section, then the sentence like (17) would be ambiguous. As commonly assumed, speakers conveys only one of the linguistic meanings in a single utterance. Thus, in uttering (17), the speaker has

chosen one of the illocutionary acts to perform — promising, threatening or reporting a decision — according to the situation appropriately determined by the current conversation. Then, how can we explain which illocutionary act is most properly performed in a single utterance? We would like to look for the answer in some more general theories of pragmatic inference. Since I suppose Grice's work on conversational implicature will give us at least a key to the answer, in the next section let us see how it works in the discourse.

5. Cooperative Principle and Illocutionary Force

Grice (1975) introduces the concept "implicature" which is defined as referring to relation between an utterance and what it implies, and conversational implicatures are considered to be derived on the basis of conversational principles and assumptions. One of the principles which is most appropriate here in our present discussion is called Cooperative Principle defined as follows :

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

(This principle implies decisions in four major areas—relation, quality, quantity and manner—which constitute "maxims". However, in this paper, I would like to leave these maxims untouched, since they are hardly influential in our present discussion.) Based on this principle, we try to infer what the speaker intends to convey, that is, what illocutionary act the speaker performs in his utterance.

Now we shall go back to examples (12) and (13), where we can find no overtly explicit illocutionary force but we can assume that in (12) the speaker A has the intention of having his seat exchanged for that of the speaker B, and that in (13) the speaker A has the intention of getting the addressee B to find someplace else to park. That is, in both cases, the utterances by the speaker A have the illocutionary force representing "request".

In (12), when the addressee B realizes the intention of the speaker A and switch seats, we could say the addressee B has observed the cooperative principle. On the other hand, in (13) the addressee B has violated this principle, since his answer and presumably his action ignore the illocutionary act performed by the speaker A. Let us see another example, paying attention to the underlined parts involving *will* :

- (18) Cathy : Would you like to come to dinner on Saturday, Jay ?
 Jay : I'd like to, Cathy, but I'm going to be out of town.
 Thanks for the invitation.
 Cathy : Sure. We'll try again sometime.
- (19) Don : Come on in, Steve. Here, I'll take your coat.
 Liz : Hi, Steve. I'm Cathy and Don's niece, Liz.
 Steve : Hi, Liz. It's nice to meet you.
- (20) Cathy : Would anyone like anything else ? More meat ? Vegetables ?
 Liz : Nothing for me, thanks. I'm saving room for dessert.
 Steve : I'll have some more meat. It's delicious. I always have room for dessert. [*East-West*, Unit 13]

Taking the cooperative principle into considerations, we can read between lines in the above dialog. Thus, the underlined parts in (18), (19) and (20) are all involving *will* and have the same syntactic pattern, but they have different illocutionary aims : the underlined part in (18) is uttered for promising, that in (19) for offering to help and that in (20) for deciding. The same observation can be true of example (11), where the two underlined sentences have the same syntactic pattern ("*I want you to ...*") but their illocutionary aims are different.

6. The Common Ground and the Relevance Theory

In connection with the cooperative principle, it may be appropriate here to make some mention of "common ground". Its original idea is assumed to come from Stalnaker (1974), but here I would like to cite the de-

definition by M & C (1990, p. 166): “the common ground is the participants’ mutually developed public view of what they are talking about: it always includes the thoughts they have stated to one another insofar as such thoughts have not been challenged or withdrawn.” Looking back the examples just given above, I think the concept of the common ground may be especially important in the utterances in the declarative forms. I also assume the idea of cooperative principle and that of common ground are compatible with each other: in other words, on the basis of the cooperative principle, we naturally aim at consistency in developing the common ground. (We put aside the utterances involving pan and paradox.)

Now let us return to the discussion about illocutionary force and see how it interacts with the idea of common ground. Judging from the abovementioned definition of the common ground, I would also like to assume it is quite similar to the background of an utterance. Since the illocutionary force of an utterance varies according to the discourse context, its interpretation depends on the contextual specification of the background information, or to put it in another way, on the inductive inference of the common ground. The use of modals, for instance, seems to reflect this assumption. As we have already seen in examples such as (14) and (15), each modal often contributes to clarifying the illocutionary force of the utterance involving it. The interpretation of the modal may also depend on how the participants in the discourse infer the common ground: i. e., the rank relation between the speaker and the addressee (as in the case shown in (14), Mother has authority over her daughter and this common ground invokes the use of *should* as “commanding”), the relevant facts involved in the present discourse (as in “offering a suggestion” exemplified in (7) for instance), the interests of the speaker and the addressee and so on.

