

CONCLUSION of *Principles of Language Use*
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By Daniel Vanderveken

Any meaningful use of language consists in an attempt to perform an illocutionary act, which can either succeed or fail. Whenever an utterance is successful, the speaker respects certain rules that are determined by the logical structure of language. In this book, I have stated a series of fundamental transcendent laws that govern the use and comprehension of language. These laws deal with universal features of language such as meaning and understanding, speech acts, illocutionary forces and propositions, the conditions of success and of satisfaction of utterances, their direction of fit, entailment, analyticity, validity, and consistency. In constructing the logic of these features, I have shown that the literal meaning of sentences is systematically related to their use in contexts of utterance, and that linguistic competence is inseparable from performance. Thus, contrary to what Saussure thought, with his distinction between *langue* and *parole*, the analysis of speech acts is part of the study of the structure of language. Natural languages such as English and French offer a vast vocabulary of verbs, nouns, sentential types, and modifiers for specifying the illocutionary forces of utterances. Moreover, it also appears that the logical form of those linguistic items is exactly the one that is appropriate for their functions. These linguistic items enable human speakers to express and communicate their thoughts.

One can distinguish different kinds of transcendent laws in the use and comprehension of language. The most basic laws of language use concern the possible directions of fit of utterances. They determine under which conditions

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speakers can express propositions with the aim of achieving a success of fit between language and the world. Illocutionary acts, like all intentional human actions, have conditions of satisfaction. They are directed at states of affairs in the world, and they can fail to be satisfied when the world does not fit their propositional content. A speaker who performs an illocutionary act must have in mind those conditions of satisfaction. As philosophers have long realized, the relation of fit or of correspondence between language and the world is symmetric. If the propositional content of an utterance fits the world (that is to say, if an existing state of affairs corresponds to the propositional content) then the world fits that propositional content, and conversely. However, as Searle and I pointed out in *Foundations*, it is still essential to distinguish from a logical point of view the various possible directions of fit that utterances can have, because an essential part of the speaker's meaning in each of the possible cases is to achieve the fit from different directions. When the illocutionary force of an utterance has the words-to-world direction of fit, the illocutionary act is satisfied if and only if the speaker correctly represents the world as it is in his utterance. In the case of such utterances, the words must correspond to things as they stand in the world independently of these utterances. But when the illocutionary act has the world-to-words direction of fit, it is satisfied if and only if one of the protagonists of the utterance (the speaker or the hearer) changes the world by his future action to fit the propositional content. In this case, the things in the world have to be changed to correspond to the words uttered in the performance of the speech act. Finally, when the illocutionary act has the double direction of fit, it is satisfied if and only if the speaker changes the world to fit the propositional content solely in virtue of the performance of his speech act, by representing the world as being so changed. In this last case, things are changed to correspond to words in the very utterance of these words.

From a transcendental point of view, the laws governing direction of fit fix limits to the ways in which language can be used successfully in order to relate in thought a proposition to the world. For example, a speaker who aims to achieve a world-to-words success of fit in a commissive or directive utterance must express a propositional content which represents himself or the hearer as performing a future course of action. Thus, given the direction of fit of utterances, there are

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sentences whose utterances are analytically unsuccessful, just as there are illocutionary acts that are not performable, or that only certain speakers can perform at certain moments of time. For example, only I, Daniel Vanderveken, can perform a commissive speech act with the propositional content that I will do something in the next decade. Moreover, I will never be in a position again to make such commissive illocutionary acts after the year 2000. Such limitations imposed by direction of fit on the use of language reflect essential features of linguistic intentionality, time, and action. They are internalized in the minds of speakers.

As I have shown in this book, there is also a logical order due to direction of fit in the set of basic ways language can be related to the world in the performance of illocutionary acts. Many logical relations that exist between the conditions of success and of satisfaction of speech acts are determined by the direction of fit of their illocutionary force. For example, declarations, which have the double direction of fit, are for that reason the strongest type of illocutionary act. Their successful performance is sufficient to make their propositional content true and to bring about a success of fit between language and the world. Moreover, when they are successfully performed, declarations are also *eo ipso* non-defective and satisfied. This is why performative sentences, which express declarations, are also the strongest type of sentence.

One of the single most important principles of general semantics that is recurrent in many laws of language use is the principle of *rationality of the speaker*. As I have argued throughout this book, speakers are rational in their use and comprehension of language. First, they are minimally consistent. They do not express self-contradictory propositions that they know *a priori* to be false with the aim of achieving a success of fit between language and the world in utterances. They never, for example, both order and forbid a hearer to carry out exactly the same future course of action. Second, speakers are also rational in their illocutionary commitments. Whenever a speaker means to achieve an illocutionary point on a proposition in an utterance with a nonempty direction of fit, he also means *eo ipso* to achieve that point on weaker propositions which are strongly implied by the propositional content of his utterance. For example, a speaker who asserts the conjunction of two propositions also asserts both conjuncts.

Such laws of language use are philosophically important because they show that language and reason are inseparable in the very determination of speaker

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meaning. Thus the principle of rationality of the speaker is not simply a conversational maxim that is regulative of linguistic behavior, and convenient for describing and explaining most actual performances of illocutionary acts. Rather, it is an essential constitutive feature of the speaker's ability to make and understand meaningful utterances. As the Greek philosophers had anticipated, rationality is part of linguistic competence. Not only do speakers never perform illocutionary acts whose performance would contradict the rationality principle, but they could never even mean to perform such illocutionary acts. This is shown by the fact that speakers who utter illocutionarily inconsistent sentences such as "I order and forbid you to stay" either do not understand what they are saying or mean something else.

Of course the rationality that is involved in the performance and understanding of speech acts is weaker than perfect logical reasoning. Competent speakers can be inconsistent (even though they cannot be minimally inconsistent). They can, for example, simultaneously assert propositions with relatively inconsistent truth conditions. However, in such cases, they do not know *a priori* in virtue of their competence the relative inconsistency of these propositions. Moreover, the illocutionary commitments of speakers are also weaker than the logical commitments of their utterances. A speaker who, for example, asserts a proposition does not *eo ipso* assert all other propositions which are strictly implied by the propositional content of his assertion, even though he is logically committed to the truth of these propositions. Thus, many logical laws of relative truth conditional inconsistency and of strict implication between the propositional contents of speech acts are not internalized by speakers in the medium of the use and understanding of language. This is why truth conditionally inconsistent sentences can be illocutionarily consistent. Illocutionary commitment is in general more restricted than strict implication.

What is interesting about the principle of rationality is that it determines exactly in which particular cases logical relations existing between propositional contents of certain forms at the level of the conditions of satisfaction are necessarily reflected by logical relations existing between illocutionary acts with the same illocutionary point at the level of their conditions of success. Thus, for example, the law of the minimal consistency of the speaker specifies exactly in which cases the non-satisfiability of illocutionary acts with self-contradictory propositions implies their non

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performability. Similarly, the law of compatibility of strong implication with respect to illocutionary point specifies exactly in which cases an inclusion of the conditions of satisfaction of two speech acts implies an inclusion of their conditions of success.

As I have formulated them, the laws of language use relative to rationality rely heavily on the logical structure of the set of propositions. They state logical relations of strong illocutionary commitment and of relative illocutionary inconsistency that exist between illocutionary acts because of the nature of their propositional content and the direction of fit of their illocutionary force. Many other fundamental laws of language use governing speaker meaning and understanding rely rather on the logical structure of the set of all illocutionary forces and on the inductive definition of the conditions of success and of satisfaction of illocutionary acts. They state logical relations of strong illocutionary commitment and of relative incompatibility that exist between illocutionary acts mainly because of the nature of their illocutionary forces. Some important laws of language use of this kind are the following: any two illocutionary forces with complementary components are relatively incompatible. For example, a speaker cannot simultaneously order and supplicate a hearer to carry out the same future action because such directive illocutionary acts have relatively inconsistent modes of achievement. Whenever an illocutionary force is obtained from another force by the addition of new components or by increasing the degree of strength, it is either identical with or stronger than that force. Thus, for example, a prediction that it will rain contains an assertion with the same propositional content.

One of the single most important and unexpected discoveries of general semantics is that there is much more logical structure in language on the side of the illocutionary forces and success conditions of meaningful utterances than on the side of their propositional contents and truth conditions. To put the point more precisely, the logical operations on illocutionary forces generate more systematically strong illocutionary commitment and relative incompatibility between speech acts than the logical operations on propositions generate strict implication and relative inconsistency between propositions. For example, any illocutionary force obtained by the application of a logical operation to another force is either stronger or weaker than that force.

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Moreover, whenever an illocutionary force is stronger than another force, it can always be obtained by a finite number of applications of operations on that force. Also, the order of application of operations on illocutionary forces has no importance. Comparable laws obviously do not hold for propositions. Thus, it is not the case that any proposition obtained by the application of a logical operation to another proposition either strictly implies or is strictly implied by that proposition. It is also not the case that any proposition which strictly implies another proposition can always be obtained by applying one or more logical operations to that proposition. Finally, the order of application of operations on propositions often affects their truth conditions. Upon reflection, the fact that the logical structure is much stronger in the logical space of the illocutionary forces is not at all surprising. Illocutionary acts are highly conventional human actions that speakers can only perform intentionally in the use of language while respecting constitutive rules which are strongly internalized. On the contrary, most propositions represent states of affairs which can exist in the world independently of any human intention or convention. They are true or false in virtue of the laws of nature or the effects of chance, without there being any necessity of human representation of the corresponding states of affairs.