Having observed so far, we have learned how important role the idea of the common ground plays in analyzing the discourse, clarifying the illocutionary force and after all developing good communication. Then, for developing good communication further, we have to also consider human cognition which has much to do with the processing of new information rather than background information. On this point, as the theory of

communication, Sperber & Wilson (1986) introduce the idea that “communicated information comes with a guarantee of relevance.” To be more concrete, “a communicator, by the very act of claiming an audience’s attention, suggests that the information he is offering is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s attention.” In other words, we may say, the communicator (which can be replaced by “the speaker”) is offering new information to the audience (replaced by “the addressee”) and this information must be relevant. Then what is relevant? According to their explanation, “new information is relevant in any context in which it has contextual effects,” where “to have contextual effects” means “to have contextual implications and to interact with an existing assumption in the context.” Since we can interpret “an existing assumption in the context” as the common ground, I would like to state the better communication would be achieved if the new information given by the speaker has more contextual implications and can be processed into the common ground. I will finish this section by citing one example which might support my view just stated:

(Jane thanks Stranger for taking her brother home, but she wants Stranger to leave soon.)

Jane : Oh, well. (Embarrassed) Well, we really appreciate it, but I’m sure you must have other plans.

Stranger : Oh, I think I have time for a cup of coffee ...

Jane : Well I’m terribly sorry, but I’m out of coffee. In fact, I was just on my way to the store.

Stranger : Oh, that’s fine. I can wait.

Jane : Uh, no. Well – well actually, we’re having a little party here for Tommy tonight, and I really do need to be going to the store to pick up some things.

Stranger : A party, huh? Well, that sounds nice. I love parties.

Jane : Well-uh-Well, only Tommy’s closest friends will be here, and it would be awkward for you to be here.

Stranger : Okay. I get the picture. [*Follow me to San Francisco*, p. 17]

In the former half of the above conversation, trying to get Stranger to leave, Jane (the speaker) is giving a kind of excuse which introduces new information and is not understood by Stranger (the addressee): the speaker and the addressee cannot communicate in a true sense, because the information Jane gives (for instance, in the utterance *you must have other plans*) is quite alien to Stranger who has actually no plan. However, at the last part of the above discourse, their communication is finally achieved when Stranger has got the common ground with Jane that he is not one of Tommy's close friends. It follows that in the above case Jane's last utterance is relevant in the situation of the discourse for achieving good communication.

7. Summary

I have discussed in this paper that the illocutionary force involved in an utterance is one of the factors which causes some ambiguous interpretations of the utterance. In order to make further observations on this matter, considering actual data (though limited), I have sketched some theoretical concepts. As one of them, I have taken up Performative Hypothesis as the means of my analysis. However, since this hypothesis is based on the assumption that the illocutionary force should be a matter of linguistic meaning, I have found it fails in explaining the utterances of indirect speech acts which show no overtly explicit illocutionary force. I have then realized that pragmatic considerations rather than semantic ones seem to be more crucial to accounting for the data.

On the other hand, Grice's Cooperative Principle which has the pragmatic foundation, gave me a key to developing my analysis of the data. By combining this principle with the idea of the common ground, I think I have succeeded in analyzing the utterances involving various illocutionary force. Furthermore, the relevance theory has supported my analysis. Finally, I would like to conclude that the illocutionary force can be determined by various pragmatic factors constituting the common ground, and that we can achieve good communication when we realize the common ground as well as succeed in processing relevant new information

into the common ground.

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Sources of Data

- 1) *Expressways*, edited by S. J. Molinsky and B. Bliss. Prentice-Hall. (1986)
- 2) *Follow me to San Francisco*, edited by S. Griffin. Longman, BBC.
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- 4) *Living in Washington*, edited by F. G. Steele. Nelson, Filmscan.
- 5) *East-West*, edited by Kathleen Graves. Oxford University Press. (1988)