From a logical point of view, the stronger logical structure on the side of illocutionary forces and success conditions is due to the fact that all logical operations on forces are reducible to a few simple logical operations on their components. These operations consist either in adding new components or in changing the degree of strength. Such operations on components are of a very simple logical nature. On one hand, the operations of restricting the mode of achievement and of adding new propositional content, preparatory and sincerity conditions are simple Boolean binary operations of intersection or union in the Boolean algebras of these components. On the other hand, the operation of increasing or decreasing the degree of strength is identical with the operation of addition in the Abelian group of degrees of strength. Such simple Boolean and Abelian operations on components of illocutionary forces generate in virtue of their logical properties decidable relations of comparative strength and of relative incompatibility between illocutionary forces that speakers are able to apprehend in virtue of their linguistic competence. Thus, for example, any competent speaker of English who understands what an order, a supplication, and a request are knows *a priori* that a

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supplication contains a request and is incompatible with an order. Indeed, whenever an illocutionary force is stronger than another, it is not possible for a speaker to apprehend their logical forms without *eo ipso* understanding that one has additional components or a stronger degree of strength which determine additional conditions of success. Similarly, whenever two illocutionary forces are incompatible, it is not possible to apprehend their logical forms without *eo ipso* understanding that they have complementary components determining relatively inconsistent conditions of success.

Few logical operations on propositions have the simple properties of the Boolean or Abelian operations on illocutionary forces. Moreover, the number and variety of logical operations on propositions is much greater than the number and variety of logical operations on forces. This is why, for example, the order in which the logical operations have been applied to elementary propositions is relevant for determining the logical form of complex propositions. As a result of this, relations between truth conditions are much more difficult to internalize than relations between success conditions. This is why many logical laws of strict implication and of relative incompatibility between propositions are not cognitively realized by speakers in the medium of comprehension. From a cognitive point of view, the truth conditional semantic networks of entailment and of relative inconsistency are much less internalized than illocutionary ones. Any speaker who understands the meaning of two sentences knows *a priori* whether or not one illocutionarily entails or is illocutionarily inconsistent with the other. However, he or she does not necessarily know whether or not one of them truth conditionally entails or is truth conditionally inconsistent with the other.

As I said earlier, some philosophical conclusions of general semantics are transcendental, because the logic of language use reflects the *a priori* order of thought. Any fact that a human being can experience in the world is indeed a fact that he can represent in an act of thought directed towards that fact. Moreover, any thought that a speaker can ever possess about a fact is in principle expressible by the use of his language in the performance of an illocutionary act with the same propositional content. Thus the universal laws that govern the successful performance and satisfaction of illocutionary acts reflect the *a priori* forms of thought and of experience. What makes these laws *a priori* is that it is not

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possible ever to have a thought whose expression in a successful utterance would contradict these laws. Indeed, they state the conditions of possibility of the very determination of speaker meaning and understanding. General semantics does more than simply make empirical claims about meaning and use in actual natural languages. By describing the logical structure of language, it fixes limits to what can be thought and experienced by us in the world. General semantics is in the tradition of transcendental philosophy. Of course, as Wittgenstein pointed out, a transcendental logical semantics fixes limits to what can be thought *indirectly* by fixing limits to the linguistic expressions of thoughts. Otherwise, one would have to think what cannot be thought in order to fix these limits. Thus, the limits of thought show themselves in language in the fact that sentences of certain logical forms can never be used with success in certain contexts, or are analytically unsuccessful or illocutionarily inconsistent. Such limits are necessary and can never be transgressed by any speaker in the use of language: otherwise he or she would then have to mean what *a priori* cannot be meant. One can of course think *about* impossible thoughts, when, for example, one describes their logical forms. However, one can never entertain those impossible thoughts in the first person, just as one cannot use the illocutionarily inconsistent sentences which express them without meaning something else. On this account, illocutionarily inconsistent sentences are not only *useless*, in the sense that they can never be used with success in a context of utterance; they are also *meaningless*, in the sense that the speaker's meaning is necessarily different from the sentence meaning in the contexts where such sentences are used. Speakers who use analytically unsuccessful or illocutionarily inconsistent sentences either do not understand what these sentences mean in the context of their utterances or mean something else. In both cases, their primary illocutionary act and thought is different from the literal speech act.